

## **One Must Be Judged By What**

### **One Has Left Behind**

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#### **1. An Inner Urge**

I was Vice Chancellor, Anna University, Chennai and as the term was nearing its end, I was preparing to settle down, not in retirement, but in a life of freedom to do all that was close to my heart. A salaried job, however good, is a kind of bondage and somewhere in my sub-conscious self, I have always been longing for liberation. This cry for freedom was so private that only I could hear. It was at this stage that I received a phone call from the Secretary, Education, MHRD, asking for my consent to accept the post of Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University. While I was aware that my name was in the panel, I did not seriously think that I had much of a chance; nor was I very enthusiastic about moving to Delhi; however, the offer came and after some hesitation, I accepted.

#### **2. Damaging Delay**

I took over as V.C., IGNOU in May 1990. The first Vice Chancellor Prof. G.Ram Reddy resigned to assume office as Vice-President, Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada. The Ministry did not appoint a successor for nearly nine months. The university was under an acting Vice-Chancellor. This practice seems to be a common phenomenon at the centre and in the States, irrespective of whether a Vice Chancellor leaves in the middle or retires. Whichever the university and whoever the acting Vice-

Chancellor, the absence of a regular incumbent in the post of V.C. does great harm – incalculable damage – to the University.

### **3. The Proverbial Lag**

The first vice chancellor was quite ambitious; had laid a broad foundation and for the superstructure initiated measures which were to be continued.

I tried to understand the situation in all its dimensions. The preparation of instruction material, lagging behind the schedule is a universal phenomenon in distance education. We had a series of meetings with the heads of schools, divisions and other senior members. From the courses announced and admissions made, I tried to assess the commitments and on the basis of the discussion:

- i Fixed a target for instruction material preparation and despatch
- ii Initiated action to enhance the faculty position by appointing a number of consultants. [These consultants later created problems which would not be discussed here.]

### **4. Codes and Rules**

It appeared that the Govt. of India, especially Shri Rajiv Gandhi the then P.M., was keen on accelerating the development of IGNOU and offering courses. Recruitment of all categories of staff had been made fairly quickly, and appointment of nearly 1300 had been made following the qualifications prescribed by the UGC for academic and Gol for all non-academic positions. The following remained to be framed:

- i. Service and recruitment rules for the academic and all the non-academic positions
- ii. Conduct rules for all the categories
- iii. Financial code.

We initiated steps for framing service and recruitment rules. It would be easy to frame the rules and recruit the staff; but formulation of service and promotion rules for those already on the campus was a formidable problem since the associations came with requests and demands and insisted on them at every stage. It was certainly a herculean task to protect the interests of the university.

## **5. Confrontation with Corruption**

The university had been functioning in a number of centers scattered in the city. A complex of temporary sheds were constructed in the land allotted to the university. The site was earlier a quarry with pits deep and wide like a volcano crater, distributed all over: it was an open ground: dusty; very hot in summer; very cold in winter.

We initiated action for developing the campus. The first step was the layout approval by the Urban Arts Commission. I was told that it would take anywhere from one to two years. The next step was the approval of the building plan by the Municipality. We had to consider also the priority between academic buildings and staff quarters. A make-shift facility was already there for the academic buildings. If the recruitment of staff for the university was to be done nationally, housing was an inevitable and urgent necessity.

We proposed necessary designs for 265 quarters to cater to all categories of staff. Getting approval for the buildings from the corruption ridden Delhi municipality was a painful process. After a few months of honest and patient effort, including personal approach to the commissioner, we found it necessary to approach the Lieutenant Governor. I met him; explained to him the problem and the job was done. In an age when skyscrapers are constructed in a year or two, it is pathetic that we are obliged to live helplessly with a system where mere approval process takes years. The work was entrusted to the CPWD and the foundation stone was laid by the Minister for MHRD. Before taking up the buildings, we have had an impressive entrance constructed for the university and had also closed the gaps in the fencing for the campus. There were also major boundary problems with a story behind them; we would not go into them now.

