

# Private universities hold promise

## Government universities, aided colleges are not growing

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**I**NDIA is set to become the youngest nation of the world and needs to provide higher education to 200 million students, as also train a 500-million workforce by 2022. The Knowledge Commission in 2007 envisaged the setting up of 1,500 universities countrywide by 2015.

It is no secret that over the last two decades southern and western India has stolen the march on the rest of India in providing educational infrastructure. Also evident are the large gaps in education in Punjab, where, in the border belt, hundreds of thousands of youth are frustrated and becoming drug addicts, primarily due to lack of proper education and employment opportunities.

A study lately has shown nearly 70 per cent drug abuse among youth aged 15 to 30 in the border belt of the state. While we are on the threshold of losing an entire productive generation, petty parochialism, partisan politics, disinformation and absolute lack of vision are stemming the building of higher education capacities.

But the larger question is: Who is going to set up additional capacities? Going over the growth trends of colleges and universities in the country, the Indian Council for Research and International Economic Relations compiled a working paper in 2005, quoted in the National Knowledge Commission recommendations. It clearly indicated that while government universi-

ties are stagnant and aided colleges are tardy in growth, the drivers of capacity are unaided and private universities, which are the rapid growing and emerging centres of learning.

Khalsa College, Amritsar, has stood the test of time as the torch-bearer for higher learning in Punjab since 1892. History is evidence to the fact that this institution provided assistance to three universities of Punjab during their hour of need. During partition Khalsa College provided space to Punjab Agricultural University for three years as this was perhaps the only centre

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of learning in the region with an agricultural wing. The botany and zoology classes of Panjab University were held on these august premises as well after partition. It is no secret that Guru Nanak Dev University owes its existence to space and support provided by Khalsa College. For two years the university was administered from the Agricultural College building of Khalsa College. Since time immemorial the Khalsa College Society has aspired to become a university by itself, and yet missed the opportunity each time.

The Khalsa College Society has earned itself the right to set up a university to facilitate higher education among Punjabis, especially along the border belt. The strides made by the organisation lately are indeed the envy of many an organisation. In six years the Society raised nine new institutions entirely from its resources. It added colleges of education, engineering and technology, pharmacy, nursing, veterinary sciences, business studies, physical education apart from a rural college and a school.

Its stature was further enhanced when

selected to train the Super 50s, needy yet bright students for the administrative entrance examination. Out of about 18,000 colleges in the country, 333 colleges submitted their proposals for CPE Phase II. Only five colleges in Punjab, including Khalsa College, were awarded the UGC Potential For Excellence certification.

Today, it holds a letter of intent to establish a Khalsa University, but the state government dithers due to adverse public opinion engineered successfully by a handful of teachers. Fuel to the fire has been

added by political rivalry both within and outside the Akalis.

How a positive endeavour in the interest of the community can be hijacked by vested interests is indeed a case in point. And to top that, adverse knee-jerk reactions of the community elders without taking recourse to facts are both intriguing and worrisome. This for sure does not augur well for a progressive community that yearns for channelling youth in directions other than addiction and shearing of the very principles of identity.

The need of the hour is not brick and mortar education, but applied and innovative research and education, an industrial interface with milestone placement systems and international engagement to ensure opportunities for youth who could get into respectable jobs there rather than go the illegal route. There is no parallel institution which has the infrastructure, an agricultural set-up for renaissance agri-research, a stable charitable society to support and implement policy, and the vision and the experience to deliver. Are the people of Punjab and the global Punjabi community at large going to sit back and be swayed by uninformed hyperbole or listen to logic and reason for the sake of its languishing youth? One hopes and prays for progressive thought to prevail

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