
Corruption in a university in West Bengal, India: A First Person Narrative

Abhijit Guha

Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, West Bengal

ABSTRACT:

This action oriented empirical article deals with the misappropriation of University Grants Commission Unassigned Grant fund by a Vice-Chancellor of a university in West Bengal. The data for this study have been collected by RTI applications filed by the author over a period more than two years and presented in the form of a case study by using real names. The study revealed that it is not only important to know how a particular act of corruption is done by the use of public office for personal gain but it is also vital to know how after the exposure of the corruption in the public domain, the authorities again take recourse to cover up the scam by using bureaucratic measures. It is found that irrespective of political regimes the privileged position of a Vice-Chancellor is protected by the decision makers in the democratic bodies of the university. The study revealed that Right to Information Act of India can become a very useful tool to fight corruption in a university.

Key words: Corruption, Culture of corruption, Action research, Narrative, University

Our university system is, in many parts, in a state of disrepair...In almost half the districts in the country, higher education enrolments are abysmally low, almost two-third of our universities and 90 per cent of our colleges are rated as below average on quality parameters... I am concerned that in many states university appointments, including that of vice-chancellors, have been politicised and have become subject to caste and communal considerations, there are complaints of favouritism and corruption.

— Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2007 at the 150th Anniversary Function of University of Mumbai.

INTRODUCTION

This article is written in the form of a personal narrative by taking cues from theoretical perspectives and practical applications of the narrative method recently developed in the social sciences (Langellier, 1989: 243-276; Bruner, 1991: 1-21). The first point of departure of this article however lie in its action component in which the author of the article is an active participant of the whole episode. The narrative character of the storytelling is retained by the uncertainty of each turn of event which was previously unknown to the author. The second point of departure of this study resides in dealing with corruption at the highest office of the university. Studies on corruption by using first person narrative method is virtually absent in the existing literature. Most of the studies in this genre deal with health issues, politics and folklore, never with corruption. (See for example, Stevens & Tighe Doerr, 1997: 523-538; Kleinman, 1988; Jameson, 1981; Propp, 1968). Finally, the study has gradually unfolded certain lessons not only for the author being an active protagonist of the story but probably for a wider audience who may care to go through the text of the narrative. Let us begin our story.

The epigraph of this article was collected from the speech of the former Prime Minister of India who himself was an eminent economist, a Ph. D from a famous British University and a University Professor in India. The speech was delivered at the *Anniversary function of the University of Mumbai*. While conducting this action research, I found how much difficult it was to generate public consciousness against corruption at the high offices of our society.

Corruption of the Vice-Chancellors in Indian universities is not a new thing. In a recent period media reports revealed that the Vice-Chancellors are not angels and many of them being appointed by their political masters are responsible for nepotism, fund defalcation, plagiarism and even sexual harassment. [1] The post of a Vice-Chancellor is the most coveted one for which many academics aspire throughout their lives. There are of course examples of highly reputed Vice-Chancellors in many Indian universities who not only set examples of honesty, discipline and courage but are famous academics as well. By taking advantage of the social prestige and highest powers within the university system, the politically appointed Vice-Chancellors have been committing corruption for the benefit of their own coterie and

sometime to achieve purely personal gains. In a recent book, the world renowned Indian sociologist André Béteille discussed about the various crises of Indian universities but he wrote nothing on the corruption in the universities of the country, let alone about the involvement of the Vice-Chancellors in nepotism and abuse of power, as if these are not important sociological phenomena for study (Béteille, 2010). In another more recent article published in the *University News* although the impact of corruption on the quality of education and research in the Indian universities have been well analysed, no mention about the corruption of the Vice-Chancellors have been made.(Mann, 2014: 8-19 & 23). Undoubtedly, political interference in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors in Indian universities is one of the major factors which ultimately lead to poor academic standard and corrupt practices at the highest educational institution. (Basa, 2001:1364; Virak, 2001:628-629; Rao, 2001; 1391).

The king can do no wrong or the culture of corruption.