We prepared the layout, plans, elevations and the designs for the academic buildings also and submitted them to the municipality. It was my ambition to inaugurate the construction of the academic buildings before laying down office; but the Municipality would not oblige; sanction was delayed as usual. It was left to my successor to inaugurate the construction work but strangely the work, I learnt, was delayed for some reason and started only about four years afterwards.

## **6. A National Body in the Offing**

**An unusual responsibility has been vested in IGNOU. It has been mandated to promote, co-ordinate and determine standards of Distance Education in the country. Stated simply, IGNOU is for Distance Education, what UGC is for conventional higher education.** The problem was one of operationalising this

provision. This is an unusual mandate; the combination of player and an umpire in one, both at the same time. The wisdom of this novel provision is still in doubt. After deep consideration and long deliberation, adjourning the subject in a number of meetings, the Board approved a proposal presented by the V.C. to establish an instrument by the designation **Distance Education Council [DEC]**. It was to have jurisdiction over all the Distance Education Institutions in the country including IGNOU. Many did not recognize at that time that within the four walls of the meeting room, by a simple approval, the Board of Management of IGNOU had created a national institution with immense potential, destined to play a major role in a rapidly growing area of education in the country.

## **7. Manpower and Research, the Desideratum**

A Distance Education Institution represents a hybrid system having academic and industrial components. The D.E. system needs trained staff and research input for development. In order to fulfill this strongly felt need, an institution by the name **Staff Training and Research Institution for Distance Education (STRIDE)** was set up with support from the Common Wealth of Learning (COL). The long term vision was that it would develop into a major institution, catering to the manpower needs of distance education at the national level and an important manpower development centre in the commonwealth countries. It would also undertake research addressed to problems in academic, financial, administrative and technology applications in distance education. Promotion of research also requires an appropriate medium for publication of research papers. A journal by the name **Indian Journal of Open Learning** was started as a quarterly.

## **8. Radio and T.V: a Late Arrival**

Distance education, to be effective, has to be based on multimedia instruction. Even in its initial stages, radio and later television played an important role. Though the secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was a member of the Board of Management of IGNOU, the university was not able to get time in TV and Radio for offering lessons. It was after considerable negotiation and pleading that the Department agreed to allot, half an hour per day for three days a week for nationwide televising of IGNOU lessons. A brief period of broadcasting with limited regional coverage was approved. While a basic facility for multimedia instruction in a National University was lacking for over six years, the Department of Education, MHRD, instead of appreciating our effort, was peeved that we directly negotiated with the Department of Information and Broadcasting. Procedure and protocol are enthroned by the bureaucracy and are deified, however obstructive and detrimental to the benefits of the society.

## **9. A Landmark Development**

IGNOU had established a well equipped studio for audio-video production with significant assistance from U.K. We wanted to further strengthen this facility; we prepared a project report for establishing a full fledged **Education Media Production Centre** at a cost of Rs.50 crores and submitted it for assistance by way of a grant to Japan through the Dept. of Economic Affairs. It was processed at the Japanese end; there were two or three visits of experts from Japan and signing of interim agreements and finally it was sanctioned as a 100% grant. The studio was to be constructed and equipped fully by Japan and at its full stage of development, it would have over 180 staff

