

The ethics of excellence: improving academic research

Many will agree that academic research in India needs to be internationally competitive and our institutions feature in rankings lists. Global research and competition are now increasingly diverse and in this scenario, India rightfully wants to be an important player. In pedagogy too, we face a situation of enhanced expectations. There has been a rapid expansion with the setting up of more Central and State universities which includes more focussed institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Indian Institutes of Management and National Institutes of Technology, enhancing the opportunities for high-quality teaching. Despite the impressive job being done, there is considerable room for improvement.

But what is still holding our nation back from achieving large-scale global academic excellence which is commensurate with our intellectual heritage and calibre? Beyond blaming the government and the bureaucracy, the usual suspects, it is important to look inward and ask whether our academics display an adequate ethical commitment to excellence.

It is rarely appreciated that excellence is an ethical issue. We think of it as something arising from people of calibre coupled with sufficient resources. But how do successful nations spot such people and resources and enable them to achieve their potential? The answer: there is a sincere and stated commitment to cultivating excellence as a goal. Contrasting this with the academic ethos in India raises uncomfortable questions.

Consider this advertisement put out by Stanford University recently: "We seek exceptional individuals who can develop a world-class program of research, and have a strong commitment to teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate levels." In such institutions, once an excellent candidate is identified, the institution does everything to convince her/him to accept the offer. Loss of the candidate to a rival institution is considered a serious failure, as excellence is seen to be a precious commodity, with the heads of such institutions held accountable.

In India, in contrast, excellence is at best one of multiple criteria in faculty hiring. Though never openly stated, extraneous considerations abound. It is an open secret that these considerations define a large fraction of hiring across India, and often precede considerations of merit. In some places, excellence can actually go against the candidate.

One might be tempted to solely blame failed institutions/departments on the calibre of leadership, and, ultimately, the government that appoints such leaders. But the problem persists even in those institutions led by respected academics. The reasons need to be examined. While academics freely criticise personality cults in the political sphere, they are happy to cultivate those of their own. A few individuals, possibly achievers in their younger days, grow into collectors of awards and fellowships and dominate organisations and committees. Factions grow around them. These people, administratively overburdened out of their own choice, make serious judgments without adequate information. Conflict of interest is another, rarely highlighted, problem. For example, within an institution, the leader may provide partisan support for their own subject of expertise and restrain the progress of rivals.

The problem is not just confined to leaders. In many Indian institutions, there is increasing democratic participation of junior academics in hiring and promotions. One hopes that this would propel excellence to the top of the desirable attributes. Unfortunately even in this set-up, research

areas that are of global importance are often, out of sheer ignorance, treated with disdain. This is a key point. In the ethics of excellence, ignorance cannot be an excuse. When making decisions affecting the future of one's institution, it is an ethical imperative to educate oneself on all the relevant facts.

The atmosphere in which academics work has a profound impact on their achievements. Academic leaders need to offer support and mentorship but also impose a standard of excellence. Instead, too often, they veer to an extreme: either scattering resources indulgently or interfering in every minor matter. In the worst cases, they are vindictive towards those who show signs of exceptional achievement.

Why do we in India accept extraneous considerations that militate against excellence? Of course our political culture is deeply implicated, which makes it ironic when our politicians ask why Indian scientists do not win Nobel prizes. But a part of the responsibility and the power to change lies within the academic community itself. The problem is our collective failure to articulate the goal of excellence and to exert firm pressure on anyone, however important, who blocks the path. The old tale that Indians instinctively behave like crabs, pulling others down, still has well-deserved traction in academia.

This is not to suggest that even developed countries are free of academic politics or these faults. Rather, there are correctives applied from two directions. One is the rank and file of academia which tends to be more professional than ours. Personality cults are met with a sharp push back and conflicts of interest are openly challenged. Even when disputes take place, excellence does not take a back seat. The other corrective comes from the top; institution leaders are evaluated by their funding and accreditation agencies, and made aware that their future leadership opportunities are diminished by every petty action and slipshod committee work. Ultimately, the system is accountable because it is committed to an ethical standard — the standard of excellence.