In this article, I would narrate the case study of corruption of the most trusted Vice-Chancellors of the Left Front Government of West Bengal who enjoyed two successive terms at Vidyasagar University from 01 December 2003 to 20 January 2011. His name is Swapan Kumar Pramanick and he was basically a teacher's association leader rather than an academic. He came from the sociology department of Calcutta University and managed to run Vidyasagar University with political skill but without any significant research or publication in his subject. In this article, I have used the word corruption in the educational sector as a systematic use of the public office for private benefit (Hallak and Poisson, 2007:29). In the same book entitled *Corrupt schools, corrupt universities: what can be done?* published by the International Institute for Educational Planning sponsored by the UNESCO, the authors however did not deal with the corruption of Vice-Chancellors of universities. Here in this case the former Vice-Chancellor in question had misused his supreme office for some private gains (foreign tour), from which the university did not receive any benefit. Before going into the details, let us summarize the corrupt activities of the aforesaid Vice-Chancellor. But even before, let me state frankly that in my anthropological interactions I have found many of my friends and colleagues at Vidyasagar University and outside

expressed at least three kinds of views regarding the corruption of a Vice-Chancellor. The views were:

(i) Vice-Chancellor is the head of a University, so he can enjoy UGC funds, if the executive council allows him to do so. In this particular case, the highest body of the University granted the funds, so it is not a corruption.

(ii) The second view was, once the fund has been spent by the Vice-Chancellor, the University should honour the Chair, the position of the VC was important; It is better not to question a Vice-Chancellor's act. Moreover, he had used the money for the purpose for which he had taken the money.

(iii) An important group of high-level university officials(including some executive council members) still believe that the term 'misappropriation' is not applicable in this case.[2]This view was evident from the letters written by the Registrar to the funding agency's(UGC) Chairman in which the term misappropriation was never used.The UGC Chairman was requested to reconsider the spending as Vice-Chancellor's educational tour and accordingly, readjust the account which was earlier settled by the UGC. My intervention was only viewed as a kind of 'disturbance' in an otherwise normal situation. A rumour was also spread during the early phase of the affair that the term 'misappropriation' was my invention at least in this case! Later, when the two member inquiry committee submitted its report it was also found that the term 'misappropriation' was not used. The act of impersonation was also viewed from the same angle, it was justified on the ground that although Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick did not join Vidyasagar University as Vice-Chancellor on the date printed on his letter of invitation, he was already selected for the same post. The view was it was just a 'careless mistake'. Let us now go straight into the facts of the case.

A fact sheet of corruption of a Vice-Chancellor

1. Professor Pramanick who enjoyed two successive terms as Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University (01.12.2003-20.01.2011) had spent Rs.60, 976/- from the UGC (University Grants Commission) Unassigned Grants Scheme in 2004 to attend the 36th International Sociological, Congress in Beijing, China held during 7-11 July

2004. As per UGC guidelines, the Vice-Chancellors were not entitled to get financial support for their foreign tours under this particular scheme. There was a separate scheme of the UGC to provide financial support for the foreign tours of the Vice-Chancellors, which was entitled as '*Travel Grant Scheme for College Teachers/Vice-Chancellors/Commission Members*'. Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick did not receive any grant from the '*Travel Grant Scheme for College Teachers/Vice-Chancellors/Commission Members*', which quite a good number of Vice-Chancellors of Indian Universities enjoyed from 2004-2009. So, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick by using the high office of Vidyasagar University as the Vice-Chancellor and political connections with the then ruling political parties of West Bengal enjoyed UGC-Unassigned Grants for which he was not entitled. The amount Rs.60,976/- was no paltry sum as it was revealed through an RTI query of Dr. Abhijit Guha. It was learned that more than 70% of the permanent employees of Vidyasagar University earned less than 60,000/- Indian rupees per month.

(https://www.academia.edu/7276048/How_many_employees_earn_less_than_Rs.60_000_-_USD_1014_at_Vidyasagar_University).

