

India Made Foreign Degrees

IMFL—India Made Foreign Liquor—is a grand success in terms of business and excise revenue as well. Whether India Made Foreign Degrees—IMFD—would go the IMFL way is anybody's guess. Foreign teaching companies with their tantalising packages in modern and ancient history, philosophy, literature, fine arts, the sciences, mathematics, engineering and medicine are coming in a big way as the government of India, is all set to allow foreign universities to set up their campuses, shops to be precise, in India, notwithstanding opposition from the concerned scholars and academics. They say because of competitiveness the move will substantially improve the quality of Indian Higher Education. But the reverse may be true. That Indian universities won't be able to withstand competition is a fact of life as this unequal competition already manifests in business.

Given the dysfunctional nature of Indian higher education system in general (a few exceptions here and there do not make a rule), the presumed competitiveness might result in its further disembowelment.

It is only the elites that would have access to these foreign universities. With a huge demand for higher education within the country, from marginalised sections of society, and the Government's stated policy to increase the gross enrolment ratio in higher education from 12 percent to over 20 percent, existing and new national universities and colleges are likely to become the second rank institutions for the non-elites. Similar to what has already happened in school education—the real elites go to international and expensive private schools, followed by local elites that access Navodaya and Kendriya vidyalayas, and for the rank and file, the only options are the downgraded 'sarkari' schools. Twenty-five years ago, most of the middle class children would be in good neighbourhood government schools; not today. A similar situation looms large in the higher education sector. And they call it progress in the right direction.

What is the guarantee that a well known university would offer the same course that it offers in its original setting (there are enough examples of downgraded courses being offered by well known universities around the world). Students flock foreign universities for the kind of courses, faculties, research environment and peer interactions they provide. It is not possible to replicate in their off-shore campuses. After all DVD lectures by the faculty does not provide that environment and quality. Hence the view that students will stay in the country and not travel abroad sounds unconvincing - students will continue to go abroad, and some more will flock these off-shore campuses.

If one is a competent teacher and offered a job at a salary higher than that of a central university, with possibilities of visits abroad to the main campus, how long would one be able to resist a switchover? The medical profession already provides that evidence—competent doctors from publicly funded hospitals switching to the private sector in large numbers. As things are bringing in teachers from abroad is unlikely to happen since that is not going to be profitable for the foreign universities. In any case it is business and cheap labour is all that is required.

Also, one doesn't know which Indian regulation shall not apply to them. A number of Bills are on the anvil—Commission on Higher Education, Malpractices and Redressal, Accreditation and Regulation—one has no clue whether they are synergetic or fragmented, and whether they will cover these foreign universities. It can be safely concluded that Indian laws won't be applicable to them as they don't touch SEZ because market dynamics has its own logic when left unfettered. □□□

[contributed]