Corruption in Indian universities

By M. J. Audi

It is sad but true that all Indian Universities are rocked by corruption. Corruption compasses: (1) appointment and promotion of teaching and administrative staff (2) construction and maintenance of buildings and roads (3) purchases of furniture, library and laboratory equipments (4) travel and entertainment and (5) examinations.

Vice-Chancellors are de facto leaders of Universities. A leader can inspire the led not by preaching sermons but by providing personal examples in integrity and excellence. In India to-day such Vice-Chancellors are as rare as the Gir lions. The Government of India frankly admits and deplores that office of V. C. Functions "On the basis of a fast dwindling prestige". Registrar, the record-keeper, is the most trusted officer of V.C. No corrupt deal in Universities can be executed without concurrence and connivance of the Registrars. Registrars are central figures in University corruption.

Backbone

Teachers are the backbone of every University. Backbone lacks marrow because favouritism governs their selection. Academic appointments are finalised on dining tables and formalised through so-called selection committees. When Universities advertise the posts, candidates are instructed to apply only if they fulfil the conditions relating to qualifications and teaching experience. Sincere candidates who do not meet the conditions do not apply. Candidates who fulfil all conditions are not selected. Favourites without compulsory qualifications and teaching experience are prompted to apply, called for interviews and selected. Task of screening committees is to suppress applications of formidable candidates to safeguard the selection of the favourites. Selection committees run down candidates opposed by V-Cs and build up their favourites. What is roundly condemned as an act of mediocrity in one candidate is warmly praised as a feat of genius in other because he or she is blue-eyed baby of powers that be. His and her doodles are applauded as sparks of excellence.

Victims suffer in silence because it is absolutely foolish to approach the Governors or the Courts. Governors are invariably "satisfied" with explanations of V-Cs Courts are "satisfied" if there is scrupulous observation of procedural technicalities of selection. Courts refuse to judge the merit of selected candidates. Attitude of the Courts enables the favourites to brag that their selections are legal. Thus Universities teach how to be corrupt and legal at one and the same time. Reluctance of the Courts to probe corruption in the selection of University teachers is one of the puzzles of Rule of Law in India. In short, the V-Cs are not at all answerable to any constitutional institution of Indian Union for the selection of teachers. What are the consequences?

Odd qualifications

Persons whom schools refuse to appoint as teacher become Professors in the Universities and Professor is the highest rung of hierarchy. In Indian Universities persons with basic degrees in Sociology and without one day's teaching experience even at primary school level are appointed Professors of French and Hindi. Absurdities could be multiplied but exercise is not worth the while. Existing process of selection of University teachers is a farce. Existing Professors, Readers and Lecturers are the product of that farce. Can such teachers inspire the taught? Can such teachers and such V-Cs command respect on campuses? Are such teachers and V-Cs capable of making Universities Centres of Excellence? How perverse and rotten are selections of teachers of Universities could be known if Government of India are compelled to order public investigation publicly conducted by a judge of calibre and courage of Ramshashi Prabhune of Pune before the British Raj or that of Jagmohan Lal Sinha of Allahabad High Court in Swaraj.

Teachers with godfathers quickly rise in the hierarchy. Without them, they rot till Government of India provide automatic promotions as they did in 1986. Like a bolt from blue one of the departments of University suddenly becomes the "Thrust area" and V-C creates four new professors of that department. The moment favourites are appointed and confirmed, the "Thrust area" becomes the "Dust area". In 1985, Government of India lamented that many persons with doubtful credentials as researchers and teachers are holding the highest positions in the faculties of Indian Universities. (Challenge of Education - A Policy Perspective, 1985). By sitting on the domes of temples, the crows do not become eagles.

Retirement

University statutes prescribe that teachers must retire at 60 but the Executive Councils can permit the favourites to continue in service till 65. The carrot of five more years is dangled before the teachers. Its cash worth is nearly five lakhs. None can get it without being the most obedient servants of V-Cs. Hence University teachers begin career in sycophancy at 25 and become seasoned sycophants at 50. To expect independent thoughts from dependent teachers is to expect grapes from thistles. V-Cs nominate such sycophants as the Deans of Faculties and members of all councils of Universities. Thus they successfully deceive the people by creating an impression that all their decisions are analysed and approved by properly constituted Councils of Universities. As teachers are not judged by their performance, they concentrate on humouring powers that be at political level and V-Cs that decide at University level. No wonder, scholars in India are pedlars of patronage. By and large those passing as "eminent scholars" in India are only the jackdaws in peacocks feathers. This is defended as a global phenomenon which may be true. Certainly, it cannot be an (Contd. in Cols 7&8)
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apology for India, which before her colonial phase, has given to the world intellectual giants in every branch of Knowledge.

Between the lines of written agreements with architects, consultants, builders, contractors and suppliers lie unwritten understandings between them and University managements. Size of corruption money in construction and maintenance of buildings and roads and purchases of furniture, library and laboratory equipments can be known only by decoding unwritten understandings. Every year crores of rupees vanish as fast as water disappearing into sand. If the bridges built by the Governments collapse within fifteen years, buildings built by Universities are repaired spending several lakhs of rupees within fifteen months. Beautifying campuses and cultivating gardens have priority over advancement of learning in Indian Universities. It permits continuous employment of fleet of labourers on dialy wages and their thumb impressions are enough for the accountants. Reliable sources state that the thumb impressions are collected without employing any labourers.

Sumptuous salaries

The V-Cs and Registrars get five figure salary every month. V-Cs and Registrars coolly collect Rs. one lakh each as a bonus when they quit as Universities permit them to encash their leave. Being final masters, they are also the keepers of their own leave record. Generally, V-Cs and Registrars are out of campuses for more than a week every month. In or out, every day is not only the leave but paid leave for V-Cs and Registrars assert reliable sources.

Present V-Cs and their selected cronies need not invent new pretexts for frequent air and car travels and cosy stays in expensive hotels. Pretexts of their predecessors have by now become indispensable routines. V-Cs fly to Delhi every month on "official" work with either the University Grants Commission or Government of India. On reciprocal basis V-Cs visit one another's "dioceses" to deliver so-called keynote addresses. And there are 190 Universities in India to-day. India's membership of the Commonwealth of Nations offers them pleasure trips throughout former British Empire. Arrangement of lectures by ambassadors or rich countries in their Universities brighten their prospects of visits abroad. University cars are pressed into service where there are no airlines. The cars ply to distant places. Petrol used is also paid by the Universities. Families and personal guests of University bosses bless these cars. Logbooks are, of course, meticulously maintained. The drivers faithfully follow the "instructions" because they are punctually paid overtime allowance which is always double their monthly salaries.

(To be concluded)