

'Private institutes face historic prejudice'

C Raj Kumar, founding VC of OP Jindal Global University, talks about challenges faced by private educational institutes

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Jindal Global University (JGU) has been enlisted in foreign rankings and has collaborated with foreign institutes. Why has the Indian government not acknowledged its contribution?

There has been a historic prejudice against private universities in India. It is high time we move beyond the categories of public and private; as the categorisation of universities is limited and based on the funding criteria. In the end, every university is public in nature, contributing towards knowledge-building. The need is to have suitable criteria for assessing universities. However, we were one of the two private universities that has been granted autonomy and recognised among the 52 higher educational institutes by the government. This is mark of a slow and organic evolution happening in the country.

Why is JGU not in the list of NIRF's top institutes?

We did not apply for the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) because the methodology used in the Indian rankings systems including NIRF, does not capture what we do in a holistic way.

We are not a typical Indian university as our focus is also on Humanities, Social Sciences and professional courses. At some point we will participate in NIRF too, but our focus is international rankings.

Indian students and parents have an affinity towards government institutes. Do you think private players need to work doubly hard to build that reputation?

Indians having a fascination for public institutes is only partly true. Over 70% of students are studying in private institutes not only because of a demand and supply situation, but also because of the systemic deterioration of the public sector institutes.

In the present system when even the best of our public institutes are struggling with lack of quality faculty, autonomy, and infrastructure, we are staring at a crisis of confidence in public institutes. This has made the meritorious students opt for private institutes.

Private institutes are often seen as commercial entities, more so because of their high fee structure. Your comments?

The fee in public institutes is less because of the government subsidies. Private institutes do not have this support, which leads to high fee structure. Yet most institutes try to maintain a balance to keep it affordable. Students have to rely on scholarships and one needs wealthy but socially conscious people and philanthropists. But more often than not, private players lack the resources, network, and even a vision to do the same.

Affordable fee structure cannot match the investments made in faculties, infrastructure etc.



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