Deemed and regular universities

A regular university is supposed to be a source of universal knowledge carrying out teaching and research in diverse subjects. Though many regular universities have some teaching and research departments, they are mainly bodies with affiliated colleges and for conducting examinations. During 1940–50s, many regular universities had several diverse disciplines/faculties such as Arts, Science, Social Science, Law, Education, Engineering and Technology, Agriculture and Medical Science. Over the years, new universities based on specialized disciplines, such as Agriculture, Engineering and Technology, Medical Science and Law were established. It is evident that the diverse nature of a regular university was diluted and the concept of a specialized discipline-based university was accepted and was found useful.

Initially a university was mainly funded by the central/state governments and its own resources were limited. Over the years, the government decided to support mainly primary education and the higher education institutes were advised to raise their own resources and become self-supporting. This policy along with the gradual deterioration in academic standards, prompted some NGOs to start higher education self-supporting centres by collecting capitation, donation, development charges and/or high fees from students, meritorious or otherwise. In the early years, such 'capitation/donation' colleges functioned under the supervision of a university. Over the years, some of these institutes were recognized as deemed universities. Graduates produced by some deemed universities were accepted for gainful employment or became successfully self-employed. Thus, some deemed universities were accepted by the society.

Presently, the resources of a university are just sufficient to meet out the day-to-day expenditure and pay staff salary. Obviously, there are no funds for development or research. It is true that some enterprising faculty members obtain research grants from various agencies, but a majority of faculty members have no funds to carry out research. It is reported, albeit unauthentically, that there is a continuous deterioration in academics, administration and examination system and unhealthy interference in university work by government and elected authorities. As a result, the degrees awarded by some universities are not valued in the employment market. Thus the basic requirement of a university, namely that of teaching and research in diverse subjects, has become unfeasible.

It seems that the Guest Editorial[1] has overlooked the need for healthy competition between regular and deemed universities. In the long run, universities, regular or deemed, that excel in academic standards will not only survive, but also thrive. Therefore, the concept in the Guest Editorial, 'By creating more and more deemed universities one would help the other universities to be doomed' is not correct, since some regular universities are doomed by their own overall deterioration, academic and otherwise. Further, Indian universities will have to compete with foreign university-supported institutes in India, from 2006 onwards. This calls for competition and efficiency.

The Guest Editorial has pointed out that 'any institution for higher education, other than a university shall be deemed to be a university for the purpose of this (UGC) Act, and such a declaration being made, all the provisions of this Act shall apply to such institution as if it were a university'. Rather in contradiction to the above mentioned statement, it also points out 'that the deemed universities being autonomous and generally outside even this perfunctory regulatory process, can and often have become reduced to fee-collection and degree-awarding centres with little component of education, *per se*'. If so, it is difficult to understand why the provisions of the UGC Act are not applied to a deemed university so as to maintain academic standards on par with that of a regular university. Concluding, only those higher educational institutes that excel in academics will succeed and survive.

1. Lakhotia, S. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **89**, 1303–1304.

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Open access geospatial data repository

In recent times, the need for having an easily accessible spatial data infrastructure (SDI) has been strongly emphasized[1,2]. Based on these recommendations, the 'National Spatial Data Infrastructure' (NSDI)[3] was formed with several participating agencies. Similar infrastructures[4] in the developed part of our globe have resulted in the availability of large volumes of data in public domain, most of which are generated by government agencies. For example, NASA makes available Landsat Thematic Mapper data in UTM projection format[5], most of which have a resolution of less than 20 m. This complements the digital elevation model data generated through the Shuttle Radar Topographic Mission, which are also in public domain.

Access to such geospatial data is critical for various GIS and ecological modelling applications in biodiversity studies[6], leading to informed decisions on conservation and sustainable utilization of natural resources. However, free access to such data continues to be impeded in majority of the developing and under-developed nations. For instance, most commonly required data, such as administrative boundaries, hydrology, lakes, water-bodies, road and rail networks and population statistics, are still unavailable in public domain. Thus, open access to spatial data is still a