

Southern Education REVIEW

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Reaching for the sky

South India has for time immemorial, enjoyed pride of place in the country's educational system. But what exactly sets the region apart, to make it a preferred destination for students? Mrinal Rajaram profiles a group of Tamil Nadu's finest higher educational institutions for the answer...



C Parameswaran

South India has always had a revered status in the echelons of educational excellence. C Parameswaran, Director, Corporate and Industry Relations, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, says, "These Universities provide excellent infrastructure, committed and qualified faculty and academic discipline. The cost of education is comparatively low and there are excellent placement opportunities with good salary packages. Universities and colleges in the South have tie-ups with many reputed Indian and International universities. There is general discipline in academic administration (starting with the admissions process), with minimum disruption in academic schedules. This helps in the timely completion of the course, enabling students to enter professional life/seek higher educational opportunities without delay."



L Gopalakrishnan

South India has asserted its position as a hub for higher education over the past few decades. Quality faculty, good infrastructure and updated syllabus has further allowed it to score over other parts of the country. According to L Gopalakrishnan, Managing Trustee, PSG Institutions, "Education is a highly valued asset in the South Indian community. Information Technology is a burgeoning field in the south. India's IT hub, Bangalore, is home to over 200 software companies. Four of the country's top seven exporters of software are from Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Coimbatore. Chennai houses some of the biggest automobile manufacturers in its backyard. More than 65 percent of vehicles produced in the country (cars, buses, trucks, trains and bicycles) are produced in Chennai. The latter also ranks first in the production of heavy vehicles." Coimbatore, he says, is the source of nearly 35 percent of India's total cotton production.

M Ponnaivaikko

Being a hub of software and electronic industries, the south offers people many great academic institutions, says M Ponnaivaikko, Vice Chancellor, SRM University. He adds, "With high-tech laboratory facilities and qualified teachers to impart good education, universities in the South offer students a host of options to choose from." He also believes that the south provides a better opportunity for students to improve their conversational English. "Good conversational English should be



high on any Indian student's priority scale. South India provides a conducive environment for it," he says.

Southern edge

What makes the south a hub for higher education? Top academicians share their views...

Prof Ramakrishna Ramaswamy, VC, University of Hyderabad

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Employability is key
Sriram Rajagopal, Vice-President, Human Resources...

A home of good counsel

The character of student counselling in colleges is changing thanks to greater peer involvement...

Mounting academic pressure, unshakeable peer influence, the need to land the perfect placement; today, student...

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The deemed question

Even as the discussion on the merits and demerits of deemed universities continues, ARJUN NARAYANAN attempts to present a clearer picture

In 2005, the Supreme Court had expressed concerns over the unregulated mushrooming of private universities all over the country. Later, in 2009, the Tandon Committee, set up by the Ministry of HRD, also derecognised 44 deemed to be universities and formed three groups, naming them A, B and C. The universities that fell under the first category qualified as per the parameters set by the committee. While the universities in the second categories were found deficient on some parameters, the ones in the final bracket were found totally unfit to function.

This month, eight of the 44 universities found deficient, have overcome the areas that needed to be worked upon and have made it to the deemed universities list. There were players like Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, who had gone for the deemed structure long back and also made it to the first group in the list prepared by the Tandon Committee. Prashant R Nair, Vice Chairman, IT, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, feels that going for deemed status helped them a lot in matters related to new programmes, pedagogy, student exchange programmes and the over-all administration of their institution. "Over the last few years, more than 150 of our students have gone on exchange programmes," says Prashant, who feels that enough checks and balances have been put in place to make sure that the university follows all the norms.



It is this advantage in designing the curriculum that Dr Murugesan Ponnaivaikko, VC, SRM University, points out to. "It is a known fact that only 10-15 percent of Arts and Science graduates and 25 percent of engineering graduates are employable. Going for a deemed status has given us more academic independence. We have been able to come up with new programmes, which are not available in other universities," he says. Murugesan also points out to problems in the functioning of a university, which causes bottlenecks.

These deemed universities have also tried to fill the gap in problem areas, such as employability by reworking their curriculum. Many surveys in the past have pointed out to the lack of soft skills among student who do technical courses such as

engineering. "In our curriculum, 65 percent of our subjects are in the engineering stream and the rest 35 percent focus on science, humanities and business. These subjects make the process of education more holistic," says Dr G Vishwanathan, Founder and Chancellor, Vellore Institute of Technology. "We also introduced new concepts in teaching such as Fully Flexible Credit System, where the students can choose the subjects of their choice, choose their professors and also the time of their classes," he says.

Nevertheless, the academic fraternity accepts the fact that the rapid mushrooming of deemed universities has brought in a lot of dubious players in fray. Prashant feels that the complicated evaluation process in place today has not left much room for fly-by-night operators to come into existence. "There are people in this field who are trying ways to circumvent the system and they have become nothing more than commercial money-making bodies. But the system has a way of weeding them out," he says. Ponnaivaikko draws the problem of a vicious circle in which many educational institutions have been placed. "Students and parents prefer institutions which have good facilities and faculty. Unless you spend money on these two elements, you can't bring in good students. But since not many go for the new players, they are unable to invest in facilities and faculty. All these problems arise because the foundation of their plan is wrong." With the academic bodies putting tough regulations in place, one can hope that over time, the failed models will gradually be weeded out to make way for genuine institutes of excellence.

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