



KHAN BAHADUR AHSANULLAH MEMORIAL LECTURE

(Fourth Lecture)

Prof. Dr. M.H. Khan
Founder Vice Chancellor,
Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology,
Ex-Vice Chancellor,
Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology
and Former Member, University Grants Commission of Bangladesh

25 March 2012

Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology
141-142 Love Road, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka - 1208
Tel : 8870422 (auto hunting), Fax : 880-2-8870417-18
E-mail : info@aust.edu, Web : www.aust.edu

Private Universities in Bangladesh - an overview

Prof. Dr. M. H. Khan

This lecture is dedicated to the memory of the Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah (R) who was a teacher, preacher, philosopher, humanist, writer, educationist and infact a multidirectional thinker.

The social impact of the Private Universities has not been studied and quantified. A general idea can be made from the number of graduates coming out of the Private Universities. Think of the situation if the Private Universities were not here! Where the young students would have been? What they would have done? What would have been the impact on the family, society and the country? With all the demerits of the Private Universities no body can deny the soothing effect in terms of personal gain in obtaining a degree viz. matrimonial issue, upliftment of self prestige, earning bread and butter, better management of one's own organization, family's social and financial position, a healthy and productive mind and above all being the "backbone of the country". So the Private Universities are taking this section of the population from a negative role (i.e. social evils like drug addiction, hijacking, looting, extortion, frustrated mind etc) to a positive productive side of increasing the GDP of the country, generating employment, showing others the ray of hope, becoming asset of the family and inducing others to go for higher education in the Private University (even by selling personal belongings like ornaments, assets like land, taking loan from banks because it pays back better than normal investment, other benefits and attainments are bonuses.) Apart from drainage of foreign exchange for education, the derailment of some of these tender aged boys is a loss for the families when they go abroad for undergraduate study.

Garment industries, rickshaw pulling and labor export are consolations of overcoming the present situation but cannot be a future plan for a developed country. Value added is a must for human being and education is the answer. Return on education comes 30 years later in a country. Population control comes automatically in mind and ways and means are developed in that

direction. Manchester is an example (it was famous for textiles). A British citizen when asked by me in 1977 about textile industry in Manchester told me that they sell a plane to us and bring a ship load of garments.

There are two views of promotion of Private Universities, The Private Universities may be allowed to function and its acceptability will depend on its market value. The feedbacks from the employer will govern the existence of the institution. The other view says that the under-rated output will damage the societies for a longer time and the public should not suffer. Moreover factors like publicity, connection at the upper level of the society and showbiz are factors in the acceptance. There should be regulatory body to keep the quality of education in Private Universities to an acceptable limit. To keep the Private Universities on the road, for competition, opening of campus of some of the foreign universities is advocated by some people.

If we make a rough estimate of GDP contribution of the graduates of the Private Universities, it comes to Tk. 200 crore/year in the initial years of their career. It is not much in terms of percentage but its constructive role in the context of the country is to be appreciated. In 2009 if we exclude the students of National University i.e. affiliated colleges with more than 11 lakh students, 165937 students were studying in Public Universities where as 200939 students were studying in Private Universities. So the contribution of the Private Universities cannot be ignored. The qualities of education in some Private Universities are questionable. But the concept should not be blamed and the governance should be stream lined to ensure quality education.

The concept of Private education is not a new concept. There were ustad's/guru's homes, monasteries, hermitage & presently madrasah, schools and colleges. The only difference is the certification at tertiary level. In school the students are promoted by the school authorities. The process of certification in Public and Private Universities is same except that in Public Universities the grading is in general more impersonal and in Private Universities it is to some extent motivated towards personal factors. Some of the best Universities in USA are Private Universities. The idea of University College was explored in President Ziaur Rahman's time but was not implemented because of the possibility of affecting the quality of education by local factors. Some of those factors are present in some Private universities and must be eliminated.

