

'Deemed univs' even before admissions open

Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital, one of the two Chennai-based institutions found charging illegal donations by a TOI-Times Now investigation, began offering the MBBS course in 2002, the same year that it received 'deemed university' status. Using the autonomy, the college designed its own courses, syllabus and teaching methodologies. Five years later, it awarded degrees to doctors under its own name Pushpa Narayan | TNN

Chennai: The investigation into capitation fees demanded by private medical colleges in violation of a Supreme Court order has brought into focus the rampant proliferation of deemed universities which enjoy complete freedom on admission rules and fee structures with little oversight. The last five years have seen deemed university status conferred on 55 medical colleges nationwide, raising doubts among experts on the calibre of some of the institutions that have profited from the status. In comparison, only 29 colleges were granted this privilege in the first 35 years after the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act came into effect in 1956, and another 40 in the period between 1991 and 2004.

What started as a method to recognise institutions that contributed to the Independence movement and slowly assumed the form of a distinction granted on the basis of an institution's standing and ability to govern, has now become questionable, at least in some cases as the TOITimes Now expose on capitation fees has shown.

Academicians and advocates say the root of the problem is the lack of clarity in the UGC Act in defining criteria for a deemed university.

"The Act does not spell out specific prerequisites for getting the status. The original idea of a deemed university was to honour colleges of stature and maturity at the time of Independence. Today, it is on sale," said a senior academician, who had served on the National Board of Examinations.

In all, the country now has 124 deemed universities. Tamil Nadu tops the list with 29. In the last five years, 15 of the 55 universities accorded the status were from TN; of the remaining, nine were from Karnataka, which has thus increased its tally of deemed institutions to 14, and five were from Maharashtra, which now boasts of 21 in all.

The three states put together account for more than half the approvals granted in the UPA's previous tenure when Arjun Singh was the HRD minister. Among them, the three states account for more than half the total number of deemed universities. Of the rest, Delhi leads with 11, followed by Uttar Pradesh with nine and Andhra Pradesh with six.

In TN, three colleges were given the status even before they started their admission process and three others before the first batch of students passed out — in other words, before there was any opportunity to assess the quality of education being imparted by them. **Colleges become 'deemed univs' even before 1st batch passes out**

A few dental colleges in the state too enjoy such autonomy. There are three other medical colleges outside TN, one each in Gujarat, Haryana and Pondicherry, which got 'deemed' status before their first batches passed out.

"Deemed university status should be accorded only to institutions which have a proven track record. The mushrooming of such universities is an example of how corrupt the medical educational system in the state has become. With several doyens in the field, TN is ahead of all the others in the medical profession. But this advantage is being misused by college managements that grease the palms of MCI officials for recognition of their courses. They ensure that they get the autonomy status not just to form the syllabus, but also to conduct exams. Even the external examiners are selected by them," says Chennai-based senior orthopaedic surgeon Dr M Parthasarathy.

All that the Medical Council of India does in the case of deemed universities is check if the students admitted to

the college have passed out of the right stream in Class XII with at least 50% marks, besides ensuring that the college has necessary infrastructure and teaching faculty. Neither the regulator nor the government has any role to play in selection of candidates or in the amount of fees levied. Evidently, even the Supreme Court's ban on capitation fees means little in some cases. In effect, the principle of merit can be easily given the go-by, although experts say this is not a uniform practice.

Indeed some deemed universities are known to have put their autonomy to the right use, innovating on syllabus and methodologies to suit changing times. Dr C Ramachandran, an ex-official of the directorate of medical education working with SRM Medical College, says, "We start new courses like MSc (anatomy). Not many MBBS students take up non-clinical streams like anatomy, we encourage BDS students to do a post-graduation in non clinical medicine. Sri Ramachandra University also has several unique courses and a tieup with Harvard Medical University. Not one government institution has such innovation. Deemed universities too have produced some of the best doctors," he says.

However, the larger picture remains bleak. For every island of excellence, there are many which have misused their autonomy to merely indulge in unchecked profiteering. As Dr George Thomas, editor, the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics points out, "A deemed university is mandated to conduct research. But there is no proportionate increase in number of research papers coming out of these universities.

STATUS DEVALUED

- **29** medical colleges were granted 'deemed university' status in the first **35 years** after the UGC Act came into effect in 1956
- Another **40** got the status between **1991 and 2004**
- **55** medical colleges have been conferred the status in the **last 5 years** alone

State	Total No. Of Deemed Universities	Those Granted Status In 2004-08
Tamil Nadu	29	15
Maharashtra	21	5
Karnataka	14	9
Delhi	11	3
Uttar Pradesh	9	5
Andhra Pradesh	6	2
West Bengal	1	1

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 The power of exemption from the provisions of the UGC Act cannot be exercised arbitrarily. We need to satisfy ourselves that such exercise of power was fair, reasonable and just. It is the duty of the HRD ministry to satisfy itself whether the norms necessary for grant of deemed-university status have been met with and adhered to

Kapil Sibal | UNION HRD MINISTER