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The Gujarat result has held the mirror to both the BJP and the Congress and magnified their weaknesses

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The Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2013

Security / Law / Strategic affairs

The Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2013

Highlights of the Bill

- The Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill, 2013 amends the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.
- The Act covers the offence of giving a bribe to a public servant under abetment. The Bill makes specific provisions related to giving a bribe to a public servant, and giving a bribe by a commercial organisation.
- The Bill redefines criminal misconduct to only cover misappropriation of property and possession of disproportionate assets.
- The Bill modifies the definitions and penalties for offences related to taking a bribe, being a habitual offender and abetting an offence.
- Powers and procedures for the attachment and forfeiture of property of public servants accused of corruption have been introduced in the Bill.
- The Act requires prior sanction to prosecute serving public officials. The Bill extends this protection to former officials.

Key Issues and Analysis

- The Bill makes giving a bribe a specific offence. There are diverging views on whether bribe giving under all circumstances must be penalised. Some have argued that a coerced bribe giver must be distinguished from a collusive bribe giver.
- The Bill has deleted the provision that protects a bribe giver from prosecution, for any statement made by him during a corruption trial. This may deter bribe givers from appearing as witnesses in court.
- The Bill has replaced the definition of criminal misconduct. It now requires that the intention to acquire assets disproportionate to income also be proved, in addition to possession of such assets. Thus, the threshold to establish the offence of possession of disproportionate assets has been increased by the Bill.
- By redefining the offence of criminal misconduct, the Bill does not cover circumstances where the public official: (i) uses illegal means, (ii) abuses his position, or (iii) disregards public interest and obtains a valuable thing or reward for himself or another person.
- Under the Act, the guilt of the person is presumed for the offences of taking a bribe, being a habitual offender or abetting

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Current Status: Pending
Ministry: Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions

Stage	Date
Introduction	Aug 19, 2013
Com. Ref.	Aug 23, 2013 and Dec 11, 2015
Com. Rep.	Feb 6, 2014 and Aug 12, 2016
Lok Sabha	
Rajya Sabha	Introduced

Relevant Links

-  [Bill Text](#) (162 KB)
-  [PRS Bill Summary](#) (110 KB)
-  [_](#) (627 KB)
-  [PRS Standing Comm Report Summary](#) (123 KB)
-  [_](#) (605 KB)
-  [PRS Legislative Brief](#) (1041 KB)
-  [PRS Legislative Brief with amendments](#) (611 KB)
-  [_](#) (1052 KB)
-  [Standing Committee Report](#) (276 KB)
-  [Official list of Amendments, May 05, 2015](#) (2 MB)
-  [Comparison with the 1988 Act, 2013 Bill and the proposed 2015 amendments](#) (1141 KB)
-  [4th Report of 2nd ARC](#) (1 MB)
-  [UNC against Corruption](#) (655 KB)

[Law Commission Report \(1310 KB\)](#)

 [Official List of Amendments, Nov 27, 2015 \(2 MB\)](#)

 [Comparison of 2015 and 2013 amendments \(1142 KB\)](#)

 [PCA- 2015 Amendments- Issues for consideration \(773 KB\)](#)

 [Select Committee Report \(4 MB\)](#)

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 [PCA Bill as reported by RS Select Committee 2016 – Issues for consideration \(1126 KB\)](#)

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[Cabinet approves refurbished anti-corruption law, Economic Times, Apr 29, 2015](#)

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[Criminal Liability Clause is 'overboard': Law commission report, Economic Times, Feb 12, 2015](#)

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an offence. The Bill amends this provision to only cover the offence of taking a bribe.

[Read the complete analysis here](#)

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India's big business needs an ethical fibre

In 2017, India's corporate landscape did not present a pretty sight. Even as the smaller companies struggled to make the necessary adjustments to the new goods and services tax (GST) regime, the largest Indian companies gave little evidence of the innovativeness and the derring-do that would suggest a brave new future for them. All that we saw were some fierce price wars, lots of hand wringing and a wait-and-watch attitude.

The abiding image of the year was the two infamous Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lists of companies that had defaulted on their dues to banks.

If Vijay Mallya bagged all the notoriety stars in 2016, this year, the bad news was more evenly spread across 40 companies which was somewhat more representative of the malaise.

Companies are microcosms of societies and people. When a Mitsubishi Materials Corp. admits to falsifying data on its components used in cars and airplanes over a year, it is a reflection on Japanese society. Similarly, when a Mallya goes absconding with employees' salaries and other dues, it isn't just a one-off problem restricted to a man who has since become the favourite whipping boy of investigating agencies.

No, Mallya's failings are shared in small and large measure, by many other companies. That's because the men and women who work for these companies are from the same society in which they operate.

The dilemma facing a pharma company selling stents at over 600% of their cost price is the maximization of profits for its shareholders versus its responsibility towards society and its customers.

