



Where Gandhian thought meets great learning

If the Mahatma were to wake up in 2018 and take a look around, how do you think he will react? If you were to ask the Vice-Chancellor of GITAM (Deemed to be University) this question, he would confidently tell you that Babu would have been extremely pleased if he'd taken a look at his students.

GITAM is not merely known for their scientific temper and research prowess, but also for the way they have been instilling Gandhian thought, philosophy and ideals in their students. Perhaps it is no surprise that they continue to do this year in and year out, as they may find it hard to proudly carry the name of the Mahatma in their name otherwise.

There is no one prouder of this philosophy than the man at the helm of GITAM - Dr Muvvala Sanni Prasada Rao, who was a career Andhra University man till he took over the reins at this national centre of learning. Having completed his undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral degrees from the prestigious Andhra University, he had joined the varsity's Chemistry department three decades ago. He also served as the registrar of the prestigious university while handling his duties as the Head of Organic and Inorganic Chemistry with consummate ease.

Hailed as a patient mentor with a mountain of knowledge in Chemistry and an able administrator, Rao took us through how and why

students need to reorient their minds to shape India in the century to come. Excerpts from a detailed conversation about philosophy, skills, empathy, emotional intelligence and the state of our nation:

We talk a lot about skilling for the future and so on. What essential skills do you think the average Indian student will need to be employable?

The very first thing they must have is a good working knowledge of digital technology. In this day and age, the computer has become a basic tool for everything. You may think that this can be taken for granted, but the truth is that there is a great risk to neglecting basic sciences. Let me give you an example. Up to World War II, there was a lot of focus on basic sciences. Especially in European countries like Germany, Austria and Britain. The US was not so interested at that time. Germany, on the other hand, excelled at the art of converting science basics into technology. Only after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and the US entered the war did they come to Europe and imbibe some of the technological advances that were prevalent in Britain. Luckily for them, after the war ended, several German scientists deflected to the US and took their knowledge with them. There were a number of Jewish scientists

who would go to Sweden to pick up their Nobel Prizes and then run away to the US. That's how science in the US flourished.

So, we have to go back to the basics?

Absolutely. I am glad to note that in the 21st century, more and more people are orienting themselves to it. A lot of scientists, including Professor Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, the Nobel Prize winner for Chemistry in 2009, have spoken about how basic sciences need to be supported and not forgotten. Even doyens like professor CNR Rao have reiterated this fact several times. This is the basis for all technology and so we must always have a sound grounding in the basics.

What else do students need to be successful in today's scenario?

They need to have a philosophical outlook. Even if they're studying science. These subjects need to be integrated at some level. People talk about morals, values, ethics, responsibility and society. To gain a firm understanding of these concepts, every student of science needs to understand the philosophy behind these concepts. If you develop too much science-based merely in reasoning and scientific knowledge then that is dangerous. Today, we have world leaders (USA and Korea) talking about using nuclear arsenals for war





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without too much thought — this is a result of not understanding basic empathy. There are very good scientists out there who don't use their science for humanity and that, in my opinion, is a waste. One has to be a good human being to be a good scientist.

How can this be instilled in students in an increasingly digital age?

If you think about it, many years ago, there were subjects like moral science in school. They have now disappeared. It is only now that they are slowly coming back because we have realised the need to have such things taught to our students.

Tell us how your institute has impacted students for the better.

GITAM (Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management) is named after the Mahatma. When our founder Dr MVVS Murthi started the institute, he ensured that Gandhian thought, Gandhian values and Gandhian philosophy were given to students at every stage. We have regular lectures by resource people from Ramakrishna Mission, Brahmakumaris and Art of Living so that our students learn good moral values and have better emotional states. This is the basis for our curriculum.

What are some of the careers that you are preparing your students for in the future?

Fields like Big Data analytics and data mining are big focus areas. We are also teaching our students to un-

derstand how data blocks and blockchain formations work because this will be a huge job creator in the near future. We must also do a lot more in the area of cryptocurrency research. Currencies like bitcoin and other currencies that the world may not even be aware of will soon take over. The fields of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) will also take off in a big way. I would not be surprised if, in the future, wars are fought by robots and not humans.

They say that some jobs won't exist because of automation. Your thoughts?

We are hopeful that new jobs will be created as we evolve. Whoever does well in a field will be safe and will keep their job. Routine workers and average employees will have a tough time. No more will average people be able to hang on to jobs in a competitive future environment.

You have the advantage of research, clearly.

We have a major advantage because we have almost every programme imaginable in our institute. We have engineering, business, science, architecture, medicine, nursing, social sciences... you name it and we have it in our network. Our faculty and students come together from across disciplines and do a lot of health-related research. We have collaborations with universities like Stanford and other major universities. GITAM was ranked as a category I institute by the MHRD and we have an A+ accreditation from NAAC, which is quite an achievement.

