Role for private universities in developing higher education in India

A recent article in *Current Science* put forth various aspects contributing towards the betterment of higher education in India. In this context, it is heartening to note the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad becoming one of the leading management institutions, at least amongst the Asian countries. This success has been achieved in the background of prevailing limitations of school education and other administrative, political and social obstacles. Is it not possible to replicate such success in other higher educational institutions? The Government of India’s new vigour and enthusiasm in supporting higher education is to be appreciated. The initiative of starting several new IITs, 5 IISERs, 14 National Universities and 16 Central Universities with lesser administrative constraints, and with an open, free and creative academic environment will undoubtedly change the horizon of higher education in the country.

In the global scenario of higher education, private universities like Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, John Hopkins and Stanford, have been leading institutions in education and research. Additionally, these institutions are successful in starting new companies based on frontier knowledge generated by the staff. Now that our country is at the stage of revolutionizing higher education, it is necessary to ponder about involving mushrooming private universities and institutions into the new Indian vision. Generally private institutions in India are viewed with skepticism and contempt. Only few institutions like the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, have been maintaining standards in engineering on par with the IITs. The current opinion of the public about private universities and institutions may be justified to some extent, but it is necessary to bring them to centre stage in order to contribute significantly to higher education. It is also necessary to realize that private institutions have additional hurdles compared to those faced by Government universities, as they need to generate funds to develop infrastructure and pay the salary of their staff, which comes from the tax-payers’ money in case of government universities. Another aspect against the private universities is that they are generally prone to be compared with good government universities, while many of them are unfortunately functioning at low standards.

Recently, some private educational institutions in India have been investing significant amount of funds in courses which are of contemporary significance. Many of those managing such educational institutions are retired teachers from government institutions, who are making sincere efforts in building up these institutions. Thus, I believe that our country cannot ignore private educational institutions, as they are currently attracting a large number of students. At least initially, efforts should made to encourage sincere private institutions also to grow and contribute to the enormous task of building a large highly skilled and professional manpower. India can take equal pride when a government university reaches the standards of say, the University of California, Berkeley or a private university reaches the standards of Harvard. Unless intensive, non-restrictive and out-of-the-box approaches are envisaged and practised by the academic community, it is difficult to achieve these standards in a short time.

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Sporidiobolus pararoseus Fell & Tallman – an antagonistic yeast with biocontrol potential

Kinnnow, a hybrid mandarin (*Citrus nobilis* Lour. × *Citrus deliciosa* Tan.) enjoying a pivotal status for its production in Sriganganagar District in the northwest part of Rajasthan, India and catering to both domestic as well as export needs, has been observed to sustain recurrent post-harvest losses due to various fungal pathogens. Worldwide, consequent to public concern over pesticide residues in food and the environment, the management of post-harvest pathogens of fruits and vegetables through the application of biological agents or living fungicides has emerged as a promising option. Hence during routine exploration of the same, a novel yeast strain of *Sporidiobolus pararoseus* was isolated from a kinnnow fruit show-