

Education and Indifference
A Case Study of Ranchi University

Sharbani Chatteraj

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Introduction

Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, is well-known for the quality of its secondary and higher secondary education. This reputation attracts students from all over Bihar and Jharkhand to Ranchi's government schools as well as the private - rather ironically called 'public' - schools. However, this stellar reputation does not extend to the institutions of higher education. There is a strong perception among the citizens of the state that there is a glaring gap between the quality of education at the school level and that at the college/ university level. Increasingly, students are moving to universities outside the state, notably to Delhi University. This is partly because there are very few reputed institutes of professional training in Jharkhand - notice the lack of IITs and IIMs. This is all the more surprising because in this part of the country, science and commerce are considered the only streams worth taking up at the higher secondary level. Another reason is that educational centres like Delhi and Pune certainly provide top-quality education and it is natural that students from the rest of the country want to study in those places. Keeping these factors in mind, we must look at why it is that Jharkhand has not been able to emerge as a centre of higher education.

The paper aims to analyze the status of higher education in the public institutions of Jharkhand, using Ranchi University (RU) as a model. There are two other universities in Jharkhand - the Sidhu-Kanhu University (established in 1992 in Dumka) and the Vinoba Bhave University (established in 1992 in Hazaribagh). The Ranchi University is the oldest and the biggest of all three universities. Not much primary research has been done on this topic, and hence this paper focuses as much on providing the facts as on analysis. Much of the data cited in this paper comes from official documents of the Ranchi University, which seem to display an unacceptable level of inconsistency. It may seem unbelievable, but it is true that financial audits are a rare occurrence in the University. As colleges were closed for the summer vacation at the time of this research, it relies heavily on interviews and newspaper articles.

This paper seeks to understand the functioning of Ranchi University. Analysis cannot precede collection of facts. It must be stated to begin with that there are a variety of misconceptions regarding how a university functions. First, a university is not a monolithic body with a single centralized structure. At the upper levels there is a pyramid of functionaries. However, each college/ institution has its own budget and employees, who, despite being employees of the university in the ultimate instance, are not counted as such for day-to-day purposes. Second, a university budget is literally a mere statement of receipts and expenses. Rarely, if ever, funds are allotted for a specific purpose and expenses for that particular purpose, it can be traced. Funds are allotted to colleges/ institutions, which have to submit a demand for grants *every month* and a report on expenditure of the said grant. If one wishes to find out the cost-effectiveness of any particular project, then, one must trace that project through successive monthly reports, which again are not readily available. Since one is seeking a general overview of the University, focus on one project or programme would defeat the purpose. Third, a university does not have a specific, quantified, or indeed quantifiable mandate. Therefore, setting parameters to judge how well it is functioning may not be as easy and clearly defined as, say, a government department might be.

The Bihar State Universities Act, 1976 lays out the mandate for the University. It lists 22 items among the powers and functions of the University as shown in in Appendix 3. A good way to evaluate the functioning of the University would be to see whether it is performing those functions effectively. In addition, this paper would use the following criteria to evaluate the Ranchi University: the standard of the academic session (quality of syllabus, number of classes, regularity of the session, quality of teaching, options available to the students), financial soundness, administrative efficiency, and finally, a rather vague criterion: *how correct are the impressions of the general public?*

Administration Evolution

Ranchi University is the premier university of the state of Jharkhand. It was established on 12 July 1960 with 10 postgraduate departments, 1 constituent college (Ranchi College, Ranchi), and 20 affiliated colleges. At present Ranchi University includes 23 postgraduate departments, 34 constituent colleges, 15 affiliated colleges, and 12 educational institutions refer to Appendix 1 for the full list). It has jurisdiction over the districts of Ranchi, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Palamau, Saraikella, Garhwa, Simdega, Gumla, Lohardaga and Latehar.

Map 1: Territorial Jurisdiction of the Ranchi University



Source: Souvenir, Twenty Second Convocation, Ranchi University, 2006

The various institutions of the RU are spread over the ten districts that come under its jurisdiction.

Table 1: District-wise Distribution of Colleges of RU

| District | Number of Constituent Colleges | Number of Minority/ Affiliated Colleges | Total |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---|-------|
| Ranchi | 11 | 07 | 18 |
| East Singhbhum | 10 | 02 | 12 |
| West Singhbhum | 04 | - | 04 |
| Gumla | 02 | 04 | 06 |
| Simdega | 01 | - | 01 |
| Palamau | 03 | - | 03 |
| Garhwa | 01 | 01 | 02 |
| Lohardaga | 01 | - | 01 |
| Saraikella | 01 | - | 01 |

Source: Ranchi University Annual Report, 2003-2004

The estimates of the number of teachers in RU vary, primarily because of the controversy over the inflated staff composition of the *navangibhoot* (literally 'newly constituent') colleges. According to the Ranchi University Annual Report (2003-2004), the number of teachers in the University is as follows:

Table 2: Gender-wise Distribution of Teaching Staff of RU (2003-2004)

| | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| Lecturer | 212 | 135 | 347 |
| Reader | 428 | 216 | 644 |
| Professor | 113 | 31 | 144 |
| | 753 | 392 | 1135 |

Source: Ranchi University Annual Report, 2003-2004

It is obvious that at the highest level, men outnumber women by over 3:1; even though at the levels of lecturer and reader, the male-female ratio is less than 2:1. This is only one of the statistical revelations about the Ranchi University that baffle the mind. It could partly be because professors are supposed to teach only at postgraduate levels, and most of the colleges do not have postgraduate departments of their own. Promotion based solely on seniority is a thing of the past, but it also means that promotions are actually few and far between. Also, lack of expansion of academic capabilities means that the number of posts of professors is extremely limited.

