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Increasing Number of Substandard Private Universities!

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It is almost more than a year that Higher Education Commission started issuing authority to large number of Institutes of Higher Education to use the title of ‘University’. Before this, only state universities were using the name of university while private sector could only use ‘Institute of Higher Education.’ These private institutes were offering diploma and certificate programs and also a number of Bachelor’s programs but after getting the title of a university, they started offering Masters Programs as well and now, a number of these universities are offering MBA, MSc and MA in Social Sciences. Evidently, it seems to be a progress in the level of our private sector institutes that they upgraded their standards and became universities, but in fact, no change was brought except to change the name of the institute and call it a university instead of an institute.

According to unofficial sources, almost all these institutes got this special permission by giving a handsome amount of money to the officials of Ministry of Higher Education and all the set standards and requirements were bypassed in the acquisition of this new status. According to international standards, many things are needed to establish a university. It needs a faculty having PhD degrees, earned from the recognized and prestigious universities of the world. Similarly, a university must be built on a big area containing all the standard requirements of a university like libraries, separate departments, their well-equipped labs, a separate and well-organized administrative block, cafeterias and even gardens. It means that a university must be established on a big piece of land with a heavy investment on infrastructure. In case of Afghanistan, these conditions are met only by a limited number of state-owned universities.

Kabul University is one of them and we are all aware that it is established on vast area with all the necessary requirements. On the other hand, none of the private, so-called universities meet the required standards. Majority of them have been established in small bungalows and they don't have almost any of the above mentioned facilities. They usually have a very small library where there is not present the standard system of library management. Majority of them don't have standard laboratories and it is the reason why, hardly any practical work is carried out in these universities. Majority of their teachers are themselves university graduates or are the teachers with a Master's Degree from Pakistan. It must be made clear here that in Pakistan and in some universities of India, a Master's degree can be acquired after 16 years of education while internationally, it must be equivalent to 18 years of education. However, there are also reports that many teachers are working on fake degrees that can be easily obtained from Pakistan and some parts of India. In the same way, the online degree holders are discouraged to teach in universities while there are many teachers in our so-called universities who have obtained their degrees online. Similarly, the system of examinations in these universities is not valid and trustable. The examinations are conducted by the staff members of the university and as they charge heavy fees from students so usually, no one gets failed in these exams and are given the university degree without checking the level of their knowledge. Cheating, plagiarism, copying from other sources and assignments and all the ill-practices are the permanent part of the system of evaluation of these universities. In the same way, the standard of making final thesis and assignments is questionable and their poor standard is a question mark for the authorities of universities and Ministry of Higher Education.

These universities charge heavy fees from students but thanks to large number of these universities being opened in almost every street of major cities, the fees are now decided upon by the market competition. As a matter of fact, these universities have been established with sole intention of making money and almost no university has the professional dedication expected of such prestigious institutes. In this case, parents and students have been left on the mercy of these so-called universities and authorities of concerned ministry make no interference as long as they also keep receiving their share in the lot. These universities are also notoriously famous for the lack of attendance and if students keep paying their fee on time, it becomes the responsibility of university administration to show full attendance of the student. Once again, concerned authorities make no interference in this regard. Due to these and a number of other factors, our so-called private universities are generating like a machine thousands of university graduates with poor academic level. Majority of them lack proper knowledge of their field and they cannot be compared to the university graduates of any country. It is the reason why, our local and international businesses, organizations, NGOs and even the same universities don't trust our graduates and they try to hire foreigners. It is the reason why, large numbers of professionals from neighboring Pakistan, India and many other countries of the world are working in Afghanistan while we have a big lot of unemployed university graduates. In the same way, degrees issued by our so-called universities are not accepted outside Afghanistan and it doesn't help them at all. Due to these harsh realities, we are producing a large group of young, frustrated people who have a degree in hand but no actual knowledge and they are hardly accepted anywhere. This trend of higher education is really dangerous for the future of the country and concerned authorities need to take serious notice of this