members. **The final sanction and signing of the agreement went through many crucial and critical hurdles. It would need a volume to narrate the efforts put in by the university authorities to overcome the man made, totally avoidable obstruction and accidents.** What appeared to be a simple problem, assumed formidable dimensions. The final agreement had to be signed by the Government of Japan and the Government of India represented by the Secretary, Department of Education, MHRD. A dispute arose between the Department of Economic Affairs and the Department of Education over accounting the value of the grant involved in the project. The Department of Economic Affairs maintained that it was to be treated as part of the plan allocation to the Department of Education; but the Education Department insisted that it must be treated as an addition to the plan allocation. For all that, neither of them was to spend any money since the project was fully a grant. It appeared that the project would not materialise. The Japanese delegation went back. I must record here that no one's sleep in the Govt. was disturbed over losing one of the finest and latest facilities for audio, video production for the national university. We met every one in the two ministries and pleaded with them desperately to save the project. Ultimately when the Secretary, Education was obliged to sign because of instruction from the Finance Ministry, the officers of the Department of Education, MHRD were very angry since they thought that the university had manipulated and brought pressure on them to sign the agreement, giving up the conditions they insisted on. It was really unimaginable that there could arise such a formidable problem in accepting an outright grant with no repayment requirements. The foundation stone for the project was laid by Dr Manmohan Singh, the then Minister for Finance and now the Prime Minister. **The**

administrative system of this country is admirably ordered for dithering, delay and obstruction. EMPC today is the nerve centre of IGNOU campus and is the venue for the Gyan Vani, Gyan Darshan and numerous tele-conferencing activities. I informed the Japanese team which came initially to appraise the possible utilization of the project, that they were granting a facility not just to IGNOU but to the nation as a whole for meeting educational requirements. I may state in all humility, that the statement then made, really proved prophetic. Credit for the later developments goes to the initiative and imaginative leadership of my successors.

#### **10. Teleconferencing: a Beginning**

One more word about the development of infrastructure facilities. With the help of COL, we developed a two way audio conferencing facility. The next step was video-teleconferencing. This is expensive and requires the use of satellite. The chairman of ISRO, Dr U.R. Rao was an unusual leader and a person deeply interested in using the ISRO facility for educational purposes. When we entered into a negotiation with him, he was extremely positive; was willing to go more than half way to meet our requirement. The agreement was to **provide one way video conferencing as a joint project between IGNOU and ISRO. IGNOU would provide the software. IGNOU** campus would be the venue for the uplink facility. ISRO would provide the equipment for uplinking and a transponder exclusively in the satellite; necessary permission was obtained from the P.M. for this project. We had a demonstration session on the campus. IGNOU entered the era of teleconferencing-though one way-in 1994. It was extensively used later, but remained an one way facility till the introduction of EduSat in 2004.



E-mail facility was established on the campus; but the potential of the website and internet was yet to emerge on the scene.

### **11. A New School: One Started, One Stopped**

**In addition to the eight schools already existing, we established a school of Health Science and introduced B.Sc., nursing programme. It was a matter of superhuman effort to get the approval of the Indian Nursing Council.** The ladies were courteous and gentle, but difficult to convince. We also started in the School of Engineering a degree programme in Water Resource Engineering and Construction Management under the broad field of Civil Engineering.

We proposed to establish a School of Legal Studies. In my report at the fifth convocation (2004) I have stated that “a school of Legal Studies is being newly established on the recommendation of the Planning Board and the approval of the Board of Management.” However, later, the Board was of the opinion that IGNOU should concentrate on consolidating the existing schools and programmes and defer expansion. It is my considered opinion that the Board was a little too conservative on this issue. I am happy that IGNOU has established recently a School of Legal Studies and a School of Agriculture.

### **12. A Unique Distinction**

Among the programmes introduced an important one was P.G. Diploma in Distance Education and Master of Education in Distance Education. **This programme attracted the attention of COL. Among the Distance Education Institutions in the developing countries of the Common Wealth and also in general, IGNOU**

distinguished itself in terms of number and variety of programmes, quality of instruction material and the strength of enrolment. COL decided to confer on IGNOU the distinction of Centre of Excellence in Distance Education. The fourth convocation of IGNOU was addressed by Lord Briggs, chairman of COL and the Distinction of Centre of Excellence was conferred on IGNOU by Prof. James A. Maraj the President of COL. In continuation, COL also came forward to assist IGNOU in setting up study centers in the developing countries of the Commonwealth for offering the P.G. Diploma and M.A. Degree in Distance Education. COL also sanctioned financial support to 100 students from countries in African, Asian, Caribbean and Pacific regions under the title, Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship. A significant number of programmes, some of them quite innovative, were started during my tenure. It is only natural in a young and growing institution.