We can see this dilemma played out in many of the key moments of the year.

The conflict between a promoter and the management at Infosys Ltd, the repeated warnings issued by the US Food and Drug Administration, or FDA, against the quality practices of India's generics makers, the Delhi government's censure of hospitals in the capital for overcharging patients, the ongoing battles between home buyers and large builders like Jaypee Infratech Ltd and Unitech Ltd, are all a consequence of these conflicting corporate urges.

The sequence of events is almost always the same. A business house spots an opportunity, seizes it using funds from obliging banks and, then, proceeds to build upon it.

So far, so good, but then comes the greed, the desire to grow exponentially and the realization that the system can be worked, that banks can be milked, markets manipulated and customers fleeced.

It is this cycle of greed, manipulation and eventual capitulation that encapsulates the fortunes of most of the companies now referred to the National Company Law Tribunal for insolvency proceedings.

The problem has been compounded by the toothlessness and, in many cases, the active collusion of the appointed regulators.

A year when the sins of the past appeared to have caught up with many Indian companies points to a missing ethical fibre. Six months ago I wrote a [column \(http://bit.ly/2EHuuk0\)](http://bit.ly/2EHuuk0) on Dilip Pendse,

former managing director of Tata Finance Ltd, whose misdemeanors included attempts to manipulate the markets and frauds against investors.

Towards the end of the year, we saw the ignominious exit of Shashi Arora, CEO of Airtel Payments Bank, after the firm's eKYC (know your customer) licence was suspended by the Unique Identification Authority of India following disclosures of the misuse of customer data (<http://bit.ly/2EJ5kkY>).

The two events, separated by nearly two decades, are part of the same malaise, a failure to follow the ethics of business.

And it is always the leaders who make these calls. Call it a failure of leadership in the face of unrealistic expectations from investors or merely the lack of a clear ethical foundations, but in too many cases, they are the ones who call for the rules to be bent.

Yet, how often have we seen chief executive officers (CEOs) being punished for the deviant behaviour of their companies?

Wipro Ltd's chairman Azim Premji has always insisted on doing business with stringent ethical norms in place even if that meant sacrificing a few percentage points of growth.

He has been able to ensure acceptance and adherence because he sets the standards with his own actions. This is a man who once refused a complimentary upgrade on a domestic flight and would often hop into an auto rickshaw at the old HAL Airport in Bengaluru.

The buck starts and stops at the top. Indian business leaders have to lay down the law on corporate integrity by setting themselves up as models of rectitude.

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A nation-builder, an inspiration

“Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached”, this shloka from the Upanishads popularised by Swami Vivekananda should be an inspiration to every Indian. It is particularly relevant for the youth of today to build a New India through motivation, education and dedication.

The time has never been more opportune than now for India to realise its true potential by unleashing the energies of the youth, who constitute about 65 per cent of the country's population. India is already one of the leading global IT players with the services sector contributing hugely to the country's GDP. However, for multi-sectoral growth, rapid strides need to be made in manufacturing, agriculture, energy and infrastructure so that the country becomes the third largest economy much earlier than the projected 10-15 years.

Vivekananda once told a group of journalists at the University of Michigan, “This is your century right now, but 21st century is India's century”. Sceptics might still have doubts if India can break new ground and become one of the leading economies. But the recent growth patterns show that there are many good reasons to be optimistic. The assessments by the World Bank, the IMF and other external agencies give ample indication that the country is on the right development trajectory.

However, we have to recognise some impeding factors as well. Narrow prejudices of various isms that come in the way of a socially harmonious, prosperous, peaceful, inclusive and equitable India have to be buried under the foundations of the New India.

As the Father of the Nation famously said, “India lives in its villages”. Unless those living in villages become part of a growth narrative, progress cannot be achieved. There is a need to adopt a bottom-up approach with a vision to transform villages into prosperous and self-contained economic hubs. At the same time, farmers' incomes have to be doubled by making agriculture remunerative and viable. In a bid to ensure that food security is not affected, utmost priority has to be given to farmers' welfare.

In the recent past, the public discourse is getting sidetracked by non-issues rather than issues which have a bearing on the growth and development of the country. I feel the time has come for media and cinema, the most powerful communication tools, to do some serious introspection. We need catalysts for positive change. We need voices of reason, objectivity, hope, courage and calm. In a parliamentary democracy, the people's representatives have a huge role to play in scripting the country's growth narrative. They should act as role models for others.

What Vivekananda said at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, in his epoch-making address is as relevant today as it was more than 125 years ago. He had said: “I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations”.

