

## Appointment of VCs and politicization of academics

This is with reference to the views expressed by Virk<sup>1</sup> and Basa<sup>2</sup>, regarding the appointment of Vice-Chancellors (VCs) and politicization of academics. We should be happy that the underworld and other criminals have not yet started interfering in these appointments and other educational matters. But, it is not an unlikely situation in the near future in view of the hundreds of opinions expressed by all sections of the society, after the N. N. Vohra Committee report<sup>3</sup>. Hence the readers of *Current Science* have a greater responsibility in future.

Some say that 'from chaos emerges a new order'. Presently it is chaos, which would increase in spite of all our writings in *Current Science*. Do readers remember the long debate during 1994–1995 on a National Science University? The readers should place on record their sincere appreciation for the calibre and commitment of the editor in this regard. In the above debate, academicians from all over the country have exposed so many things about the state of affairs of education and science and technology in our country. Rather, the situation has deteriorated a bit more, as is evident from the letters in these columns till today.

Virk<sup>1</sup> and Basa<sup>2</sup> say that politicians interfere in the appointment of VCs. Do they interfere only in the appointments of VCs? How about in the appointment of faculty and administrative staff? How about in the distribution of research grants and other funds, selection of national and international fellowships, student admissions, securing ranks, etc.? We keep hearing that politicians interfere even in the above. Of course, we also keep hearing that whatever that is left after the interference of politicians, is manipulated by so many others, which includes our fellow academicians.

Several years ago, in one particular region, the appointment of a VC in a university was stalled, because there arose a question 'why is a person from only one particular social group appointed as a VC every time'? The 'Social Assertiveness' has increased manifold and is going to further increase, the consequences of which will be reflected in so many ways. Already we are witnessing it in the form of various appointments, fragmentation of districts and

states, emergence of political parties with affiliation to social groups, coalition governments, etc. So, whenever a VC post is vacant, it is only natural that politicians are to intervene. Hence, the appointment of a VC is not purely political, but it is based on 'socio-political considerations'. In the above process, often the faculty of the respective institutions take an active part. Sometimes there may be an added dimension of 'economic considerations'. This is an outcome of increased commercialization of education.

In one of the editorials<sup>4</sup>, the editor has rightly expressed a concern. 'The approach of universities and autonomous educational institutions in starting new programmes with complete disregard for academic considerations, merits serious attention.' While the editor has expressed this opinion discussing about a particular programme, the above statement of the editor is true for other programmes also. For this situation the VC alone is not responsible, but the above factors too.

As I mentioned above, chaos is likely to increase, but that should not deter us from contributing our bit for the sake of posterity. In view of the above and related background, I have from the columns of *Current Science* felt the following points should be pondered over by the esteemed readers of *Current Science*.

1. Should education be totally left to the respective states or should we have a single national policy mandatory for all states to follow? Presently, education is in the concurrent list. Another alternative is to make at least some major matters as a national policy, leaving absolutely no loopholes for the states to circumvent.

2. Presently, a state university functions (or can function) on the basis of a random combination of rules and regulations of the UGC, of the respective state government and of its own (because it enjoys autonomy). It is high time that we decide on a specific method of functioning. A great deal of uniformity and collective vision is required – if not throughout the country – at least within a state.

3. How much autonomy should a university enjoy? A VC is able to create many problems in a university because of

this autonomy. The same autonomy can be used by another VC to improve the university. But in the present state of affairs, I feel the extent of autonomy should be decided keeping in view the former situation.

4. It is high time that the UGC is split into CGC (College Grants Commission) and UGC (University Grants Commission).

5. The nation should ensure spread of education fairly uniformly throughout the country, obviating the regional differences present.

6. People should be educated as to why they should be serious in matters of education and S&T. People express awe at the might of the West. Similarly, people express awe when Cambridge or MIT claims a number of Nobel Prizes. It is not just the defence capabilities, but also the well-being and harmony of a society that is dependent on excellence in many branches of knowledge and spheres of human activity.

7. A long time ago, an advertisement in *Nature* for a senior academic position said 'The candidate would be judged for his quality of mind, intellect and character'. I do not know how they have judged the above, but it is worthwhile that we too ponder on these lines. Is it possible to get a person who excels in all the above qualities, for every university in the country, that too every 3–5 years? In the West, I understand that many good academicians shun not only a VC's post but even a chairman's post (Head of the Department). But in our country many are restless to rise to the above posts. Why? There is 'something' in these posts in our country which must be analysed.

1. Virk, H. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **81**, 628–629.
2. Basa, D. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2001, **80**, 1364.
3. Kulkarni, S. K., *Free Press J.*, 31 January 2001.
4. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 1999, **76**, 859–860.

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