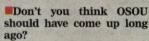# 'We will work towards bridging skill gap in state'

With Odisha State Open University (OSOU) set to turn one on June 10, newly-appointed vice chancellor Srikant Mohapatra talks to Minati Singha about challenges ahead and his vision for development of the varsity...

TALK TIMES

■**Don't you think OSOU should have come up long ago?**

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) had proposed to set up an open university in the state way back in 1996. But the state government took nearly 20 years to set it up. The last open university to be set up in the country was in Assam in 2005 and OSOU is the 15th such university in India.

■**How is OSOU different from IGNOU, which has a better reach and access, here as well as across India?**

While IGNOU operates in the country, OSOU has the mandate to operate in the state. The latter offers courses based on regional requirements. This apart, we are laying greater emphasis on promotion of Odia language and allow students to study and write in Odia, which is not allowed at IGNOU. OSOU also aims to promote and popularize the state's art and culture through various innovative courses.

■**What are the innovative courses that OSOU is offering?**

We have developed courses on Odia language and communication, disaster management, rural development, cyber security and accountancy. These are add-on courses, which the students can do along with their regular graduate and postgraduate courses, which will help make them more employable. Currently, the varsity is offering 11 diploma and three certificate courses.

■**In a state where primary and secondary education is in a bad shape, what would be the focus of OSOU?**

The skill gap in Odisha is beyond 90% and OSOU will work on bridging the gap by imparting skill-based education to dropouts and working professionals. We want to lay emphasis on skills and not degrees. We are developing courses in sectors like IT, healthcare, hospitality, security, housing, construction and automobile.

■**What are major challenges for the university?**

The shortage of quality teachers is the main difficulty we are facing in the state. So we are using internet and mobile technology to provide study material to students in interior areas. Along with providing a hard copy, we have uploaded all material on our website.