2. Furthermore, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick did not also submit any voucher in support of his 'statement of expenditure' and his 'statement of expenditure' was not signed by him. The Finance officer of Vidyasagar University signed the statement of expenditure of Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick. This was a gross violation of financial rules of the universities of India.
3. Professor Pramanick applied for financial assistance under the UGC Unassigned Grant Scheme for attending the 36 World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology (IIS) which was held in Beijing, China during 7-11 July 2004 by placing an invitation letter dated **11 November 2003** of Prof. Jing Tian Kui, Executive President of IIS to the concerned official of VU. Incidentally, the invitation letter was addressed to 'Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick, Vice-Chancellor, Vidyasagar University' which meant that Prof. Pramanick had communicated to Prof. Jing Tian Kui as Vice-Chancellor of VU before he joined Vidyasagar University on **01.12.2003**. This is a clear case of impersonation by Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick who was given

100 percent financial grant by the Vidyasagar University for his Beijing tour. The executive council of Vidyasagar University in its meeting held on 08.06.2004 approved 100 percent travel grant to Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick for attending the aforesaid Congress held during 7-11 July 2004 in Beijing, China. This act on the part of Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick being the then Chairman of the Vidyasagar University Executive Council seems to be a criminal offence under IPC.

Let us go through the details of the case.

Public awareness seminar on RTI at Vidyasagar University: the other side of the game

I would begin with an anecdote. This is about a seminar. It was organised by the Registrar of Vidyasagar University (VU) who was also the Appellate Authority under the Right to Information Act of the institution. The seminar was held on 7 January 2010. I was not invited in the seminar in which the then Secretary of the West Bengal Information Commission (hereafter WBIC) Mr. Nandan Roy acted as a resource person. In fact, I had to submit an RTI application on 07.01.2010 to know the details of the seminar! No reply from the State Public Information Office (S.P.I.O.) of Vidyasagar University came to me until I filed a complaint to the WBIC by an e-mail. The S.P.I.O. only gave me the official notification issued by the Registrar, VU on 23.12.2009 informing the members of the executive council, Deans, Heads and all the associations of the university that a discussion on RTI will be held at VU. No minute or proceeding of such an important discussion was recorded in which Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, the then Vice-Chancellor was present. The S.P.I.O. simply wrote to me: ‘The discussion was not recorded as it was merely an awareness programme’ (Letter of S.P.I.O. dated 15.01.2010). I also wanted to know the proposed ‘budget’ and the ‘expenditure’ of the said programme. The reply of the S.P.I.O.’s was curt: ‘As it was merely an informal gathering no budget was fixed for it’ (Ibid). The media however reported about the discussion in a report published on 15.01.2010 and it was learnt that Prof.S.K.Pramanick asked the Secretary of WBIC the following question: ‘Does Vidyasagar University come under the purview of RTI Act?’ (The Statesman 15.01.2010). The report published in the media also revealed that quite a good number of RTI applications were being filed to the S.P.I.O. of VU which ranged from the subject of harassment of women teachers of the

University to the denial of study leave application of teachers. The students have also filed a number of applications after being dissatisfied by the marks given to them in the examinations. The journalist also reported that on one occasion the Mr. Subir Kumar Basu, the then S.P.I.O. of VU was show caused by the State Chief Information Commissioner for not giving information to me. No letter of protest by the university authorities was published in newspaper which divulged some of the discussions that were held inside the closed room of the University in which the Secretary of the WBIC discussed RTI matters with the university community. After all, ‘it was merely an awareness programme’, ‘an informal gathering’ as mentioned by the S.P.I.O.!

Leftist Vice-Chancellor’s Beijing tour

My personal experiences regarding the implementation of the RTIA and the reaction of the bureaucrats of my university are quite revealing in this regard. I filed (in the month of February, 2010) an RTI application to know the details of the foreign tours of Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick, Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University (formerly a professor of Sociology at Calcutta University and a prominent leader of the leftist Calcutta University Teachers’ Association) to the Public Information Officer of Vidyasagar University. The reply to the aforesaid RTI application revealed that Prof. Pramanick had spent Rs.60, 976/- from the UGC-Unassigned Grants Scheme in 2004 to attend the 36 International Sociological, Congress Beijing, China held during 7-11 July 2004. Incidentally, as per UGC guidelines, the Vice-Chancellors are not entitled to get financial support for their foreign tours under this particular scheme. There is a separate scheme of the UGC to give financial support for the foreign tours of the Vice-Chancellors. Furthermore, when I filed RTI applications seeking the vouchers submitted by the Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University for the expenses incurred for his China tour, those were simply not given to me. More interestingly, when I wanted to know the ‘benefits’ gained by Vidyasagar University from the China tour of the Vice-Chancellor, the Public Information Officer replied twice that the ‘query’ does not come under the purview of the RTIA (Right to Information Act).