Provisions of law

The University is governed by the Bihar State Universities Act, 1976. This Act establishes, from the date of its commencement, "Ranchi University having the headquarters at Ranchi and the jurisdiction over the whole of the South Chhotanagpur Division." The Act also defines the following purposes and powers of the University, some of which are listed below:

- (1) (a) to provide for imparting instruction in such branches of learning as the University may think fit including professional studies and technology; and

(b) to provide for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge

- (2) to conduct examinations and to grant and confer degrees, diploma, certificate and other academic distinctions to and upon persons who –
 - (a) have pursued an approved course of study in the University and passed the examination of the University, under the conditions laid down in the Statutes, the Ordinances or the Regulations
 - (b) are teachers, librarians and laboratory assistants in educational institutions or any other persons under such conditions as may be prescribed in the Statutes, Ordinances and the Regulations and have passed the examination of the University under like conditions; or
 - (c) have carried out independent research under conditions laid down in the Statutes, Ordinances or the Regulations.
- (3) to confer honorary degrees or other distinctions upon persons approved in the manner prescribed in the Statutes;
- (4) to provide such lectures and instruction for, and to grant such diplomas to, persons not being members of the University, as the University may determine;
- (5) to inspect all colleges, University departments and hostels;
- (6) to co-operate with other Universities and authorities in such manner and for such purposes as the University may determine;
- (7) to institute Professorships, Readerships, Lectureships, and any other teaching posts required by the University and to appoint qualified persons to such posts of Professor, Reader, Lecturer, and teacher;
- (8) to recognise teachers as qualified to give instruction in Colleges;
- (9) to institute and award fellowships including travelling fellowships, scholarships, exhibition, medals and prizes in accordance with the Statutes, the Ordinances and the Regulations;
- (10) to establish, maintain and manage Colleges and hostels and to recognise Colleges and hostels not maintained by the University.

There are various other functions listed in the Act, but the general thrust is the same: provision of good quality education. A cursory reading of the Act might give the impression that the University has far-reaching powers with regard to higher education, but appearances are certainly deceiving in this case. To begin with, appointments are finalized by the state government - no college or university can appoint at will. Second, the University cannot function without financial help from the government; and as always, whoever controls the purse makes the decisions.

Officials and Institutions

The Bihar State Universities Act, 1976 lists the following as officers of the University:

- 1) the Chancellor,
- 2) the Vice-Chancellor,
- 3) the Pro-Vice-Chancellor,
- 4) the Financial Adviser,
- 5) the Dean, Students' Welfare,
- 6) Proctor,
- 7) Registrar,
- 8) Inspector of Colleges,
- 9) Financial Officer, and
- 10) Such other person or persons as may be declared officers of the University by the Statutes.

The Secretariat of the RU is headed by the Governor of Jharkhand and ex-officio Chancellor of the University. The executive duties are mainly overseen by the Vice-Chancellor and he is assisted by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Financial Adviser and the Registrar.

At the risk of the next few paragraphs sounding too official and bookish, one would sketch out the powers and functions of the governing officials and bodies of the University, as given in the Bihar State Universities Act, 1976. Experience demonstrates that at times even the officials themselves do not know what their rights and duties are!

The Chancellor has the powers to inspect the University or any part of it, any act of the University, or the examinations conducted as also the teaching process. He/ she can annul any proceeding or order of the University which is deemed not in conformity with law. He/ she has the power to transfer officials and teachers. The Vice-Chancellor (VC) is appointed by the Chancellor and must be, in the latter's opinion, a reputed scholar known for his/ her academic interest. The VC is the principal executive and academic officer of the University, the Chairman of the Syndicate and of the Academic Council. He/ she exercises general control over the educational arrangement of the University.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor is responsible for admission and conduct of the examination and the publication of the results upto Bachelor course; and exercises such powers as are conferred upon him/ her by the Vice-Chancellor. The Financial Adviser is required to give advice on all matters having financial implication. The Registrar is the secretary to the Senate, the Syndicate and the Academic council; the custodian of records and the commons seal; and the conductor of the official correspondence of the University.

The Senate is the supreme governing body of the University. It has the power to make, amend or repeal statutes; to pass resolutions; to exercise control in Colleges and Tolls; to institute and confer degrees, titles, diplomas and other academic distinctions. The Syndicate is the executive Council of the University. It holds, controls and manages the property and funds of the University; regulates the use of the common seal of the University. It makes, and has the power to amend or repeal, ordinances. It can accept transfer of any property given to and for the benefit of the University or a particular College.

The Academic Council is the chief academic body of the University. It is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards of the University. It determines and regulates all academic matters concerning the University. It has powers of general control over the Examination Board.

The main office of the Ranchi University is located near Firayalal Chowk, which is the centre of the town. A visit to the office may, at first, give the impression that one has stepped into a past age. It is nearly impossible for someone who does not know their way around the building to find any office within a reasonable period of time. Then, of course, there are the sacrosanct lunch breaks that one runs up against in practically every office in the country. The University office, the hub of all bureaucratic activities concerning this mammoth University, paradoxically, seems to exude an air of lethargy. The hustle-bustle that one imagines when one thinks of an office is totally missing. Of course, it may be because summer vacations are going on.

Vacancies in a land of High Unemployment

There are over 700 vacancies among the teaching staff and nearly 800 among the non-teaching staff ¹. The sheer lack of concern about what is obviously a situation needing urgent correction is frightening to say the least. The quality of education does not seem to be too high on the agenda of either the Government or the University itself. There simply are not enough teachers! In a mode of employment where employees cannot be hired and fired at will, it is remarkable how **both the absence of authority to fire in case of incompetence as well as the lack of compulsion to hire sufficient number of appropriately qualified persons have only served to cause deterioration of the system.**

To consider this situation as terrible seems a mere understatement. **The answer one gets from most quarters at the University is that there are so many vacancies because there have been no appointments for a long time!** Answers to why there have not been any appointments 'for a long time' are not so forthcoming. Typically, the government is blamed. Before the creation of the state of Jharkhand, teachers were appointed by first the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) and later by the Bihar Constituent College Service Commission. In the new state of Jharkhand, the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) has the responsibility to appoint teachers and fill the existing vacancies. **In the last five and a half years, JPSC has failed to make a single appointment!** One fails to understand how any teaching goes on in colleges where the number of vacancies is equal to or at times even more than the number of teachers present! Again, it is the existing pool of teachers which has to bear this additional burden, since classes cannot be stopped on account of the State Government being inefficient.

