

## How to reform our University system?

In his Guest Editorial 'Rediscovering our universities', Ramakrishnan<sup>1</sup> has brought into focus the pitfalls of our university system and suggested some remedies. He has used the analogy of the Indian caste system to classify our educational institutions into three distinct groups: 'The castes are the institutes, the universities and the colleges. That is the hierarchy. The broad functions are: research but no (or very little) teaching, principally postgraduate teaching and mainly undergraduate teaching. There is not much inter-caste mobility or mingling; sub-castes are emerging and are getting established.'

In my view, the scenario in Indian institutions is also undergoing a change in the right direction. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has allowed its dedicated research laboratories to undertake postgraduate teaching programmes and award Ph D degrees as deemed universities. Scientists in CSIR laboratories have been re-designated as Assistant/Associate Professors and Professors with equivalent status of Scientist E/F/G or H. By adopting this approach, the movement of faculty from the research laboratory to the university system is almost inhibited. However, I agree with Ramakrishnan<sup>1</sup> that the integration of CSIR laboratories with the university system is not so strong as in France, where CNRS laboratories are being merged with universities. This is happening in Germany too, where Max Planck institutes are under the process of being entwined with universities.

There is another noticeable trend in the Indian universities to emerge out of the triune caste system mentioned by Ramakrishnan<sup>1</sup>. Most private sector universities are opting for five-year integrated courses where students are admitted after

senior secondary or 12th class to augment their numbers at the admission stage so that universities can become economically viable, rather profitable enterprise. This system combines undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in the same institution. The Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research have also introduced the five-year integrated programme and it augurs well for improving the quality of research in Indian universities.

I also agree with the following remarks of Ramakrishnan<sup>1</sup>: 'A striking fact about our universities is that in most of them, the three aspects of a university, namely the campus which gives it an identity, affiliated colleges, and examinations ending in degrees, are conflated. Most often, the latter two overwhelm the first. In many universities, the natural concerns of the affiliated colleges and their dynamics consume the energies of individuals and bodies which are responsible for the university.' In my view, residential universities like Oxford and Cambridge in the UK are best suited for integration of all three academic castes, namely undergraduate, postgraduate and research streams. Ramakrishnan<sup>1</sup> has cited the examples of Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi and Hyderabad University in India as single-campus universities.

He has also cited examples of Stanford and UC Berkeley, USA, as model universities to be emulated by India. But we fail to imbibe the spirit behind these universities. To bring drastic changes in the Indian university system here are a few suggestions.

1. Our accreditation system is faulty and needs to be changed. We should not allow all universities to award research

degrees unless they have excellent infrastructure and highly qualified faculty to undertake research activity. This practice is followed in the universities in USA and Canada. However, there is no such restriction in India, and some private and state universities are awarding Ph D degrees on payment of hefty fees.

2. Differential pay scales need to be introduced in Indian universities to promote excellence in teaching and research as has been done in the US universities.

3. The post of Research Professor needs to be created as is prevalent in most of the universities of Europe and USA.

4. Research component must be introduced in all undergraduate and postgraduate courses as part of curricula in the form of research projects.

5. Reservation in admission and recruitment needs to be curbed on the basis of regional, caste and other extraneous considerations.

6. Last but not the least, decentralization of powers of Vice Chancellors and other bureaucrats in the university system is desirable, making Professors an independent entity for all intents and purposes, as in the most highly ranked universities of the world.

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1. Ramakrishnan, T. V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2016, **110**, 1879–1880.

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