

Open the windows for Indian universities

Indian universities need fundamental reforms that will infuse dynamism and a renewed sense of purpose and to do that we need to re-examine the existing institutional structures, the regulatory processes and the governance paradigm of our universities. The single most important fact that distinguishes all great universities from the mediocre institutions is the quality of its faculty. Most Indian universities are ill-prepared to respond to the crisis of mediocrity that is institutionalised in the existing institutions. Even though this problem is universally acknowledged, no serious effort has been put in place to address this issue.

One of the most important reasons for not a single Indian university featuring among the top 200 in the world is that our universities do not adequately contribute to research, knowledge creation, publications and the resultant citations. Research in any discipline requires significant funding and institutional support. But more importantly, it needs an environment that promotes a culture of research and creates opportunities for faculty to be inspired by each other's work and contribution.

The entire university system in India is based upon a command and control system that at every stage there is a multilayered, bureaucratic, government-led regulatory structure that not only controls, but also scuttles the freedom and liberty of academic institutions. This needs to change. The basic framework of most, if not all regulations in the Indian university system is based upon a deep and pervasive distrust that prevails across the regulatory bodies for the university administration and the faculty. Universities are expected to be dynamic institutions where new ideas get tested, mistakes made and lessons learnt. This process of learning and constantly reinventing is not possible, if regulations are made with the purpose of exercising controls leading to obstacles and hindrances for institution building.

The only way for Indian universities to change is to give more autonomy, independence and freedom so that they can find their own institutional space within India. Promoting excellence in Indian universities is not just a goal that is worthy of pursuing, but it is a policy imperative that needs to be achieved, if we are to harness the demographic dividend.

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