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UT INTERVIEW

"I could not do much for colleges": V R Mehta

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development of all the departments in the University.

UT: How come such big achievements remained without being highlighted in the media?
Mehta: Well, the Press has its own priorities.

There is another matter about which I am genuinely happy. And that is we have generated consultancy and patents culture in the University. So much so that by now 6 new patents have been filed. [Arre aapki chai thandi ho rahi hai.]

Two have already been granted in applied sciences — Molecular Biology, Biology and Chemistry. And to cap it all, we are already in the realm of technology transfer to industry. Three multinationals have already negotiated with the University or are in the process of negotiations with the result that not only the individual scientist but also the University will continue to get royalties for eternity. Cadila is one of them. I don't remember all the names. We have utilised part of the Rs 6 crores (15% of the Rs 40 crores) we got for development of the University.

UT: Why could all this not be properly highlighted?

Mehta: Kabhi kabhi ho jata hai. [What a way to avoid mentioning incompetence of those handling media and information in Delhi University].

Another satisfaction that I have is that I have the University firmly on the international map. We have signed MOUs with some of the best universities abroad including all the 9 campuses of the University of California, Austin (Texas), University of Beans in France, University of Sydney in Australia, Soka in Tokyo (Japan) and number of other universities. The best part is that as a result of these MOUs we are going to benefit in 2 ways. Number one, our students and faculty members will be able to go to these universities at their expense. They will not be required to spend even a single penny. Number two, we'll also be able to use these resources for the development of infrastructures in the departments. The process has already begun.

Vice-President of California University said, "We are interested in signing MoU with University of Delhi". And I said no I am not interested.... I said, Sir, you have dollars in your pocket.... Our students will never be able to visit California.

Kalra sahib, aap imagine keejiye ki Vice-President of California University

also done the same. And we are also using that money for the infrastructure here. And the amount of fee they are paying is \$ 3,500-4,000 for a term.

UT: I was a student at Syracuse (New York). Why were they dying to sign MOUs with Delhi University?

Mehta: Today we have MOUs with 40 universities during the last 4 years. And those universities include universities of Italy, Britain, Middle East, Asmara and many others. They are sending their students here. Delhi University has become truly international. It's not merely America. Almost the whole of the globe has been covered. Because they see that Delhi University is the only University in the country which has international character. Even the number of international students has gone up. And we have been able to generate resources from that. We have commissioned International Students Hostel from our own budget. There is no government grant involved. It was about Rs 4 crores.

The students who come here will attend full semester courses. Someone coming to Delhi School of Economics will have to undergo even the basic courses in Micro Economic Theory. Thus we have raised our resources. Thus the stature of Delhi University has gone up. When I tell people that we have signed an agreement with the University of California it gives a different impression. Even Harvard was keen to have some relationship with DU but somehow that could not materialise because we want to safeguard our rights. Every week I am receiving either an ambassador or a Vice-Chancellor or a dean of some university etc to sign an MoU. And that is I why created the office of Dean, International Affairs.

Another great satisfaction I have is a new mindset about the relationships with foreign students. They took up this initiative. Dean, Alumni Affairs is another initiative which will bring in lot of money. I got a massive response when I was in America. Students of DU were occupying many important positions. India Abroad gave me a full page coverage because the correspondent happened to be an ex-student of Delhi University. That is why after I came back, I requested EC to make institutional arrangements in this regard. In the last two years we have been able to generate lot of scholarships, fellowships, endowments for scholarships and such things and even an endowment for a Chair.

People are waiting for their salary and you say situation is 'good'? I am talking of university departments during the last 4 years. I'm not talking of colleges.

after a month or so. She said, "Prof Mehta, here is the cheque for Rs 25 lakhs." By that time new pay scales had come. I said Madam now things have changed. She said doesn't matter. After my death my house will go to the University. She was one Mrs S Bakshi. She had pledged her house in Shanti Niketan to institute this Chair.

Another point which has gone unnoticed so far is that the financial position of the University has been quite good. It is only recently now that we are in a precarious position.

UT: People are waiting for their salary and you say situation is 'good'?

Mehta: I am talking of university departments during the last 4 years. I'm not talking of colleges. But, as I said, once again the situation is precarious. And I don't know what to do. A number of colleges have not paid salaries.

UT: When you look back at your four-and-a-half years, what has been your happiest moment in Delhi University?

Mehta: The first, of course, which I just told you, Mrs Bakshi donating all she had to Delhi University. It was one of the most touching moments. It has given me a lot of hope in humankind especially as teacher and a Vice-Chancellor. It has convinced me that we don't have to depend on the largesse of the industrialists. People at the middle level have a stake in the system and they can sustain the system.

**Your biggest frustration?
"I have not been able to do much for the colleges."**

UT: On the same note, what do you think has been your personal frustration in DU?

Mehta: I have not been able to do much for the colleges. Much as I would have liked it. We appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof P N Srivastava to look into the entire question of college governance. And till today, there has been a gap between what I wanted to achieve and what I could do.

UT: At a slightly abstract level, what do you think can be the paradigm for Indian Higher Education in the next century. I won't talk 'millennium' but let's limit to the century?

Mehta: It's very difficult job. Vice-Chancellor's a fairly full time job. I'll have to give you 3-4 points.

UT: Two centuries ago we were a 'wisdom' society. Then we became a 'knowledge' society. Today we are 'information' society. Some such mapping?

Mehta: No let me first remain on paradigm part. As we move from knowledge society to knowledge

UT: That's a tall order?

Mehta: Otherwise higher education not survive. University education will become redundant. Because NIIT will do their job much better. Apteck will do it much better. Microsoft is here. So IBM and a host of others. Unless you try to move in that direction we'll be redundant.

Secondly, so far we have tried to combine excellence with vocational education with the result that we have not achieved either. In the next decade we have to ensure that we have an education system which guarantees decent jobs to the students. The mismatch that exists between the kind of people needed and the kind the universities supply will have to be taken care of.

UT: Can universities get rid of "unwanted burden"? Disciplines like Persian or Sociology (though I am not against either Persian or Sociology) whose burden we cannot bear in times to come?

[Suddenly remembers]. It is the change in the academic environment in the universities I want so that there greater decentralisation empowering teacher, especially the researcher, to be able to pursue his own research without hurdles of any kind from any source. Jab tak ye nahin hoga kuchh nahin ho sakti. Itna time hamara researcher barbad karta hai. In frustration he leaves this country and goes abroad whenever he gets a chance.

UT: But your statement is in contradistinction to the emerging world picture? Most of the fundamental research is concentrated in advanced West and the erstwhile Third World countries are the net recipients of technology under the WTO arrangements?

Mehta: No. My point is that we already have the infrastructure for higher education. The only care we have to take is that it does not languish for want of funds and for want of support from the society. Indians do wonders when they go abroad. I can tell you from my own experiences. I went to Fermilab which is the biggest high energy physics institute in the world. We have signed an MoU with it. We are the first Indian and only University in the world to do so. In other cases, states have signed MOUs with Fermilab and not the universities. And I was pleasantly surprised. 20-25 students of Delhi University are doing wonders there. And I firmly believe that if take care of our universities we can create that infrastructure here and create necessary climate so that Indians don't have to migrate.

UT: Are you trying to negate the emerging international economic relationships?

Mehta: Woh to hai. Indian cannot be ruled on their terms. We have much greater potential. Especially in higher education.

UT: Now that you have only 5 months