The other side of this story is perhaps even more astonishing. In a number of colleges and institutions, the number of staff actually working far exceeds the sanctioned strength for that particular college/ institution; which means that effectively there are scores of people working for the Ranchi University who do not have confirmed employment. **Legally, there posts simply do not exist!** This problem is typical of the *navangibhoot* (newly given the status of constituent colleges) colleges; which insist

¹ Estimated Budget Document, 2005-06, Ranchi University

that all those listed as employees on the day the particular college was made constituent be accepted as bona fide employees. However, the University argues that it cannot accept a number greater than the number of sanctioned posts for the college concerned. In the official documents of 2005-2006, however, one finds that the number of sanctioned posts has been increased as compared to 2003-2004.

The persons who are working on what are called non-sanctioned posts are liable to have their employment terminated anytime. They do not receive regular salaries, and at times, even no salaries at all! Since appointments have not been made to the extent that vacancies plague the RU, these non-sanctioned posts serve the purpose of keeping the work going on. However, they are entitled to no benefits of employment.

Inquiries reveal that the information given in the Ranchi University Annual Report 2003-2004 has not been compiled by any single agency. There has been no centralized collection or collation of information, with the result that at times the figures regarding the same variable in the same college are different in different pages of the same Annual Report. To cite an instance, the total number of students in various courses in Karam Chand Bhagat College, Bero, is given as 664 on page 33, and 483 on page 175!

There are too many comparable instances of what, for the lack of a more appropriate term, can be thought of as misinformation. Clearly the information given by colleges and institutions has not been double-checked before compilation and publishing of the same. One could go on and on about what can at best be called negligence and at worst incompetence leading to the misleading of public. The Report is full of such contradictions. One could be charitable and argue that all these are merely calculation faults. But so many? And in a document officially published by the University?

At present, there are 2, 428 sanctioned teaching posts in the entire Ranchi University, out of which only 1, 665 have been filled: **there is only 68.5 % employment** (Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU). 763 posts, even by the University's own admission, remain vacant. Unofficial estimates put the figure much higher, closer to 900. As for the non-teaching posts, out of a possible total of 3, 412; there are only 2, 598 employees: **a deficit of 814 members of staff (23.85%) among the non-teaching section of employees².**

Finances: is the story any different?

Finding a budget of the Ranchi University seemed for a long time more difficult than finding a needle in the haystack. The first excuse was that the documents simply do not exist! However, after approaching nearly fifty officials and teachers of the University, one finally discovered that the documents in fact were not lost to the civilization.

Table 3: Expenditure and Income of Ranchi University for 2005-06

| Heading | Units (in Rs) |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| General Fund | 22,38,638 |
| Total Salary to Teachers | 6,89,24,630 |

² Estimated Budget Document, 2005-06, Ranchi University

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Total Salary to Non-Teaching Staff | 1,50,15,318 |
| University Contribution to Provident Fund | 54,56,092 |
| Total Expenditure (2005-06) | 8,93,96,040 |
| Income (2005-06) | 22,38,638 |
| Total Grants | 8,03,12,419 |
| Deficit | 68,44,983 |

Source: Estimated Budget Documents 2005-06

Even now, **RU has outstanding dues to its teaching and non-teaching staff to the tune of nearly Rs 190 crore³**. On the other hand, at a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee of the Jharkhand Assembly (dated 15 June 2006), it was pointed out by the Accountant General (Audit) that heads of various departments, lecturers and non-teaching employees of RU have taken Rs 6.43 crore as 'advance' and this amount has not been adjusted from their salaries. Excesses, it seems, have been committed on both sides with impunity.

In June itself, the RU administration, in response to the matter raised in the State Assembly, instructed the heads of the postgraduate departments and the principals of the 34 constituent colleges to submit the expenditure receipts of the advance given to them, in the main for conducting examinations⁴. The unaccounted expenses date back to so long that the heads of the departments and principals, in whose names the money was issued, have either retired or do not hold those posts any longer. This is another one in the seemingly never-ending list of examples that show how ineffectually the Ranchi University administration has been functioning. It was not very long ago that corruption used to rule the University. One is not suggesting that corruption has been rooted out magically, but the very fact that such indiscretions are being brought to the notice of the public and some action is being taken bodes well for the future. True, the system of checks and balances has not worked for decades; but a beginning has indeed been made in the past couple of years.

While the funds due to the University receive a great deal of attention from the media, sadly, the money due to the employees of the University goes largely unnoticed. Those who have been working in the University for the past 20-30 years are resigned to the continued denial of what is rightfully theirs. The following table shows how the outstanding dues have accumulated over the years, going back as far as 1987.

Table 4: Estimated Outstanding Dues to Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

(Rs in crore)

| <i>Head of Arrear Payment</i> | <i>Estimated budget for 2005-2006</i> |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Salary Arrear to Non-teaching staff from 01/08/93 to 31/03/96 | 5.76 |
| Dearness Allowance | 39.19 |

³ Estimated Budget Document, 2005-06, Ranchi University

⁴ Hindustan Times. 2006. 21 June

| | |
|---|-------|
| Interim Relief | 2.90 |
| Bonus (1987-88 to 1999-2000) | 2.70 |
| DDA and others (unpaid upto July 1989) | 68.00 |
| Arrear of UGC pay scales from 15/11/2000 to 28/02/2002 | 19.75 |
| Promotion of teachers by BSUSC | 4.67 |
| Electricity Dues | 2.00 |
| Arrear of Housing Board for Staff Quarter | 6.00 |
| Arrear of Municipal Tax | 0.20 |
| Arrear of Revised Scales for Non-teaching Staff | 1.70 |
| Difference of Pay Arrear for Non-teaching Staff for time bound promotion | 8.94 |
| Shortage of grant sanctioned and released by the State Government (March to October 2000) | 9.81 |

Source: Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU

Apart from the dues listed above, the pensioners have to be given their dues as well, which comes to a total of Rs 18.46 crore (as mentioned in the Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU). How has the state of affairs been reduced to this dismal condition?