I then sought a copy of the invitation letter from the Public Information Officer of Vidyasagar University which was given to me. The invitation letter was e-mailed from Professor Jing

Tian Kui, Director, Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peoples' Republic of China to Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick on 11 November 2003 addressing the latter as "Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University" while Pramanick joined Vidyasagar University on 01.12.2003! It appears from the documents that Prof Pramanick had applied to the Director, Prof Jing Tian Kui, expressing his desire to attend the Congress by impersonating as Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University before 11 November, 2003 when Professor Anandadeb Mukhopadhyay was occupying the VC's chair! Prof. Jing Tian Kui also clearly stated in his letter that Prof Pramanick has to "cover his own travel costs, accommodation, membership fee and other expenses travelling to China".

RTI again

Later, after joining the VU on 1 December, 2003 Prof. Pramanick, by using his office, procured grants for meeting hundred percent expenses to be incurred by him from the UGC for the trip. On the basis of his application, a sum of Rs.75, 000/- was released from UGC's unassigned grant scheme for the financial year of 2004-05. But according to UGC guidelines on unassigned grant, the V-Cs of universities in India are not entitled to avail themselves of the financial assistance for foreign travel from the unassigned grant scheme of the UGC. The reason is simple. There is a separate scheme of UGC for the foreign travel of the VCs entitled "Travel Grant Scheme for college teachers/ VCs/ Commission members", according to the guidelines. But surprisingly, Prof Pramanick did not apply for grants under the above scheme of UGC meant for VCs to which he was aptly entitled. The story also appeared in the media and none from Vidyasagar University protested in the letter to the editor of the newspaper.

The matter however did not end in the media. Through RTI applications to UGC, I came to know that no grant from UGC was sanctioned to Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick for his Beijing tour. During 2004-2009 twenty five Vice-Chancellors from the different universities of India went abroad under the "Travel Grant Scheme for college teachers/ VCs/ Commission members" and Professor Pramanick's name did not figure in the long list. Thanks to Right to Information Act which helped me to procure all the documents. I then complained to the Higher Education Minister of West Bengal on 01.08.2011 regarding the case of impersonation and embezzlement of UGC Grants by Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick. The

Higher Education Minister's department sought a detailed report on the matter to the Registrar of Vidyasagar University in a letter dated 16 September 2011 but that was all. The Registrar did not send any report. I again filed an RTI application and finally a complaint to the West Bengal Information Commission on 19 March 2012 and I am yet to receive any reply from your appointed information commissioners.

Meanwhile, I sent a complaint to the Chairman of UGC on 16 March 2012 followed by one RTI application dated 18.06.2012 seeking to know about the action taken on my complaint since the UGC Chairman also sat over my complaint for three months. That probably worked and the Deputy Secretary of the UGC sent a letter dated 27.07.2012 to the Registrar, VU requesting him to refund Rs.60, 976/- and also show reasons, which according to UGC was misappropriated by the former Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University. (https://www.academia.edu/6877545/UGC_letter_on_the_misappropriation_of_UGC_money_by_the_Vice-Chancellor) According to reports published in the media, and one may be surprised to know that the officials of the earlier red regime at Vidyasagar University in collusion with the executive council members of the present government have been trying hard to misconstrue the case of 'misappropriation' of the former Vice-Chancellor by delaying the process of refunding the money to UGC.

This was revealed in the executive council's agenda for the meeting held on 23.08.2012. In the said meeting under table agenda number 18 it was stated:

"To place before the Executive Council the letter F.No. 45-3/2003 (SU-II) dated 27.07.2012 received from the Deputy Secretary, University Grants Commission, New Delhi regarding revision of the account head for the travel grant offered to the former Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University."

