

Why aren't arts and science experts posted as university V-Cs?



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The appointment of Vice-Chancellors to universities in India has, of late, been triggering controversies. The University Grants Commission, Governors, and state governments have been emphasizing their powers over this matter. Moreover, the ruling and opposition parties are also contributing their mite to making the issue highly debatable.

Amid all this, there is a fear among academics if Acts and statutes of the universities will eventually be left out in the cold.

Appointment of V-Cs

India boasts 55 central universities, 482 state universities, 465 private universities, 124 deemed universities and 165 educational institutions of national importance. Tamil Nadu has 56 universities of which 22 are government-owned, four private, 28 deemed, two educational institutions of national importance (with university status) and two central universities. Among them are Anna University for technical education, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University for agricultural education, Dr. Ambedkar Law University for law education and Dr. M.G.R. Medical University for medical education and also sector-specific universities. Among the 22 government universities, 13 are arts and science universities and the rest are universities each in the categories of engineering, medicine, law, physical education, fisheries, veterinary science, fine arts and open institution.

On Sept. 5, 1857 India's first three universities were launched each at Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata. Till Madurai Kamaraj University was set up in 1966, in Tamil Nadu all courses in arts, science, engineering, medicine, agriculture and veterinary science and other courses were offered and degrees awarded only under the jurisdiction of Madras University. In those days, experts from various fields such as doctors, advocates, engineers and so on served as Vice-Chancellors. In a gesture to honor the Tamil language, former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi appointed Tamil scholars such as Mu.Varadarasan, T.P.Meenakshisundaram, Va.Suba. Manickam and so on as Vice-Chancellors of universities of arts, science and literature.

UGC riddled with goof-ups

Nowadays the appointment of V-Cs is teeming with chaos and confusion because of the lack of clarity in the legal frameworks, announced till date, about the UGC, V-C qualifications, search committee formation and tenure of the post.

An applicant to the V-C post should, at least, have 10 years' experience working as a professor in a university or should have an equivalent rich experience in research or administration in an

institution of higher learning. Besides, the applicant should be a respectable figure in the education sector.

Guided by these guidelines, the tenure of V-Cs in government universities has been fixed at five years in some states, four years in a few states and three years in other states. The UGC has nowhere stipulated that to fill the posts of V-C in sector-specific universities, academics from the sectors concerned should only be appointed. This is the reason why there are so much confusion and discrimination in V-C appointments, particularly in Tamil Nadu. As a result, the most affected are highly experienced educationists who have graduated from and are working in arts and science colleges.

Changing trend

The Vice-Chancellor to Anna University, a technical education institution, is appointed from among the list of PhD-holders in technological education. Similarly, only the highly qualified in respective sectors are appointed as V-Cs to the universities of medicine, law, agriculture, veterinary science, electricity and fine arts. But even in universities of arts, science and literature such as Madras University, Periyar University and so on, experts in subjects such as engineering, agriculture and so on are appointed as V-Cs though these subjects are not taught in those universities. This trend has, of late, been on the rise.

In this context, one cannot help but raise the questions: Is Tamil Nadu suffering from scarcity of qualified scholars, researchers and experts in arts, literature and science, who are eligible to work as V-Cs? Or is there a misconception doing the rounds that the experts in the humanities are not competent enough to work as administrators?

In most universities of arts, science and literature in Tamil Nadu, only those well qualified in engineering, agriculture, medicine, and law have functioned and are functioning as V-Cs.

Things that merit attention

Only a person well qualified and highly experienced in teaching, research and writing of analytical articles and books in arts, science and literature can administer with acumen the board of studies, academic council, senate and syndicate in universities of arts, science and literature. The reason is that thanks to the person's own experience of having learnt and worked in a college or a university, he/she can get to know the various departments of a university and the problems of affiliated colleges and function accordingly. But the V-Cs from other domains of knowledge will have to take a few years to understand the studies and research in universities of arts, literature and science. They may have to take decisions to resolve problems that may crop up now and then, after consulting the experts in the disciplines concerned. All these will lead to lots of practical problems.

It has long become an in-thing to appoint V-Cs to universities of arts, science and literature from among the professors of Anna University, Agriculture College and Medical University. By way of justifying this trend, it may be said that the UGC has not stipulated that only those having the relevant educational qualifications in the disciplines concerned should be posted V-Cs of universities of arts, science and literature. If this trend is considered as right, could it not be logically right either to appoint experts in arts, science and literature as V-Cs of Anna University?

Appointing experts in subjects concerned as V-Cs of the exclusive universities in the subjects will pave the way for putting the institutions on a par with standard global institutions. Keeping this truth in mind, it is better to post Vice-Chancellors in the days to come so that we will certainly have a better and upgraded system of higher education.

Translated by V Mariappan.