He told the convention that, “sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now”. Referring to the common ground of religious unity, he said “if anyone here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the other, to him I say, ‘Brother, yours is an impossible hope’.”

I have highlighted parts of Vivekananda's speeches at the World Parliament of Religions to drive home the message that religious tolerance is of paramount importance for the peaceful co-existence of people of all beliefs and faiths. Problems arise when ignorant, fanatical bigots try to impose their worldview on others and indulge in one-upmanship. Irrespective of religion, this sort of behaviour cannot be and should not be tolerated. Continuous efforts are needed to bring down caste barriers by all stakeholders, especially the political parties. Caste, cash and community must not be allowed to play any role in electoral politics and people must elect their public representatives on the basis of character, calibre, capacity and conduct.

Pointing out that caste was a social organisation and not a religious one, Vivekananda said it was the outcome of the natural evolution of our society. "It was found necessary and convenient at one time. It has served its purpose." He went on to add that the Hindu religion no longer requires the prop of the caste system.

I feel that no other country is as uniquely placed today to fast-track development as India is with a predominantly young population. Here, I would like to mention the relevance of the man-making mission spoken of by Vivekananda. He said: "Man-making is my mission of life. I am not a politician, nor I am a social reformer. It is my job to fashion man. I care only for the spirit: When that is right, everything will be righted by itself."

Vivekananda wanted education to provide "life-building, man-making and character-making assimilation of ideas". We need women and men who have knowledge, skills and attitudes that foster societal transformation. Universal literacy and good quality education with a strong underpinning of universal values are the foundations we must strengthen.

Vivekananda believed in uplift of humanity, irrespective of caste and creed and emphasised the importance of spiritualism for the survival and progress of mankind. He said "worship God in all living beings through service". This emphasis on service to humanity as a step towards spiritual upliftment needs to be underscored in our current national context.

The Swami was an enlightened spiritual preacher who brought Vedanta and Yoga to the West, while infusing a strong sense of patriotism among Indians during the colonial British rule. Through his historic speech at the Parliament of World Religions, he communicated the correct and accurate meaning of Hinduism and its way of life. He acted like a bridge between the East and the West and played a pivotal role in strengthening the spiritual foundation of mankind. I feel that his life and teachings have to be popularised so that the younger generation in particular realises and assimilates the greatness of India's culture, spiritual heritage and traditions in the context of growing materialism and influence of Western concepts and lifestyles. The younger generation should emulate his ideals.

The Swami was a great nation-builder and his teachings have become all the more relevant today in the wake of attempts by a number of fissiparous forces that impede progress. From times immemorial, Indians believed in the concept of "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" and have prayed for peace and harmony. We have upheld the principle of peaceful coexistence. It is time for us to recall and revitalise the well-springs of our rich civilisation.

Swami Vivekananda can provide our society the eternal fountain of "ananda" (happiness) springing out of "viveka" (wisdom).

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Walking with others on a tightrope

January 30 marks the 70th anniversary of the [assassination of Mahatma Gandhi](#). Once again the ideas of non-violent resistance and self-transformation are brought before the public arena. But more than ever, this is an opportunity to evaluate the theoretical and practical status of M.K. Gandhi in India and in the world.

Gandhi everywhere

It is practically impossible to live in India and not to see or hear references to Gandhi. Gandhi is by far the most recognisable Indian put on currency notes. He is also honoured all over the country with statues erected in the middle of town squares and his pictures posted on the walls of business offices and shops, even restaurants. But this does not mean necessarily that Gandhi is well read and understood by all Indians. A quick look at everyday Indian politics and the debates in the press and elsewhere shows that the spirit of Gandhi is no more fully present in his native country. Though his name is pronounced by all politicians and managers, when it comes to his teachings, young, middle class technologists, corporate lawyers and businessmen in India consider Gandhi an old-fashioned figure with his preference for an austere, simple lifestyle.

On another New Year's Day: Mahatma Gandhi's 'khorak' a 100 years ago

Despite being misread and misunderstood, Gandhi's legacy lives on over 70 years after his death. Today, for many non-Indians, the name "Gandhi" is synonymous with non-violence and civil resistance. As such, Mahatma Gandhi continues to be studied and taken seriously by all those around the world, (including Indians) who are engaged in the struggle for freedom and democratisation. Over the last seven decades, political and spiritual leaders and civil activists, from Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama through to Aung San Suu Kyi, from young militants of Otpor in Serbia to the freedom fighters of Tahrir Square in Egypt, have increasingly incorporated the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence in their protest repertoires, realising the ways in which it challenges the ruling elite's power and domination.