The total receipts of the RU office and allied offices, for the year 2005-2006, came to a total of Rs 70, 142, 984; while the total expenditure was Rs 66, 141, 560 (Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU). Budgets for the various colleges and institutions are also laid out separately. Here one would briefly describe the items that are included in a college budget, in order to gain an insight into the actual receipts and expenses, using Ranchi College as a model, for the year 2005-2006, and the information provided in the Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU.

Ranchi College has a total of 6692 students. Receipts from the students include tuition fees (Rs 14 per pupil per month), laboratory fees, library fees, development fees, and an unexpectedly large contribution is made by fines (Rs 20, 000). The total comes to Rs 3, 446, 839. The College also receives grants from the Government for salaries and other purposes: a total of Rs 44, 383, 847. The sum of these two gives the total amount of receipts of Ranchi College: Rs 47, 830, 686. **Only 7.2% of the total receipts, which translates into 6.7% of the total expenditure, of Ranchi College is paid by the students.** Expenditure includes salaries paid to the teaching and non-teaching staff (Rs 44,383, 847), expenses incurred on the maintenance of the

library, laboratories, college vehicles, fetes, organization of sports and cultural events, repair expenses, legal expenses, and payment of taxes. The total expenditure is Rs 50, 790, 317, i.e. a deficit of Rs 2, 959, 711. Most colleges operate on a deficit budget.



Ranchi College, Ranchi

The budget is full of some interesting and rather inexplicable details.

Take the case of the head 'repair of typewriters' in the General Fund: in the year 2001-2002, the cost of repairing typewriters is listed as Rs 22, 085; in 2002-2003, Rs 32, 572; and in 2003-2004, Rs 19, 881.50. **The total expenditure, then, on getting typewriters repaired during the period 2001-2004 is an astonishing Rs 74, 538.50! By contrast, the expenditure on purchase of books in 2002-2003 was a mere Rs 2, 468, and in 2003-2004 it was Rs 9, 612** (Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU)! Exactly how many typewriters does RU have? And how much repair do they require? Surely this is a signal for immediate computerization of the entire system!

Teachers: perpetrators or victims?

One of the impressions that one seeks to analyze, and then evaluate the functioning of the Ranchi University on that basis, is that 'the teachers of RU are a lazy lot who care only about getting more and more money without doing any work'. This perception is extremely widespread and perhaps nobody except the teachers themselves will disagree. How true is this perception?

Are the teachers not sufficiently qualified? Nowadays a person wishing to join the teaching profession must pass the UGC-NET (National Entrance Test) examination. Getting requisite marks in this examination does not guarantee the candidate a job; it merely makes him/ her eligible to apply for the post of lecturer should a vacancy be advertised anywhere in the country. Before this system was put in place, toppers of the Master's degree examinations in each subject were offered the option of joining as lecturers, subject to review and the availability of a sanctioned post in the subject concerned. These days no reader can be promoted to the rank of professor unless the candidate has done his doctorate, as well as 'produced a Ph D', i.e. had been a thesis

supervisor to at least one student who has finished his/ her doctorate. Are all these requirements insufficient?

Do the teachers not do any work? A professor is required to take 18 classes per week (3 classes per day), and readers and lecturers, who teach at the undergraduate level, are required to take 21 classes per week. The University calendar lists 180 days out of the 365 in a year as working days. Teachers in RU, unlike many other universities, do not have Saturdays off. In Delhi University, schedules are organized in such a way that teachers effectively have 4/ 5 -day working weeks. In RU, every teacher has a 6-day working week. On Sundays, often examinations like the UGC-NET, Railway Board examinations, JPSC examinations, and other examinations are held; which means that on their one off day, many teachers have to do invigilation duty in these examinations. The option of refusal is all but non-existent.

It must be understood that a teacher does not *only* take classes. In RU, he/ she has to check forms during admission, perform invigilation duty in university-prescribed and other examinations, evaluate examination papers, and at times even manage the departmental libraries; even though these would seem to be the area of activity of the non-teaching staff.

With the introduction of the new pay scale, the UGC has also introduced a new set of rules. These have to be followed in every university across the country, and are listed below:

- 180 days of academic work (it must be understood that this includes *both* classes and examinations);
- 12 weeks' work for admissions;
- 8 weeks' holiday along with 2 weeks of public holidays
- 8 days' paid leave for teachers (in RU, teachers are still availing 16 days' of leave);
- 40 hours of teaching per week;
- Five hours' compulsory stay for teachers at their respective colleges (in RU teachers have often been made to stay till 5 PM!)
- Compulsory self-assessment form for teachers;
- Research is compulsory; and
- 10 days' special leave for invigilating in examinations outside one's town.

(Source: *Prabhat Khabar*, 01 June 2006)

Too many vacations? It is argued that university teachers have too many holidays. On the face of it, the argument seems persuasive. After all, when there are no students - and students have at least three months' vacation every year - what do teachers do? Do they enjoy extended vacations just like the students do? No. Ranchi University holds examinations throughout the summer months when there are no classes. Apart from that, evaluation work also goes on throughout the summer.

Do teachers get money disproportionate to their work? Sadly, teachers in RU do not even get their due. It is common knowledge that salaries are often behind schedule by as many as 3 months! If the State Government budget is delayed for any reason, the salary grant for university teachers is not released. Which other profession does not guarantee its employees regular salaries? In 1996, the University Grants Commission had offered a new scale of salaries for teachers. At that time, the Government of Bihar

did not implement this improved scale. Teachers of RU continued to get lesser salary than their counterparts all over India. In 2002 the Government of Jharkhand introduced this scale - 6 years after almost all other universities. The arrears of those 6 years, the money that teachers rightfully deserve but was not given to them due to, have still not been paid.

Do teachers have facilities disproportionate to their work? Teachers get a medical allowance of a mere Rs 50 per month (Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU). Earlier the medical allowance used to be 2% of the basic pay, but now the flat rate of Rs 50 per month has been fixed. There are not enough quarters to allot to all teachers. Professors of Ranchi University are living in quarters meant for non-teaching staff (Rana, L N. Interview by author). Teachers have no paid holidays. They get no travel concessions. So, it seems that their facilities are indeed disproportionate to their work, but not in the way generally people think.