Interestingly, the phrase 'revision of the account head' was deliberately inserted by the Registrar (who is the responsible officer of the university who prepares the agenda in consultation of the Vice-Chancellor) of Vidyasagar University to conceal the misappropriation of funds perpetrated by Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick, the former Vice Chancellor of Vidyasagar University.

Misappropriation: UGC versus Vidyasagar University

More surprisingly, the discussion on the agenda was deferred in the EC meeting on 23.08.2012 for reasons best known to the authorities of Vidyasagar University. One member even opposed the term ‘misappropriation’ and the present Vice-Chancellor reportedly promised him that he would seek an explanation from the UGC. The whole episode was reported in *The Statesman* on 28.08.2012.

BOX 1: Trinamul man protects former VU V-C from charges of misappropriating cash

The Statesman, 28.08.2012

MIDNAPORE, 27 AUG: The misappropriation of University Grants Commission funds by former Vidyasagar University Vice-Chancellor Swapan Kumar Pramanik was not discussed during the university’s executive council meeting on 23 August because a Trinamul Congress member shielded the Prof. Pramanik. Mr Manab Mondol, principal of a Jhargram College and a Trinamul Congress spokesperson, opposed the term "misappropriation" used by the University Grants Commission (UGC) against Prof. Pramanik in the meeting and sought an explanation from Vice-Chancellor Ranjan Chakraborty. As a result, the matter was not discussed and Prof. Chakraborty promised to seek an explanation from the UGC. A university professor said: "It is surprising that Prof. Pramanik, who was close to the CPI-M brass, is now being shielded by a Trinamul Congress teacher." The issue was on the agenda for the executive council meeting because the Vice-Chancellor recently received a letter from West Bengal State Council of Higher Education vice-chairman Abhijit Chakaborty, asking the V-C to form a two-member internal inquiry committee to investigate the matter. "The agenda item has been deferred to the next meeting for discussion," said Vidyasagar University registrar Ranajit Dhar. "The issue was taken as a table-item, but we could not discuss the matter in this meeting for some reason." Mr Pramanik has been accused of misappropriating UGC funds to pay for his trip to a five-day conference in Beijing in 2004.

The deputy secretary of the UGC, Mrs Archana Thakur, recently wrote a letter to the registrar of Vidyasagar University, asking him to explain the misappropriation, and to refund Rs

60,976 to the commission.

In her letter, Mrs Thakur said the university disbursed Rs 60,976 to Prof. Pramanik, then the Vice-Chancellor of the university, for his trip to the 36th World Congress of Sociology, which was held 7-11 July 2004. This was a violation of the commission's guidelines, the letter said. For his Beijing tour, Prof. Pramanik not only used unassigned UGC funding, to which he was not entitled, but also flouted the norms for taking advances from public institutions.

Source: Report filed by Biswabrata Goswami, The Statesman, 28.08.2012

In order to continue a multilateral attack against the corruption of the highest authority of my university, I sent a complaint to the Chairman of the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education (a statutory body entrusted to frame policies for the improvement of the quality of higher education) regarding the misappropriation of UGC money by the former Vice-Chancellor. The council responded to my complaint and requested the present Vice-Chancellor to form an internal enquiry committee to probe into my allegations. The matter was taken up by the university authority who however requested the Higher Education Council (hereafter WBSCHE) to form the enquiry committee. A committee has been formed but at the time of writing this article no public notification has been made, let alone the terms of reference of the committee. The UGC also did not issue any letter of reminder to VidyasagarUniversity to refund the money illegally enjoyed by the former Vice-Chancellor. In the meantime more facts have come to my bag of knowledge through RTI applications. For example, I have learnt from the S.P.I.O. of VU that Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick did not submit his air tickets and boarding cards to settle his expenses towards the advance of Rs.75, 000/- which he had taken from the university for the China tour. I have complained about this gross violation of finance rules to the present Vice-Chancellor who promptly suggested me to submit the documents to the enquiry committee formed by the WBSCHE. On earlier occasions the present Vice-Chancellor who was appointed under the Trinamul led government did not initiate any action against the Registrar (appointed during the Left Front Government) when I complained against the latter for suppressing report sought by the ministry of the state Higher Education Department during September 2011. I also wrote to the

then Governor of West Bengal, Mr. M.K. Narayanan and published an open letter on the subject.(Guha, 2012).