More interestingly, there has been a new interest in Gandhi among political theorists in the West. For the past seven decades, very few theorists considered Gandhi's seminal work, *Hind Swaraj*, as a major work in modern political thought next to Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Mill's *On Liberty*. But a new interest in Gandhi the political philosopher is emerging among the comparative political theorists. Actually, his relevance to contemporary debates becomes even more pertinent by analysing his philosophical and political contributions in a comparative perspective. Moreover, it reveals the multidimensional aspect of Gandhian thought while providing a sharp contrast between his approach to ethics, pluralism and autonomy and many challenges of our contemporary world, including lack of empathy, legitimised violence and exclusion.

An ethics of empathy

As such, what the comparative analysis of the Gandhian thought reveals to us is that unlike many contemporary liberal political thinkers, who put rights before duties, empathy and cross-cultural understanding are the 'hallmarks of the Gandhian view of everyday politics. The heart of Gandhi's ethics of empathy is to look within oneself, change oneself and then change the world. That is to say, at a more fundamental level, for Gandhi, cultures and nations are not isolated entities, because they all play a special role in the making of human history'. Therefore, 'Gandhi rarely speaks in terms of linear world history. His goal for every culture (including his own) is the same as his goal for every individual: to experiment with Truth. This is a way to open up the world to a harmonic exchange and a transformative dialogue among cultures'.

No material to probe Gandhi assassination again: SC

At a more philosophical level, in Gandhi's view, every culture should learn from others. As a result, politics for Gandhi is a matter of non-violent organisation of society with the aim of becoming more mature and more truthful. At the same time, Gandhi is always concerned with cooperation among nations in terms of mutual understanding, empathic friendship and non-violent partnership.

Last but not least, Gandhi is a thinker and a practitioner who is constantly experimenting with modes of comparative and cross-border cultural constellations. As he affirms, "I do not want my house to be walled in on sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." This statement of Gandhi has a particular relevance to the cultural situation in our globalised world. Gandhi's 'house' can be understood as a metaphor for an autonomous and democratically self-organised system within a decentralised community of 'houses' where communication between equally respected and equally valid cultures can take place. In other words, this capacity to engage constructively with conflicting values is an essential component of practical wisdom and empathic pluralism of Gandhian non-violence.

It also involves a belief in the fact that an understanding of moral views is possible among all people of all cultures because they all participate in the same quest for Truth. This why Gandhi affirms, "Temples or mosques or churches... I make no distinction between these different abodes of God. They are what faith has made them. They are an answer to man's craving somehow to reach the Unseen." Consequently, the Gandhian non-violent approach to plurality is a way of bridging differences and developing inter cultural awareness and understanding among individuals and nations. As a result, Gandhi suggests a view of civilisation deeply rooted in an ethics of non-violence. However, his ontological and political demands for an ethical approach to human affairs are not of an utopian nature, but more of a dialogical sensibility. Maybe that is why Gandhi's response to the phenomenology of violence is not the exclusion of certain historical self-consciousness but a mutual recognition among subjects of history. As a matter of fact, the pluralistic and inter-cultural recognition in the Gandhian vision of democracy can determine our sense of who we are and the value accorded to the common world we live in. That is, for Gandhi, one's sense of freedom is never a matter of simple self-introspection. Rather, understanding oneself as an autonomous self-consciousness requires the recognition of the otherness of the other. For Gandhi, recognition is the mechanism by which our democratic existence, as self-transformative beings, is generated.

Importance of dialogue

The point here is that in Gandhi's political philosophy, the experience of freedom derives from the diverse modes of participation in common concerns and community-engendering values spelt out in terms of a dialogue with the otherness of the other. Actually, Gandhi's message would be that dialogue with the other would save the self from its own tyranny. In short, what all this means is that with Gandhi, human conscience finally returns to earth, to the here and now, after centuries of temptation looking for salvation in eschatological constructions.

Gandhi knew well that one cannot be a friend of Truth without living on the edge. For him, therefore, thinking and living became one. But, thanks to his comparative and dialogical attitude, he always thought differently and lived marginally. His opening up to the world went hand in hand with his act of being free. While listening to his inner voice, he also had an acute sense of the world. Gandhi preferred to walk with others, even on a tightrope, rather than walking alone on a rigid, inflexible and impenetrable ground. This is his legacy, which is needed now more than ever.

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