Ranchi University has a number of teachers' unions. The Federation of University Service Teachers' Association of Jharkhand (FUSTAJ) includes the teachers of the original constituent colleges and the postgraduate departments of RU. The second, the Federation of University Teachers' Association of Jharkhand (FUTAJ) caters to those constituent colleges which were previously affiliated colleges and given the status of constituent colleges on the grounds that these were the premier colleges in their respective districts. *Navangibhoot* colleges have their own association. *Navangibhoot* (literally 'newly constituent') is a term applied to those colleges which were given the status of constituent colleges almost overnight, due to what everybody concerned accepts as political pressure. They demand that all those listed on the payroll of the college(s) concerned be given employment by the University. RU, on the other hand, claims that only those who are working on sanctioned posts will be accepted. The matter has gone to the Supreme Court and is still sub-judice. Then there is the Federation of Minority Colleges Teachers' Association of Jharkhand (FMCTAJ). It has repeatedly accused the State Government and the University of discriminatory behaviour towards the minority colleges of the state. The Federation claims that the authorities intentionally withhold salaries and unnecessarily deny sanction for opening new departments, introducing new courses, and even appointing teachers⁵.

According to Joint Secretary, FUSTAJ, Dr Biswaroop Mukherjee, teacher's unions cannot present a united front to the administration or the government, because they have varied and sometimes conflicting interests; and collaboration is all but non-existent. Officials admit freely that the unions have not been very effective; primarily, it is suggested, due to the lack of involvement and active participation of the teachers themselves. Apathy and ineffectiveness work in a vicious circle here: teachers do not take active part in the unions because they seem to be toothless, and the unions remain powerless because they do not have the total support of the teachers. **Elections to the unions have not been held in nearly 10 years**, even though they are supposed to be held biannually (Mukherjee, B. 2006. Interview by author). The next election is scheduled to be held on 25 July 2006 but one can find none of the bustle preceding an election.

⁵ Hindustan Times. 2006. 23 June

On the other hand, teachers' unions do perform certain highly useful functions and these must be acknowledged. In times of need - for instance, in cases of medical emergencies - the union provides all the help that it can, both financial and otherwise. A major achievement of the unions has been the extension of the retirement age from 60 years to 62 (Mukherjee, B. Interview by author).

Students: subjects or objects?

More than 150, 000 students are enrolled in Ranchi University every year. In the year 2005-2006, the number stood at 153, 149 (Estimated Budget Document, 2005-2006, RU). While it is true that those students of Jharkhand who can go to institutions outside the state prefer to do so, it is equally true that RU remains the only hope for many students, particularly those who hail from the rural areas of Jharkhand. Students coming from nearby villages are a regular feature of the University. Colleges like Ranchi College, St. Xavier's College, and Ranchi Women's College are still much sought-after and often students who do not get admission in these also have to go to institutions outside the state. Another characteristic that needs to be pointed out is that RU offers intermediate courses as well. A teacher often takes classes for intermediate (which is the equivalent of senior secondary examination at school level) students, undergraduates as well as graduates. A break-up of the number of students in the year 2005-2006 would give us a fair idea of how many students are enrolled at which level.⁶

- At the intermediate level, there are a total of 69, 927 students.
- At the undergraduate level, there are 78, 572 students.
- At the graduate level, there are a total of 4, 650 students.

It is interesting to note that there are *more* students at the undergraduate level than at the intermediate level. The numbers are certainly not to be dismissed easily. So far there have been no cases of seats remaining vacant. If anything, there are too many candidates, especially from the poorer sections of the society. The importance of a university that is accessible, both in terms of its location and in terms of the cost - the monthly fee is a pittance (Rs 14) - must not be underestimated. It may not be good enough for those who want top-quality education, but it is indispensable for those who cannot pay the amount required to study in another state.

In accordance with governmental policy, students belonging to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are exempt from paying the tuition fees. These students are also given free coaching for competitive examinations like the JPSC, and engineering and medical entrance tests.

The Ranchi University Scheduled Castes Pre-Examination Training Centre was set up in July 1994, under the directorship of Dr K K Nag. It is located in the postgraduate Department of Botany, RU. It receives an annual grant of about Rs 12 lac, which includes funds for salaries and remunerations for teaching and non-teaching staff (one typist, one librarian, one *chowkidar*, one peon and three block servants), scholarships to students and contingency funds. There are 20 seats for engineering entrance examinations, an equal number for medical entrances, and 40 for JPSC examinations. A student does not have to be enrolled in RU to avail of this coaching facility. Each

⁶ Estimated Budget Document, 2005-06, Ranchi University

student is granted a scholarship of Rs 250 per month. The entire expenses of this institute are borne by the Welfare Department, Government of Jharkhand. Till date about 130 students of this training centre have passed professional examinations. Rough calculations give the cost of one successful candidate approximately Rs 11, 000: a remarkable feat, considering that most of these students come from poor families and average educational backgrounds. However, no hostel facility is provided to the students, making it difficult for those who are not living in college hostels to avail of this facility. Teachers of RU also take classes at the Jharkhand Tribal Welfare Research Institute, established in 1953.

However, there is one major fact that stands out as a black mark. **There is no students' union in the University.** There are provisions for a union, but these are not implemented properly. The last students' union election in RU was held in 1982, 24 years ago! In January 2006, the RU Syndicate had approved an amendment to the existing statute on the indirect method of election for students' union polls. On 28 June, the HRD department gave its approval to the amendment (*Hindustan Times*, 28 June 2006)!

Elections in RU would now be organized on the lines of those in Delhi University. There is always a danger of politicization of the student body and a suppression of genuine student demands in order to serve political gains. After all, student unions have always been political hotpots. The famed JP movement of the mid-1970s had its base among the student unions in various states. Even today, it is common knowledge that student unions in Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi) offer a fertile ground for budding politicians. However, there are certain obvious advantages of having a system that provides voice to the students, that is democratic and thrives on a culture of debate and respect for opposition. One hopes that the students' union will be formed in RU soon and the student body of the University will not let its agenda be hijacked by political opportunists.

