

## **Editorial**

### **Creativity, independence and private institutions**

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There is a general feeling that in Pakistan, public sector institutions have failed to provide a disciplined academic life for students. Moreover lack of accountability for teaching faculty- too smug in security of their jobs-has resulted in a total collapse of academic and professional milieu.

Feeling a vacuum private enterprise has stepped into medical education and treats it as a business, trying to put a strong rein on students and teaching faculty. The business sector in order to avoid pitfalls of public sector has ignored that in professional colleges and institutes of higher learning, a little bit of job security for teaching faculty and independence for students is must for creativity and grooming of intellect.

“To encourage real creativity, you need to have a good deal of slack”, said James Watson, who along with Frances Crick figured out the structure of DNA. It is rumored that he deliberately used to untie his shoelaces before going to a formal (suit and tie) meeting.

In order to maintain strict discipline hefty fines on missing, leaving or being late for a class may be good to some extent but students do feel suffocation and lack of choice especially when they are forced to attend a boring and uninspiring lecture. Too much emphasis and punishments on minor slackness in uniform is an anathema for a professional institution of higher learning. In the name of discipline, administration always appears breathing down on the neck of students. Even in hostels being administrated mostly by non-professionals, students feel too many restrictions and interference in their personal life.

Fearing a moral collapse, some of institutions have over emphasized a strict dress and moral code for female students (or teachers), ostensibly for promoting religious values, which for a mature today's youth exposed to lot of social influences seem puritan Victorian approach. Without an inner conviction on the part of students (or teachers) this breeds hypocrisy and resentment with no visible effect on morality.

Students are generally discouraged to develop their own extra curricular activities and everything has to be approved, supervised and guided by the administration. This has resulted in stifling of freethinking (hallmark and main difference between school and an institution of higher learning), so much so that distinction between knowledge, intellectual grooming and vocational training in becoming distorted.

Similarly, in order to keep teaching faculty on their toes, even senior faculty members are hired on short-term contract with provision of termination on one-day notice without compulsion to explain the reason. Since universities are run as business, faculty members are increasingly becoming nothing more than glorified hired-hands contract-bound laborers to be hired and fired at will. This means a floating pool of adjunct teaching faculty with lesser credential is replacing permanent professors.

The market-driven mutation of the private institutions into industries has made misfit out of academics who come to universities and professional colleges seeking refuge from corporate world and from failed public institutions, where the state does not make higher learning a national priority. Economic compulsions force some of the teachers to maintain a low profile disgruntled existence, where gradually they become the very thing they disdain- glorified mercenaries.

What purist academics like me do not want to understand is the following argument: that in the absence of well-defined and state-sponsored national educational policy, private institutions that fill the vacuum cannot be immune to market forces. The market forces are redefining educational institutions into mere service providers, catering to the sophisticated info-tech commerce needs of post-industrial societies. The reality is that private universities can't be expected (unless state enforces it) to uphold the 'noble' values of traditional academia.

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