

Private universities asked to close shop

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In February, the Indian Supreme Court quashed a provision of a state law that allowed rampant mushrooming of private universities in Chhattisgarh. Delivering the judgment on a petition by former UGC chief Prof Yashpal, the Supreme Court has struck down Sections 5 and 6 of the Chhattisgarh Private Sector Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Act, 2002 - Chhattisgarh Niji Vishwavidyalaya Adhiniyam (University Act), 2002 - enacted by the then Ajit Jogi government. This law had permitted "self-financing" private universities to come up in the state. The result: In a short span of about three years, over 120 private universities had sprung up in the state. The court termed the provision as unconstitutional and cancelled the registration of all the private universities in the state, rendering them null and void. Nearly 20,000 students are presently enrolled in the institutions. However, in order to safeguard the interest of the students, the court has directed the institutions to seek affiliations with the two government universities in Chhattisgarh - Pandit Ravishankar Shukla University in Raipur and Guru Ghasidas University in Bilaspur.

Prominent among the universities which have been ordered to be closed by the apex court include Amity, Rai University, ICFAI Vishwavidhyalaya, Aptech, Apple, Jaipuria, NILLM, Rajiv Gandhi Technical University, Asia Pacific Management University, etc.

This move has once again brought the issue of the education quality and its accessibility in sharp focus. When the Chattisgarh government enacted this particular law, there were just two public universities to serve the entire population of the state. Though some sincere efforts were made vide the Act but taking its undue advantage many so-called universities set up shop, some even operating out of one-room homes or storefronts in shopping complexes. In fact, in 2003 a high level regulatory committee was set up by the state government and the preconditions for granting university status were made

more stringent like, they should have a Rs 2-crore endowment corpus, 25-acre land if the university is outside the Raipur municipal limits and 15-acre land if within the Raipur municipal limits. After inspection, only 37 universities remained in the fray and all the rest were denotified.

Now, this move by the Supreme Court has sent shock waves amongst many of such universities but those confident about their quality of education remain unperturbed.

Commenting on this development, Rajeev Tewari, director, (Media and Communications), Rai University, said, "There is no denying the fact that there were a large number of shops in Chattisgarh but a genuine institution like ours has invested over Rs 1000 crore for generating quality human resources through our university. The Court must constitute an examination committee which can examine all the institutions and based on their merit, choose to grant them a deemed university status. Meanwhile, we have approached Ravishankar Shukla University in Raipur and Guru Govind Singh Indraprastha University in Delhi for interim affiliation and the attitude of both the universities has been very positive." He further stated, "We are keen to have an ordinance that would grant quality institutions like ours a deemed university status. And would ideally want this entire issue to be resolved within the next two months before this academic session ends, so as to safeguard the interest of our students. The further this matter stretches, the more panic it will create among the students".

Aseem K Chauhan, trustee and board member, Amity institutions, commented, "We believe that this is a very good development for quality private education in India. We welcome this decision of the Supreme Court. Earlier, Amity had complied with the strict revised regulations for university status and on inspection by the committee, there were talks of giving us a UGC status. Later, an examination by the UGC committee led to talks of Amity being a State University in Chattisgarh. This was the state of affairs when the Supreme Court derecognized all the private universities in the state. Presently the Chattisgarh governor, chief minister and officials at the highest level are sympathetic towards us. And now, we have several avenues open in front of us: Setting up a University through an Individual Act, that is, each university will be set up separately and in this way the quality of education will be much higher and the number of universities much less; or seek affiliation through our other existing university in UP or the one coming up in Rajasthan, which is in the last stages of finalization."

"Also, the Supreme Court being sympathetic to the cause of students has recommended that the private universities can affiliate with the state universities there. In fact some universities have approached us too. But Dr Ashok Chauhan, founder president, Amity, is looking towards a University status and will look towards affiliation as a last resort," he added

This move by the Supreme Court should set in motion the formulation of some standardized quality norms for all institutions alike - private or public so that the students do not feel shortchanged and the exercise of quality human resource generation can continue unabated.

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