

COTTON COLLEGE STATE UNIVERSITY: challenges ahead

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We realize the absence of quality higher education in India when we find that not a single Indian university figures in the list of top hundred world class universities. It is a matter of great concern that while some smaller countries of the world with population and size smaller than that of Assam have world class universities but India with more than a billion populations does not have world class universities. Therefore it was a welcome decision when Cotton College was elevated to Cotton College State University (CCSU) in 2011 by an Act of Government of Assam with a vision to make it a world class university.

There was great deal of debate in various public platforms before Government finally decided to establish the university which has created a lot of euphoria among the academic community. Now, before the University has become fully functional, academic circles, students and civil society have come forward to raise a strong voice against the way in which the University is trying to move forward.

The disillusionment and discontentment among different circles is natural considering the progress made by the university since its inception in 2011. A visit to the Cotton College State University website does not inspire anybody. The website does not provide any information on the major academic and administrative areas of the university. The first academic session of the university is expected to commence from current year. If this is so the university should have been ready with its wherewithal by now. For a university aspiring to be a world class university, there should be innovative and carefully selected courses and well designed syllabus consistent with the best world practices. In view of this, the restlessness of the student community of Cotton College is well understood

The Vice-Chancellor is the Chief Academic Officer of a university; he exercises general supervision and control over the affairs of the University and facilitates effective functioning of the various authorities of the university. The VC of the CCSU has therefore a unique role in shaping the destiny of this new university. The VC has to have vast experience in academic administration or in general administration with pronounced academic bent of mind. The first VC took over charge in June 2012 and during the last one year, the university should have been able to create the basic infrastructure including the administrative set up, courses, syllabus, appointing faculties and officers of the university to make it fully functional from the current academic session.

This is the university set up by the Government of Assam and depend on State Government for the flow of fund and in other decision making process. The University was given its shape when

dissidence in ruling party did not surface and the Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi was made the Chancellor of the University with the fond hope to ensure the flow of fund from both the Central and State Governments to materialize the vision plan within short span of time. But unfortunately, the rift between the Chief Minister and Education Minister is now a matter of public knowledge. This political development might have inadvertently impacted the financial, academic and administrative matters of the university leaving the university in the state of doldrums.

But entire blame for lack of direction of the university cannot be pushed to the government. In course of promotion of a university, there are lots of tasks to be done by the founder VC. He must hold frequent discussions and meetings with the EC, Academic Council and other officials to chalk out the road map, take follow up action and review. Whether the present VC has been able to build his working team and lead it in the right direction is also a matter of criticism.

When the Cotton College was established in 1901, the area was thinly populated, calm and quiet. But today Panbazar is already a congested area bustling with activities with consequent traffic jams and noise pollution and has become a business place. The idea of setting up a world class university in such place was ill advised and there is hardly any space in the Cotton College campus for creating world class infrastructure. This can be done only by demolishing the heritage buildings of Cotton College which is not at all desirable. The Cotton College should retain its distinct identity and its heritage status as constituent of the Cotton College State University and the university should move out to the outskirts of Guwahati considering future growth of the university.

In view of the present state of the university, it appears that there is hardly any time to start the current academic session. The brand name and reputation of the university will depend on the quality of faculty, infrastructure and research and development activities. But it does not appear that university has initiated any process to attract the best of the faculties from all over India and to create infrastructure for academic and R&D activities. Any management if committed and honest to establish a centre of academic excellence then they must establish good infrastructure and then pool quality faculty which ultimately would attract the best students. This combination is the only *mantra* to promote an world class university in a very short period of time.

The infrastructure facility should include secured residential facility for students and teachers, 24-hours library and reading room facility, working environment for R&D. Before commencement of classes, university must enter into collaboration with reputed universities to get consultancy services to set up departments at least at par with institute of excellence. There should be master architectural plan and five-year vision plan for the campus development. If the Government is not committed to support the Cotton College State

University to make it a centre of excellence, the scarce resource should not be spent for the new university to make it an average university. Instead, Government should support the Gauhati University to make it a centre of excellence.

In this present context, it is advisable to form an advisory group from Cotton College alumni intelligentsia who have excelled in the field of academic and research at national and international levels. The group would sit together to work out a target-oriented plan so that university can be made functional by the academic session 2014 as per the vision plan and to the satisfaction of all. Eminent academicians like Dr Nirmal Choudhury, Dr Kishori Mohan Pathak, Dr DN Boragohain, Dr AC Bhagawati, Dr Kulendu Pathak , Dr GN Talukdar and many others who have successfully administered educational institutions and still are actively associated in different academic activities, should be involved in deriving ideas to streamline the development process of CCSU.