

## Deemed Universities : Let Innovation Flourish in Freedom

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The history of mankind tells us that innovation has always flourished in freedom. Perhaps recognizing this to be all the more relevant in education, the University Grants Commission and the Government of India decided to let a few institutes of excellence function with a higher degree of freedom by notifying them as institutions deemed to be universities. Over the years quite a few institutions have acquired this status and it appears that now there is an attempt to bring "uniformity" among these institutions. Any such effort, though unlikely to streamline the processes, will certainly hit at the very cause which led these institutions to excellence in the first place. The idea that all deemed universities should have identical systems and procedures essentially amounts to contemplating that apples and oranges must taste and smell and look the same just because both belongs to the category "fruits".

In what follows let us look at the idea of Deemed Universities from its inception to its current status.

The University Grants Commission was established on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1956 by the University Grants Commission Act 1956. The function of the Commission was thus stated in the Act:

*"It shall be the general duty of the Commission to take, in consultation with the Universities or other bodies concerned, all such steps as it may think fit for the promotion and co-ordination of University education and for the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in Universities".*

Till the date of establishment of the Commission, Universities in India could be established either by an Act of Parliament or an Act of a State legislature.

However, there were Institution working in the field of education, particularly higher education, who were outside the State control for historical reasons, were pursuing a Mission of national importance and doing work which, though did not fit into it the rigid framework of prevalent University system, was as important as the work being done by the latter and was no inferior to that.

In order to accommodate such institutions in the University System without tinkering with their special Mission, the structure or way of functioning, Section 3 of the UGC Act provided that

*"The Central Government may, on the advice of the Commission, declare, by notification in the Official Gazette, that any institution for higher education, other than a University, shall be deemed to be a University for the purposes of this Act, and on such a declaration being made, all the provisions of this Act shall apply to such institution as if it were a University within the meaning of clause (f) of section 2."*

The first batch of institutions notified as deemed to be Universities included:

Indian Council of Agricultural Research	1958
Jamia Millia Islamia	1962
Gurukul Kangari	1962
Gujarat Vidyapith	1963
Kashi Vidyapith	1963
Tata School of Social Science	1963
Birla Institute of Technology & Science	1964
Indian School of Mines	1968

There was a clear thinking in this regard. Jamia Milia, Gujrat Vidyapith and Kashi Vidyapith had been established as counter to the British India educational system consequence to Gandhiji's call for boycott of the alien system. Gurukul Kangri was also setup as an alternate to the alien system. BITS, Pilani was patterned on American system, as opposed to the British system, in collaboration with Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA and with the support of Ford Foundation. It would not have been possible for these institutions to continue their work had they become part of the traditional university system.

When these institutions were accorded University status their constitutions were respected, their uniqueness and autonomy preserved and no attempt was made to impose rigid control on them.

In the decade of seventies that followed the UGC decided that notification under section 3 should be made only rarely and only in very special cases, and only three institutions were granted the university status : (1) Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (1973), Gandhi Gram Rural Institute (1976) and School of Planning & Architecture (1979).

However, there was again a slight shift in policy and in the decade of eighties and eighteen more institutions were notified under Section 3. These were :

1. Dayalbagh Educational Institution	1981
2. Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning	1981
3. Banasthali Vidyapith	1983
4. Indian Veterinary Research Institute	1983
5. Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology	1985
6. International Institute of Population Studies	1985
7. Indian Institute of Science	1985
8. Biral Institute of technology, Mersa, Ranchi	1986
9. Lal Bahadur Shastri Rastriya Sanaskrit Vidyapith	1987
10. Rastriya Vidyapith	1987
11. Tilak Manjhi Bhagalpur University	1987
12. Rastriya Sanaskrit Vidyapith	1987
13. Avinashlingham Inst. for Home Science. & Higher Edu. for Women	1988
14. National Dairy Research Institute	1989
15. Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies	1989
16. Jamia Hamdard	1989
17. Central Institute of Fisheries Education	1989
18. National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and M.	1989

Still there was a definite thinking about what type of institutions deserved to be notified under Section 3 as is evident even from a cursory glance through the name of above institutions.

Till this time, there was not much interference with the autonomy of the Institutes nor there was any attempt to impose drab uniformity on them which would destroy the whole idea of preserving uniqueness of such Institutions. Thus, in 46 years, from 1956 to 1990, only twenty eight Institutions were notified under section 3.

It seems that thereafter flood gates have opened and now there are more than 70 deemed to be Universities. In last ten years number of Institutions given the deemed university status exceed the number that were given the status over the preceding 46 years.

In this rush for issuance of notifications focus seems to have got blurred.

Hence, instead of laying down the principles which will decide as to which institution can be notified as an Institution deemed to be university and which cannot be, emphasis is being put on how an Institution notified as deemed University will be *governed* and also *controlled*.

In India we talk about autonomy. The National Policy on Education 1986 advocated autonomy for colleges (also for University Departments) with the object of bringing about decentralization of academic administration and promoting innovation and higher standards. This autonomy related to the framing of courses, conduct of examinations, innovations in pedagogy and admissions. However all our actions are aimed at enforcing Uniformity and strengthening controls.

Some of the highly objectionable elements of the earlier suggested guidelines by the UGC (to which even the then University Education Secretary had taken strong objection- please see Annexure-I) related to uniform constitutional framework designed on the lines of those of Government Universities, common entrance examination, interference in framing of courses, charging of fee etc. Attached as Annexure-II is another document, a letter from the MHRD to the Chairman, UGC, which advocates the freedom of universities in prescribing appropriate higher fees for various courses as it will bring in more resources in the education system.

There are many other strange contradictions in the guidelines which again and again suggest that we are trying to say that oranges and apples should taste and smell alike because both of these came under the same category, namely "fruits".

Any attempt to bring "uniformity" among deemed universities, is unlikely to streamline the processes, but would surely destroy the very essence of these institutions of excellence.

These institutions should be allowed to enjoy as much freedom as can be so that they may continue to stand apart as bright spots amidst a rather gloomy overall educational scenario.

Let innovation flourish in freedom.