A heartening development is that the lack of a union has not deterred the students from taking action in support of their demands. For instance, on 22 June 2006, over a hundred students belonging to three engineering colleges affiliated to RU, viz. the RVS College of Engineering and Technology (Jamshedpur), Alice Institute of Technology (Nawagarh) and Cambridge Institute of Technology (Tatisilwai), led an agitation at the main gate of the RU campus, protesting against the delay in conducting their examinations (*Hindustan Times*, 23 June 2006). The Department of Science and Technology had ordered the delay in response to the admission of students in these colleges in excess of the allotted capacity. The matter has gone to the Jharkhand High Court. It does seem unfair to deny the students their due because, once again, the administration has not acted the way it is supposed to.

Achievements

The institutional decay - in the entire Bihar-Jharkhand region, and not only in education but in almost all areas of social participation - has been slow but deep-set. According to Harivansh, editor of a local Hindi daily, *Prabhat Khabar*, "the state of affairs is such that the society would not be harmed in any way if the universities in Jharkhand were to be closed down." An exaggerated statement, perhaps, but it says more about the

disillusionment of the common people with the current system of education than any bunch of facts and figures. Reform, then, must be the order of the day.

It must be said that the Ranchi University has made a start. The Human Resource Development (HRD) Department has effectively streamlined the allocation of resources. Previously, funds for salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff were demanded and given *en masse*, meaning that there was no accountability as to who deserved how much and who got what. Now, the Department has individual records of all those employed by the various colleges/ institutions/ departments of the University and funds are released based on these records. Leakage of money and its diversion to pockets where it did not belong is a thing of the past.

Teacher absenteeism has been for too long part of the contemporary legend about the University, and not without justification. In this area too, steps have been taken which have been remarkably effective. Surprise inspections are conducted by the Inspectors of Colleges ever now and then. If a teacher is not taking classes regularly, the students have the option of complaining to the Principal or other competent authorities; in which case action is taken against the teacher.

In the year 2006, 108 students of the Ranchi University have passed the NET examination held in December 2005. These include 57 ST students, 11 SC students, 17 OBC candidates and 23 belonging to the general category (*Hindustan Times*, 14 June 2006).

Ranchi University also gives attention to 'extra-curricular activities', viz. sports, social service (NSS), NCC, and cultural activities. Annual games are held by most of the colleges and also at the university level. In the 2005-2006 session, RU organized 15 inter-college tournaments and participated in 20 inter-university competitions. In the financial year 2003-2004, RU had incurred an expenditure of Rs 7, 27, 045 on sports (RU Annual Report, 2003-2004).

NSS cadets have played a praiseworthy role, especially in providing help after natural calamities and collecting funds for the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. Two NSS members from RU participated in the Republic Day Parade 2006 in New Delhi (Souvenir, 2006, Twenty second Convocation, RU).

Students in 19 colleges of RU can choose to join the NCC. At present there are 3610 cadets enrolled under the supervision of 21 officers, 18 of which are of commissioned rank (Souvenir, 2006, Twenty second Convocation, RU).

Youth festivals, which allow a stage for expression of co-curricular talents of the students, are held in every college of RU. This culminates in the festival organized by the University itself. At the 11th All India Youth Festival held in Patna (13-17 February 2006), Ranchi University got the first position in the category of folk group dance.

In the year 2006, the University Grants Commission gave St. Xavier's College and Jamshedpur Women's College the status of 'Colleges with Potential for Excellence' (*Hindustan Times*, 26 May 2006). In the first half of the year 2006, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) visited various PG departments and

constituent colleges of Ranchi University for inspection. Some of the grades given by the NAAC are listed as follows.

Table 5: Grades given to colleges/ institutions in RU By the NAAC

| Name of the College | Grade |
|---|-----------------|
| Marwari College, Ranchi | B ⁺⁺ |
| Jamshedpur Women's College, Jamshedpur | B ⁺⁺ |
| Ranchi College, Ranchi | B ⁺⁺ |
| Graduate School College for Women, Jamshedpur | B ⁺⁺ |
| St. Xavier's College, Ranchi | B ⁺⁺ |
| Ranchi Women's College, Ranchi | B ⁺ |
| Loyola College of Education, Jamshedpur | B ⁺ |
| Nirmala College, Ranchi | B ⁺ |
| Karim City College, Jamshedpur | B ⁺ |
| Ursuline Women's Teachers Training College, Lohardaga | B ⁺ |
| Kartik Oraon College, Gumla | B |
| Doranda College, Ranchi | C ⁺ |
| Mahila College, Chaibasa | C ⁺ |
| YSN Mahila College, Daltonganj | C ⁺ |
| Worker's College, Jamshedpur | C |

Source: Souvenir, 2006, Twenty second Convocation, Ranchi University

The Academic Staff College of RU has been placed in the sixth position in an all-India ranking (Souvenir, 2006, Twenty second Convocation, RU). During the last academic session, the Academic Staff College conducted four orientation programmes and 10 refresher courses (these include Information Technology, Environmental Science, Women's Studies and Philosophy of Education). The College also has a fully computerized multi-media laboratory, called *Ramanujan*. These orientation sessions and refresher courses are no doubt helpful, but it is obvious that not much has been done to bring the teachers up to date with regard to the UGC syllabus which has been implemented in RU from the year 2003.

The Centre for Women Studies (CWS) is all set to be launched in August 2006. The concept of CWS is the brainchild of the UGC, which envisages the establishment of full-fledged departments of women studies in various universities across the country. Under the Tenth Plan of the UGC, Rs 17 lac was earmarked for the CWS. The launch was delayed due to allegations of mishandling of funds, which had been at the disposal of Ranchi Women's College (*Hindustan Times*, 24 June 2006). If the funding by UGC continues in the Eleventh Plan as well, the CWS can be reasonable expected to develop into a full department.