Misappropriation revisited

The two member enquiry committee which was constituted by the Vidyasagar University on the recommendation of the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education comprising Professor Subha Sankar Sarkar, V-C of Netaji Subhas Open University, and Mr Gour Krishna Pattanayak, finance officer of Jadavpur University in September 2012 finally submitted its report to Professor Ranjan Chakrabarti, V-C of VU, as early as 1 January 2013. The committee report categorically concluded: “The VU authority sanctioned the grants in favour of Prof. Pramanick, against the invitation letter dated 11.11.2003 when he was not V-C. VU authority sanctioned funds out of UGC Unassigned Grant, which was not admissible and appropriate head of expenditure. Prof. Pramanick acted as the chairman of the UGC Unassigned Grants recommending committee wherein he himself was an applicant for the said financial assistance.”(https://www.academia.edu/5397484/Two_member_enquiry_committee_report_on_the_Corruption_of_a_Vice-Chancellor_at_Vidyasagar_University_West_Bengal)

Surprisingly, when the inquiry committee was conducting its investigation during September-November 2012, Dr Ranajit Dhar, the Registrar of VU, presumably operating beyond the knowledge of the committee made an attempt to justify the sanction of grants to Prof. Pramanick by writing a letter (VU/R/1013/2012 dt.04.10.2012) to the chairman of UGC. In the letter the Registrar said: "To use the term 'misappropriation' to describe an act of oversight is extremely unfortunate ... I request your kind honour to take necessary action(s) so that the expenditure in question may be treated as grant for the Vice-Chancellor's educational trip by making necessary official adjustments." Later the VU authorities instead of realising the money misappropriated by its former VC refunded the Rs.1,14,685 which included the interest charged by UGC as penalty from its own fund.

Let the Vice-Chancellor speak!

The executive council of Vidyasagar University after receiving the report of the two member committee sent the same to Professor Pramanick to know his views on the report. Professor Prmanick, accordingly sent his views to the Registrar, Vidyasagar University.[3]. It is quite interesting to read closely the views of the former Vice-Chancellor, which was sent by him to the Registrar, VU in a letter dated 02.02.2013. I got this letter through RTI applications from Vidyasagar University on 01.04.2013. My observations to the views of this corrupt Vice-Chancellor are summarized in the following paragraphs.

The Report of the 2 member committee constituted by the WBSCHE reconfirmed my allegations that Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick impersonated the position of the Vice-Chancellor and furnished a false letter of invitation and misappropriated public funds of the University Grants Commission and it seems that he is being attracted by sections 170, 177, 198 and 403 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860). Furthermore, his views show that he has made attempts to justify his misappropriation and impersonation.

Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick stated that he was selected as Professor of Sociology, Calcutta University(CU) by the organizers of the Beijing Conference in 2003. Then why he did not apply for UGC Unassigned Grant fund from CU? He could also have applied from CU in 2004 before joining the VU. The truth: his name was not among the teachers of CU who got funds from the UGC Unassigned Grants Scheme in 2004. I have come to know this fact by filing RTI applications from the PIO of CU.

Professor Pramanick stated that he was unaware of the fact that the Vice-Chancellors are not entitled to get UGC Unassigned Grant fund. Is it not unusual for a teacher of CU who served there for more than 30 years and he was also the Secretary and President of Calcutta University Teachers' Association? How a VC could say that he was not aware of this simple fact? Moreover, he acted as the Chairman of Unassigned Grant Committee of Vidyasagar University? Additionally, mere ignorance of publicly notified rules does not absolve one of the charges from the violation of rules. He also said that he knew about some VCs of the state who got funds from the UGC Unassigned Grants scheme. But he

did not produce any documentary evidence to substantiate his claim. I have come to know by filing RTI applications to UGC that 25 Vice-Chancellors of different Indian Universities received grants from UGC from the travel grant scheme earmarked for the Vice-Chancellors during 2004-2009 and that included a Vice-Chancellor from West Bengal.

Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick stated that he informed the organizers of Beijing about his change of official position from Professor of Sociology to Vice-Chancellor designate but he could not produce any document to support this statement.

Professor Pramanick's views are full of inconsistencies, unsubstantiated claims and statements not supported by any documentary evidence.

I duly sent my observations to Mr. M.K. Narayanan, the then Governor of West Bengal and Chancellor to Vidyasagar University in my letters dated 03.05.2013 and 29.07.2013.

When police appears in the scene

For the first time in the annals of higher education in West Bengal, the Superintendent of Police of West Midnapore district Smt. Bharati Ghosh, has ordered the Inspector-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station to record an FIR against Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick the former Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University on the charges of misappropriation of funds and impersonation. The aforesaid FIR, (D.R.No. 140 dated 04.01.2014) has been recorded by I/C Kotwali on the basis of a complaint lodged by Dr. Abhijit Guha, Associate Professor of the Department of Anthropology at Vidyasagar University on 05.11.2013 simultaneously with the Superintendent of Police of West Midnapore district and the Inspector General of Police (A), West Bengal. In his complaint, Dr. Abhijit Guha requested the police authorities to take action against the former VC under section 170, (impersonation) 177 (furnishing false information), 198 (using false certificate) and 403 (misappropriation of money) of the Indian Penal Code and section 2(c)(xi) [since Vice-Chancellors are public servants] of the Prevention of Corruption Act, as the latter had misappropriated Rs. 60,976/- from the UGC unassigned grant for his tour to Beijing in 2004 and impersonated the position of the Vice-Chancellor before joining the post at Vidyasagar University. The I/C Kotwali, in

response to an RTI query has informed the State Public Information Officer and the Deputy Superintendent of Police(D&T) that an “enquiry is pending” on the complaint of Dr. Guha under the case diary No.D.R.-140 dt.04.01.2014. After the filing of the complaint with the police Mr.Swapan Kumar Pramanick was forced to refund the Rs.1,14,685/- which included the interest charged by the UGC to Vidyasagar University and the matter was reported in the media.(https://www.academia.edu/5737518/Vidyasagar_University_ex_V-C_booked_by_police).

Latest scenario

Through repeated RTI applications filed to the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Paschim Medinipur district,I have come to know that the local police station has started an inquiry in the month of January 2014 prompted by my complaint but the police again gave me misleading information on the enquiry. Mr.Sitaram Banerjee,the Inspector-in-charge of the local police station at Midnapore town provided the S.P.I.O. & DSP (D&T) in response to my RTI request, a piece of information, dated 09.05.2014, wherein the latter informed me that the “SI Mr.P.K.Pathak completed the enquiry” and it was sent to the Superintendent of Police through proper channel for his/her further opinion.But curiously, just after one month of the above disclosure the S.P.I.O sent me a letter bearing Memo No. 776/D&T/RTI Cell dated 07.06.2014 enclosing a letter addressed to the S.P.I.O. & DSP (D&T) by Mr. Susanta Rajbansi, Inspector In-Charge Kotwali Police Station dated 05.06.2014 as information to my RTI application dated 22.05.2014.In the letter of Mr. Rajbansi, it was categorically stated “Enquiry is pending on some points”. So, I was therefore, not provided with the information, i.e. the enquiry report on the alleged crimes committed by the former Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University.The matter was reported in The Statesman on 9 July 2014.

Meanwhile, in the month of February, when I was attending conference at the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, my two e-mail accounts were hacked.I lodged complaints with the Superintendent of Police pointing out the fact that the hacking took place after I lodged complaints against the misappropriation and impersonation perpetrated by the former Vice-Chancellor of VU.The police after one month of my complaint started a case, presumably after conducting an enquiry under the Information and Technology act 2005 of India against

the unknown accused. This incident was also reported in the media(The Statesman, 7 August 2014).