### **13. An Experiment Discontinued**

Quality is not inherent in the system itself; it is what one builds into a program or a product. Quality in education is to be maintained by the institution and acknowledged by the public. In order to ensure quality and standard. I introduced a system of Academic Audit, in which peers from outside assess the content of the syllabus, adequacy of coverage in the question papers, the dependability of valuation of answer books and prepare a report to the university authorities.

I introduced a similar measure in Anna University, in both the cases, at the fag end of my term. It has been given up in both the institutions after my departure.

Notwithstanding the unceremonious farewell to the Academic Audit experiment in both the institutions, I hold the view that it is a valuable and reliable tool to measure quality.

#### **14. An International Institution in IGNOU Campus**

The Commonwealth of Learning [COL] decided to set up an institution by the name **Commonwealth Education Media Centre of Asia [CEMCA]**. It invited proposals for offering certain facilities for establishing the centre in the campus of a university. Initially I thought of waiting for the Board Meeting; but later learnt that it might be too late. **Therefore we offered at IGNOU the facilities required and comparing our merits with other competitors, COL decided to set up CEMCA at IGNOU. It is now functioning from IGNOU campus.** However, it appears that since the CEMCA is an international facility, its location in India required the approval of the Ministry of Home and the Ministry of External Affairs besides MHRD and ultimate approval came after two years of processing. **Our procedures are such that in a world of competition we are like a person entering a swimming match with a stone tied around his waist.**

#### **15. A New Service Cadre**

An Open University functions through its regional centres distributed all over its jurisdiction. To an individual student, the contact point with the university is the regional centre. Each centre is administered by a Regional Director and his/her staff. In the initial arrangement of IGNOU, the regional director was in the administrative cadre and his / her colleagues were academics in the rank of lecturers, really belonging to the respective schools on the main campus. This arrangement was not conducive to the efficient functioning of the regional centre since each centre was really a mini university,

A new cadre by name, Regional Service was created, with posts of Director, Deputy Director and Assistant Regional Director. They were referred to as other academics while at the regional centre and made eligible for transfer as academics to the school. The intention was that the academic posts in the schools and in the regional centres must be interchangeable. It is my considered opinion that about 20% of the staff at the main campus at any time must be academics transferred from the regional centres.

### **16. Bypass, the Preferred Route**

There were a few aspects of my approach and value system that created situations warranting my having to displease or antagonize the staff members who were otherwise friendly, respectful and appreciative. I tended to totally identify myself with the institution and hence found myself unable even to place before the Board of Management proposals that in my judgement would harm the institution.

I should cite as examples two demands of the Teachers' Association:

- i. Election of two representatives of teachers and other academics to the Board of Management in place of nomination by the Vice-Chancellor.
- ii. Appointment of Heads of Schools by rotation.

I have been against direct election for representation in the Board for more than one reason. Coming to nomination of Heads of Schools by rotation, it was my considered view that nomination of Heads of Schools mechanically by rotation would completely reduce the effectiveness of the incumbent, and do great harm to the open university system. Consequently, I could not go along with the Association. Many in my position

might have thought it prudent to leave it to the Board of Management to reject the proposals, a route that I was not willing to follow.

