Autonomy of IIMs is at peril

Why in news?

Recently, IIM-Ahmedabad and IIM-Calcutta are surrounded by controversies which questions the autonomy they posses.

What are the controversies surrounding them?

1. IIM-Ahmedabad:

- The Director has approved a PhD thesis of three essays which is based on electoral democracy.
- It is alleged that the thesis described political parties like BJP & BSP as ethnically constituted one and BJP as a pro-Hindu upper caste party.
- Later the Ministry of Education asked the Institute for a copy of the thesis after a MP sent letter to the Prime Minister.
- The MP urged that the thesis should be re-examined by independent professors and the PhD be kept on hold till the review is complete.
- But the director said that government is not an arbiter of complaints regarding PhD thesis and complaints should be raised in appropriate academic forums present in the Institute.

2. IIM Calcutta:

- There is a dispute between the Institute's Director and the Chairman of the Board.
- The Board passed a resolution against the Director and stripped his key powers of making appointments and taking disciplinary action.
- The above instances raise **questions on the autonomy** which IIMs posses.

How was the autonomy of IIMs earlier?

- Before the enactment of the IIM act in 2017, these IIMs functioned as Societies.
- They had a fair amount of autonomy in academic matters and other issues such as the fixing of fees.
- They were not dependent on the government for funds and were in a better position to assert their autonomy.

- But the appointment of Directors and Chairmen remained in the government's hands and government often used this leverage to influence the IIMs.
- However this autonomy was only a product of convention and it functioned well as long as both sides respected it.
- When this respect was compromised, friction has occurred.

What are the other instances of friction between them?

- IIMs tend to protect their autonomy and opposed government's attempt to curtail their freedom.
- In 2003-04, government issued an order which drastically reduced the admission fees in six IIMs from Rs 1.5 lakh to Rs 30,000.
- A face-off existed between the government and the IIMs.
- It got resolved only after the government reversed the order.

How does government funding affect their autonomy?

- All over the world higher education system is supported by the government in one form or the other.
- Normally this should not impact the autonomy of universities.
- But government can interfere in their autonomy irrespective of whether these institutions are funded by the government or not.
- This was the case with IIM-A which is financially independent.

What are the implications this turmoil on the IIMs?

- The new IIM Act has created a dramatic shift in power dynamics in these institutions.
- The government has relinquished control on paper.
- But the implementation of the Act will face issues as the Board assumes greater power in the functioning of the IIMs.

Source: The Indian Express



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