The Central Library of RU is modest but satisfactory. It has a collection of approximately 89, 000 text books, 9, 400 reference books and 327 Ph D theses (Souvenir, Twenty Second Convocation, RU, 2006). A student of the University can issue two books at a time. There is a spacious reading room on the first floor. Ranchi University has acquired lease line from Information and Library Network, or INFLIBNET (Ahmedabad) with 25 nodes and a bandwidth of 3 mbps. At the INFLIBNET Awareness Programme organized at St. Xavier's College on 24 June, A A Khan, vice-chancellor of the Ranchi University, termed the INFLIBNET as "information superhighway" (*Hindustan Times*, 25 June 2006). This initiative is funded completely by UGC, through which students and scholars can have access to nearly 2, 000 e-journals.



Central Library, Ranchi University

However, departmental libraries in the various postgraduate departments do not present a similarly rosy picture. The level of functioning of these libraries is altogether too dependent on the interest shown by the professors or the non-teaching staff concerned. There must be a single set of rules regarding access to, issue and return of books throughout the year that are applicable to all libraries in RU; and more importantly, there must be a mechanism to control inefficiency which more often than not is a veil for bribery and corruption. Perhaps a certain official in each department/ college/ institution could be designated to accept complaints about the functioning of libraries and their staff, and he/ she must be accountable to the students.

Vocational Courses: Preparing for the Future?

Increasingly it is becoming clear that specialization(s) of some kind is essential for employment and long-term professional success. Traditional degrees are becoming less and less relevant in the marketplace, because industrial modernization and specialization are inseparable. More and more sectors are being opened up in the

economy, creating more and varied avenues for employment. Slowly but surely, students and their guardians are realizing that there are occupations other than medicine, engineering, management and the mother of them all, the public services. Ranchi University is also catching up to the times, it seems.

According to a report published in *Prabhat Khabar* (12 June 2006), **out of the 60, 000 graduates that emerge from the three universities of Jharkhand; generally only 4, 000 get jobs.** Since the year 2000, out of approximately 3 lac graduates from Jharkhand, only 14, 300 have got employment - **4.7% of the total number.** The remaining 95.3% only add to the ever-increasing pool of the educated unemployed in the country. This is the situation when the expenditure on these universities is about Rs 2, 45, 00, 90, 000⁷! One does not need an exact estimate to figure out that the government has been spending way too much to provide an education that does not translate into employment. To counter such an unacceptable situation, RU has started a number of vocational courses in various colleges.

The vocationalization of education at the undergraduate level has been envisaged by the National Policy of Education, 1986, and the Programme of Action, 1992 prepared by the then central HRD Ministry⁸. These courses, their structure, syllabi and regulations governing those courses as have been introduced have been approved by the RU Academic Council on 15 October 2005 and by the Syndicate on 18 October 2005. A vocational course is supposed to cover a period of three years and shall be counted as an honours degree (honours-vocational).

In June 2006, RU administration agreed to amend the rules and regulations governing the vocational courses, as requested by the Human Resource Development Department. Now the heads of the departments concerned would have more authority to decide the rules for their respective courses. This step was taken in response to the claim made by Vijay Bahadur Singh, Director, Higher Education, Government of Jharkhand, that many vocational courses had been introduced without having the necessary rules and infrastructure in place⁹.

The Centre for Vocational Studies has also invited applications in order to set up a panel which would look into contractual appointments for faculty members for vocational and self-financing courses, including Information Technology, Biotechnology, Fashion Designing, Advertising, and Travel and Tourism Management.

It remains to be seen whether these courses actually manage to make a difference to the level of unemployment in the state, or this attempt, like many other well-intentioned ones, falls short due to lack of long-term commitment. If implemented properly, **these vocational courses could go a long way in making education meaningful in a state that has the dubious distinction of having 9 out of its 22 districts among the 18 poorest districts of the country!** However, it is also necessary to take care that the courses, by their very nature, do not become impractical. It must be seen to that there are at least some jobs in the local or regional

⁷ Prabhat Khabar. 2006. 12 June

⁸ Information Brochure. 2000. Ranchi University

⁹ Hindustan Times. 2006. 16 June

economy that can absorb those who have such specialized degrees. Adequate infrastructure must be put in place so that these courses are not reduced to blackboard teaching classes. Economy and education can have an extremely symbiotic and profitable relationship, if nurtured carefully.

Glaring Flaws and Obvious Solutions

Even with the trend towards improvement in the recent years, it is too early to decide with any certainty whether the trend would continue. Also, there are some problems with the system as it exists which have the potential to undo all the good that has been done so far. These problems need to be addressed as urgently as possible by the authorities.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the vacancies need to be filled with all promptness. The Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSE) has been entrusted with the responsibility of filling these vacancies but so far no posts have been advertised for. Those who have been working at non-sanctioned posts also need to be rehabilitated. A simple way of solving both problems would be to place the latter in the vacancies that already exist. It would not be a neat match, but this is one option that deserves to be looked into.

A related issue is that of wrongful appointments. In fact, the Vigilance Department has discovered that 61 posts, including that of 3 vice-chancellors, were made over the years without following the proper procedure. The Department, under investigation number BS - 7/ 98, is looking for these persons¹⁰. While filling the existing vacancies, RU authorities as well as the Government of Jharkhand must make sure that appointments are made fairly and after following the due process.

Next, teachers across courses do not seem sufficiently familiar with their respective courses, with the result that both classroom teaching and examination standards have suffered. Both teachers and students are mostly content to turn a blind eye to the new portions of the syllabi, with the stress being on ensuring every student passes the examination rather than on improving the quality of education as must have been the motivation behind introducing the UGC syllabus to begin with. Once again, we have a case of good intentions and the setbacks they unintentionally cause. Too many decisions have been taken and even implemented without proper thought being given to the question whether the necessary infrastructure - both physical as well as human capital - is in place or not. Special seminars and short-term courses can be introduced to familiarize the teachers with the new syllabus. Well-known professors who have already been teaching the UGC syllabus could be asked to give lectures. Another important point in this regard is that reading material pertaining to the new syllabus must be made available in Hindi, as that is the most popular medium of instruction of almost all subjects in RU.