Is there any ray of hope?

The above narrative of corruption in the state of West Bengal exposed how the so called democratically elected executive council of Vidyasagar University under the Left Front Government abused power to misappropriate UGC Unassigned Grant fund by its Vice-Chancellor for his foreign tour. The story also revealed the nature of grant sanction by the UGC, since it was very much in the knowledge of the concerned UGC officials in Delhi that Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick was the VC and he was not entitled to enjoy Unassigned Grant Scheme fund for attending seminars, which was specifically earmarked for the teachers and officers of any university in India. It was only after the submission of several RTI applications, first appeals and complaints by me to the Central Information Commission for more one year that UGC finally issued a letter of refund and that too without specifying any deadline. More interestingly, after the change of political regime in West Bengal the newly elected Trinamul government and its nominated members in the executive council of Vidyasagar University were found to shield the corruption committed by the former VC who was appointed by the Left Government in West Bengal. The intervention of WBSCHC through the formation of an internal enquiry committee also seems to delay the process of refunding the misappropriated money. The formation of the enquiry committee also helped the VU authorities to make plea for delaying the refund of money, although finally the findings of the enquiry committee clearly revealed the illegal activities of the former Vice-Chancellor in collusion with the then executive council of the University.

Apart from the gloomy side [3], there are some positive aspects which come out from this case study.

Firstly, nothing could have been known regarding the corrupt practices of the former Vice-Chancellor without the Right to Information Act. Despite all the shortcomings of the WBIC and the poor role of the civil society organisations in West Bengal, I found RTIA as one of the most effective tools to reveal corruption with individual effort.

Secondly, the print media at the local and national levels played the most proactive role by reporting and following up the various developments of the case in a factual manner and also through the publication of my articles on RTI and the corruption of the Vice-Chancellor at my university (Guha, 2011:12-15).[4].

Finally, it seemed to me that fighting corruption within a university is not unlike the fights carried out by individuals in other social arenas. It required patience, courage and moral support from the peers, colleagues, friends, students and the members of one's own family. I owe a lot to all of them in my battle against corruption.[5]

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to my colleagues and friends as well as to the members of my family for their moral support in my fight against corruption at Vidyasagar University. I am grateful to Mr Umesh Rai of the *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies* for reviewing the paper for publication.

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Notes

[1] In a recent period seven Vice-Chancellors of Uttar Pradesh were sacked by the Governor on the charges of corruption. These vice-chancellors did not feel discredited at all and one of them have become the principal of large government-aided college (Editorial, *International Journal of Rural Studies*, 2012).

[2] It is pertinent here to quote the legal meaning of the term 'misappropriation' which is, " *the intentional, illegal use of the property or funds of another person for one's own use or other unauthorized purpose, particularly by a public official, a trustee of a trust, an executor or administrator of a dead person's estate, or by any person with a responsibility to care for and protect another's assets (a fiduciary duty). It is a felony (a crime punishable by a prison sentence).*"

[misappropriationNo wonder UGC has termed the act of Professor Swpan Kumar Pramanick as misappropriation since he used the money for which he was not entitled and a Vice-Chancellor is the trustee of the all the grants available in the university's exchequer.

[3] In 2011, I submitted an article on RTI in the journal Society and Politics published by the Department of Political Science at Vidyasagar University which was rejected by the editorial board since it contained ‘controversial issues’ related to the university. In the article, which dealt with the RTI scenario in West Bengal, I briefly narrated very briefly the corruption of the Vice-Chancellor of Vidyasagar University as an example!

[4]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264423911_Corruption_of_a_Vice-Chancellor_in_a_university_of_West_Bengal-326775684-corruption-of-a-vice-chancellor-in-a-university-of-west-bengaltrkprof-post

[5] All the names used in this paper are real names and the ethical responsibility of seeking informed consent does not arise here since the corruption and the revelation of the misappropriation were revealed through the Right to Information Act, 2005 of India. Any person has the right to know the names of the other persons involved either in committing or detecting the corrupt acts.