### **17. A Matter of Precedent and Propriety**

I have been singularly careful not to set up a precedent that I could not sincerely defend or that would later make life difficult for my successors. It was clear in my mind that I should function with dignity or vacate the office. Leaving aside my image in the eyes of others, I should not fall in my own evaluation of myself. A joint director, who was heading a division, was accused of corrupt practices by the non-academic staff associations. The associations demanded that pending enquiry, the officer must be suspended. I was willing to order an enquiry and take action if, *prima facie*, he was found guilty. That was not acceptable to the associations. I called for a meeting of the heads of schools and divisions and posed the question whether the administration could suspend an officer on the demand of the associations, whatever its merit, without the authority satisfying itself that the individual was *prima facie* guilty. There was silence in the conference hall; one or two who spoke almost supported the associations. Only one among the group was for an enquiry. I was somewhat disappointed at the non-committed attitude of the senior members. The fatal weakness of our society to-day is the aggressiveness of the few, and the passivity of many. I had to decide myself on a course of action. The individual involved was no an angel: but, it was not the man under concern, but the method to be adopted. Suspending an officer on the basis of the demand of the associations without some enquiry or examination to justify the action would totally undermine the basis of disciplinary action. I did not yield. Citing this and a few other service matters, the members of the associations went on an indefinite strike.

It was not unexpected. There were endless negotiations. Mine was unwillingness to setup a precedent which would remain an indelible stain on the administration. There was really nothing to compromise. With the co operation of 19 heads of schools and divisions and support of three PVC's, there were yet moments during this period when I felt that, perhaps, I was alone. What I had consciously opted for, I must accept. Ultimately, the strike was called off after a fortnight and the administration agreed to appoint a retired high court judge as an enquiry officer. Action would be taken on any interim report that he might give. This was agreed to by the associations.

### **18. An Honest Attempt at Self-evaluation**

During my term at IGNOU, I considered it desirable to monitor, in whatever manner possible, my standing in the eyes of my senior colleagues in terms of their evaluation on a four point scale. I adopted from the world of management an instrument of evaluation consisting of 14 parameters, such as: Accessibility, Fairness, Receptivity, Innovativeness, Ability to Lead, etc., and arranged for an annual evaluation on a four point scale: Very Good [A], Good [B], Adequate [C], Needs Improvement [D]. The evaluation was done at the end of each financial year on a strictly anonymous and confidential basis. Giving a weightage of 4, 3, 2 & 1 for the grades, A, B, C, D, the Grade Point Average (GPA) obtained from the ratings of 19 senior colleagues answering against 14 characteristics, over a period of four years was 3.68. The average of all the 19, against each aspect in each year is given in the Table. I was also the recipient of the national honour of **Padma Shri** at the Republic Day in 1992 – a distinction conferred on me for the contribution of my colleagues.

Sl. No.	Item	Yearwise GPA* for 4 years			
		1991	1992	1993	1994
1.	Accessible	3.37	3.23	3.53	3.74
2.	Fair & just	3.93	3.73	3.57	3.50
3.	Rapport with colleagues	3.81	3.28	3.42	3.47
4.	Delegates responsibilities	3.68	3.55	3.42	3.68
5.	Conducts discussions effectively	3.87	3.86	3.80	3.95
6.	Prompt decisions	3.81	3.73	3.88	3.89
7.	Familiar with rules	3.37	3.59	3.73	3.74
8.	Helpful	3.75	3.59	3.50	3.74
9.	Systematic implementation	4.00	3.45	3.80	3.84
10.	Receptive mind	3.62	3.68	3.61	3.79
11.	Plans for the future	3.62	3.73	3.73	3.84
12.	Interest in job	3.93	4.0	3.92	4.0

13.	Innovative	3.50	3.45	3.61	3.68
14.	Leads ably	3.75	3.45	3.80	3.74
<b>Total Average</b>		3.71	3.60	3.66	3.76

- Each grade is an average of 19 ratings

A – Denotes Very Good [4]; B – Good [3] ; C – Adequate [2]; D – Needs Improvement [1]

### **19. An Honour to Cherish**

I was fortunate to inherit the legacy of an illustrious predecessor. I must also record without any reservation that I have also been privileged to be succeeded by eminent men– Prof. R.K. Takwale who was closely associated with me as a member of the Board of Management of IGNOU and the council of DEC; Prof. A. W. Khan and Prof. H.P.Dikshit, both of whom were my senior colleagues in IGNOU. The University community in general and the Board of Management and the V.C. in particular have chosen to confer on me D. Litt (honor is causa) at the 11<sup>th</sup> convocation in 2000. It is a kind gesture and a manifestation of magnanimity that I recall, with a feeling of gratitude and, may I say, a pardonable sense of pride.

