

Private Universities

Session-jams, campus violence and an inadequate number of seats in the public universities that is driving about 75,000 students to India each year, the need for private universities became apparent. When this concept was first mooted during the early 1990s, by and large people felt it an excellent remedy for the shortage of seats and welcomed the move to set up new universities.

Today few of these universities have their own campuses; and most do not even have a permanent teaching staff. That being so the charge that several universities have failed to live up to their promise is justified. Thankfully this issue is now getting some attention from the authorities and the authorities have decided the seven private universities blacklisted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) will be closed down. Although belated, this is a move that is acceptable to people because of the failure of many private universities to contribute positively to the spread of higher education. The UGC also issued a warning to six others to follow the mandatory guidelines and regulations.

Much as this action is appreciated there is also the urgent need to restore the dignity of the private universities in the country. First and foremost there is a need to ensure that the various departments of the universities work according to the existing requirements. For example, deception can no longer be tolerated. In other words, an institution that calls itself a university must be on a level much higher than a mere coaching centre and their standard of education must be at par with the nation's public universities maintain a standard of education way above that followed by private universities.

Private universities need to be more receptive to public needs. However ever since the UGC report came out, private universities have come in for much debate, and startling facts are emerging that will shock the nation. Some have no students at all and one is functioning with only two teachers! But in today's highly competitive job market, a degree is an essential prerequisite for obtaining a highly-paid job and increased competition for public university seats has sent many aspiring students to the private institutions but if they fail to live up to expectation, choosing a university is fraught with danger.

One aspect of private universities that is, to our minds, unfortunate at best and unacceptable at worse, is they cater only to an elite group of students. Concern for the poor quality of teaching expressed in seminars and various editorials and articles in the media does nothing to alter the fact that they are producing elites that may not necessarily be educated in the full sense of the term. Do we really want to create a market in higher education if degrees are not worth the paper on which they are printed? Are we not duty bound to ascertain their value by monitoring the standard of education that is on offer and to make certain the universities in question live up to our expectations?

Higher education institutions are a part of a regulated community and private universities are every bit as much a service as a public one. But the criteria for setting up a university are that it must have its own campus, playground recreational centres. There must also be provision for expansion and teaching staff must conform to the set standard of education. The problem is most do not and as they are located in rented accommodation where an academic atmosphere cannot be maintained, they are failing in their responsibility to their students. The only good thing that can be said is they generally complete their courses within the scheduled timetable. However as many private universities complain they find it difficult to recruit foreign teachers due to the cumbersome procedures and difficulty of getting government approval, this needs remedying. Genuine problems must be sorted out on an urgent basis and the rest calls for better monitoring by the department concerned.