Third, RU should start seriously considering computerization of its entire administrative structure. Not only would it go a long way in preventing financial mismanagement (intentional or otherwise), it would also make the set-up more student-friendly. It is a big task, no doubt; even premier universities like DU and JNU have not been able to

¹⁰ Prabhat Khabar. 2006. 20 June

fully computerize their systems as yet. However, that is no logical reason for RU to not consider the idea. INFLIBNET is one small step, but a beginning.

Fourth, Ranchi University must take immediate steps to put its financial house in order. Some steps have already been taken in this regard, the lead being taken by the HRD Department. Perhaps the existing rules could be amended to make a financial audit mandatory every six months or annually. Since the problem is deep-set, going back more than two decades, inspection of records from that time onwards must be done.

Fifth, corruption is the bane of any bureaucratic system. Again, RU has taken a few steps in this regard as well. In the centralized evaluation (i.e. evaluation of examination papers at some designated centre rather than allowing the teachers to take the papers home) held in June-July 2006, surveillance cameras were put up at the centres to ensure fair evaluation. The administrators need to be put under some sort of surveillance too! With the HRD Department releasing funds only as per their records of individual employees, 'disappearance' of money, which was earlier shown to be paid to persons who had retired or had never even worked for RU, has also been reduced significantly. The results of the funds allocated for improvement of infrastructure can be seen for themselves.

The demands and expectations of students must also be met. After all, it is them that the University is supposed to cater to. The convocation ceremony was held this year after many inordinate delays. Earlier this year, the Vice-Chancellor had held a meeting with the toppers of the postgraduate departments in order to discuss the problems faced by students. The students' union is already in the process of being revived. In each college, there could be provisions for a students' representative organization that would have an official status as spokesperson for the entire student body. There should be a complaint register in every institution so that students can present their grievances anonymously, should they choose to, in order to prevent possible harassment.

Also, while a lot of infrastructural improvement has been made, there are a great number of colleges that still need urgent renovation. The difference is obvious in colleges like the Ranchi College, the Central Library, and the postgraduate departments of RU (see picture below). One might forgive a student who left the University two years ago for not recognizing the buildings now.



Postgraduate Department, Arts Block,
Ranchi University

But it is equally obvious that there are too many buildings that need immediate attention (see picture below).



Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav College, Ranchi

Finally, the demands of the non-teaching staff must also be dealt with. These employees have a union of their own, the *Ranchi University Karmchari Sangh*, which was set up in 1963. At present most of their demands, could have been met at the university level, have been fulfilled, but there are certain demands on which only the government can take action. In yet another case of mind-boggling contradiction, whereas the retirement age for teachers has been increased from 60 years to 62; that of the non-teaching staff has been reduced from 62 to 60! The logic eludes comprehension. Vacancies among this staff have been mentioned before. A related issue is that the vacant posts are not even filled by promotion. Salary and arrear woes continue to plague both the teaching and non-teaching staff (see table 3 above).

Conclusion

To conclude, one would go back to the criteria listed at the beginning in this paper and try to evaluate the functioning of the Ranchi University on that basis. To repeat, these criteria were: the standard of the academic session (quality of syllabus, number of classes, regularity of the session, quality of teaching, options available to the students), financial soundness, administrative efficiency, and finally: *how correct are the impressions of the general public?*

The standard of the academic session has certainly improved since the creation of the state of Jharkhand. The UGC-approved syllabus - the same syllabus as is being followed in DU - has been introduced from the year 2002. The requisite number of classes is also being held regularly. Teacher absenteeism has been curbed by a significant extent, due to inspections and getting feedback from students; though it has not been eradicated as yet. The academic session is being regularized. Earlier, the session was more than a year late, which means that a three-year undergraduate course took four years to complete, and so on. However, at present, all examinations are completed by July and results declared in the next two weeks at the most. Given the present trend, it can be reasonably expected that by 2008, the academic session would be fully regularized. The absence of the required number of teachers continues to hamper the quality of education, and it is surprising that the Government of Jharkhand has yet to appoint even a single person. There is also an urgent need for some kind of periodic assessment of teachers. One way would be to ask the students to fill a feedback form at the end of each academic year. Finally, the number of

options available to the students has increased substantially with the introduction of vocational courses.

Financially much needs to be done before the house is put in order. The steps in this regard taken by the HRD Department are commendable and must be welcomed. On the one hand, arrears going back 20 years and more must be given to the employees. On the other, those who have filled their pockets at the expense of the University must be taken to task. Regular audits would be an effective way to keep a check on such activities. There could also be periodic inspections to ascertain that expenditure that is shown on paper has actually borne fruit in reality. Budgets and demands for grants made by various institutions must be easily accessible to the public. Public opinion is more often than not an extremely effective deterrent.

The level of administrative efficiency at present is a far cry from what one expects in an institution of this size and importance. One could argue that there is too much segmentation of work without the necessary connectivity among the various units. During the research one often encountered situations when no official was able to inform one as to where a particular piece of information might be obtained! Second, the plague of too many vacancies has affected administrative efficiency extremely adversely. How can any work be done properly if the requisite number of employees is simply not there? It does not take any sophisticated analysis to understand that the quality and quantity of work must suffer in the given situation. Third, there must be a system in place for redressal of grievances. Who does one go to if files are only being moved from one table to the next every month?

Lastly, one comes to the impressions of the general public. A university is an association working within the social space and much of its success or failure depends on how it is perceived by the masses. Throughout this research one has found time and again that lack of correct knowledge regarding how a university is supposed to function has caused adverse opinions. For instance, it has been argued that RU does not hold classes for 180 days, as required by the UGC. The point here is that 180 days of work includes examinations as well, which take anything from one to two months, not only in RU, but in any university in the country.

In each sphere of its activities, Ranchi University has been attempting for the last 2 years or so to improve its track record. Many steps have been taken to rectify the problems and make the University more helpful to the students. Problems remain, of course, as most of them are too deep-rooted to disappear in a couple of years. But the heartening development is that something is being done about each of them. The Government of Jharkhand and the society need to come together and fulfil their duties to speed up the process of rejuvenation. One hopes that this trend towards improvement would not fall victim to the apathy of the government and the society that it represents.

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