### **20. Envisioning the Future of IGNOU**

I posed to myself the question of, what future developments, could be envisioned for IGNOU. It did not require a prophet to foresee:



- I. The emergence of knowledge as a resource and education as the vehicle for all ascents
- II. The starting of an open university in each State
- III. The establishment of distance education component in each conventional university and eventually all conventional universities becoming dual mode
- IV. Advance in technology helping to restore almost the class room situation, ensuring interaction and thus minimizing the distinction between the conventional system and D.E. system.

These developments were not far away and I tried to visualize the future of IGNOU against this background. I used to think of it ultimately as an umbrella institution; a co-ordinating agency, a strong research centre in distance education, a provider of electronic media facility at different centres in the country, a seat of bench mark for each component of D.E. system, and a manpower development institution. I expected that the DEC would emerge as a force greater than its creator in the distance education scene of India; that the EMPC, the STRIDE and the Journal of Open Learning would play greatly increasing roles with national and international contributions; that IGNOU would withdraw from offering conventional programmes, take over pioneering roles in introducing programmes with a futuristic element, assume greater responsibilities for reaching the unreached covering all categories of disability and expand its activities overseas. **As I read the V.C's report at the 16<sup>th</sup> convocation in March 2005, my assessment was, to say without any reservation, that IGNOU has progressed in the last decade far beyond my expectation. The diversity, the number and the**

**spread of activities undertaken are really staggering. It has certainly emerged on the educational horizons of India as a colossus. I may conclude this discussion by saying that if India signs the much disputed GATS agreement, unlimited global openings will unfold for those that are competent, and IGNOU, as the second largest university in the world, is better suited than any other institution in India to take full advantage of the emerging opportunities.**

## **21. Epilogue**

As I look back and see before my mind's eye the events of nearly 15 years as Vice-Chancellor in three universities, I could say that I had the support of the Boards of Management, co-operation of my colleagues and understanding of the Government. I have had no major complaints of political interference or intervention. In the Delhi atmosphere a sad aspect was the readiness on the part of major newspapers – especially the local language papers –to accept planting of adverse or even damaging news items which were contrary to facts, without any attempt at verification. Anything that was anti-establishment was welcome and it was supposed to represent progressive forces; the ease with which M.P's could be persuaded to ask questions which were reflections on defenceless individuals in responsible positions was astonishing. One saw the emergence of a culture in which condemnation by itself was paraded as contribution.

Occasional moments of discouragement and despair are inevitable depending on how close to the set path one would want the system to move: but sincerity, concern and true merit become irresistible and receive acknowledgement. The apathy of the many

and the aggressiveness of the few might drive one to wonder whether any struggle for what is right is worth; a little staying power certainly brings satisfactory results. Compromises bring short term comfort, but the long term costs are heavy: the choice is a matter of conscience. Compromise with those who promote and instigate revolt under one pretext or the other, might at times appear to be an attractive alternative, but never the one to be opted for.

I should think that on an overall assessment of my service in three universities, I belong to the group of fortunate Vice-Chancellors whose path was comparatively smooth; in whose case the hurdles were there, but not insurmountable; who did not have to face any serious hostility from those in authority: enjoyed throughout, the support of the staff, the full cooperation of the Boards of Management and other university authorities. I may say, in conclusion that a Vice-Chancellor should be judged not by what he did or did not do, but by what he has left behind as his contribution – facilities and programmes; manpower and leadership; precedents and traditions and in general, the image of the institution and the image of himself.