In these days of IT you can reach any book or journal through different means of IT and the concept of library in keeping books and journals for research work is not tenable. But IT facilities must be available in the library. The text books and reference books for student must be available in the library, The service given by Nilkhet market in Dhaka in catering the needs of the student (end justifies the means) is appreciated, The UGC may think about this while considering requirements of library.

The period 1992-96, being the initial period, saw launching of 13 Private Universities where as in 2001 only one Private University started functioning. But from 2001 to 2003, thirty three (33) Private Universities were established while from 2004 to 2006 only 4 Universities were approved by the government. This takes the total to 51 Private Universities excluding 3 Private Universities which are operating by court order (because these three Private Universities were ordered by the government to close down). Eight new Private Universities approved by the government will start functioning in near future.

80% (i.e.42) of the Private universities are in Dhaka while there is none in Rajshahi and Khulna. The concentration in Dhaka is obviously for many obvious reasons but Rajshahi and Khulna can claim Private Universities because of geographical and other reasons. Education is a service sector. But majority of the Private Universities are taking the commercial view. In fact education has become an exportable commodity. But the quality of education should not be sacrificed because if a substandard graduate comes to the market, he will be harming the profession for the entire period of his career.

Slum dwellers and rickshaw pullers take children and wives as their insurance. Education and population control has to go side by side or else the benefits of education will be overshadowed by increase in population and the result for Bangladesh will not be very palatable. Poverty, social evils, unemployment, corruption, civil disorders are the results. Shortage of food, water and dwelling houses are sometimes predicted because green revolution has a limit of increasing production and this increased production is coming at the cost of public health. The quality of food and quality of

health in the long run has not yet been studied. The environmental effect, energy source and human civilization are related over a very long path and I leave it to the future generation.

Coming back to the Private Universities, let us look into some of the statistics. In 2009, the percentage of female students in Private Universities was 25% while for Public Universities it was 40%. The percentage of students in Private Universities taking business administration was 50%, technical subject including science was 28%, taking arts was 11%, taking law was 8%, taking social science & economics was 3%. In Public Universities in 2009, 29% of the students were in technical subjects including science. The consolation in this respect is the fact that in 2004, 15% of the students in Public Universities were in the science and other technical group where as in Private Universities in 2004 also 29.4% of students were in the Science & technical group. The other side of the picture is that in Public Universities the trend is increasing whereas in Private Universities, it is static.

The fields of commerce, business administration, law, arts and social science bag more than 70% of the student. This is not a good sign. The student should be attracted in technical fields which will increase the value addition of human resources. If necessary to give scopes to deserving students fields like technical and vocational education including Nursing can be promoted. Emerging and high tech subjects like Bio Medical Engineering can be introduced at the tertiary level in Universities. Mechatronics is a European concept and is not popular in USA. It is similar to combined degree of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering introduced in colonial times in some European countries to feed their colonies. Robotics is rather a better term than Mechatronics for the purpose. Seats for admission are an important issue for the huge no. of students coming with HSC. In Public Universities in 2009 there were 29000 seats for admission as against 65312 seats in 2009 in Private Universities in 1st year 1st semester i.e. more than double. Public Universities in general admit students once in one year, though working on semester basis, from the output of HSC which is also yearly. But the Private Universities admit in general, twice in a year (Fall & Spring). This gives an idea of service and facilities to the public given by the Private Universities though many of the Private Universities have not yet got the confidence of the public about quality education. The number of seats in affiliated colleges under National University in 2009 was 183095.

This is really a big number. Many of the colleges do not have adequate laboratory and library facilities as well as qualified experienced teachers. There were 1778 affiliated colleges with 67953 teachers in 2009 giving education at the tertiary level. Students take admission in affiliated colleges primarily because of limitations in academic result and financial problem. Hence % of successful students appearing in pass course under National University is very low (less than 50%), where as the % pass in Private Universities is 90% to 95%. These percentages, the system of education and the marks/grades are never absolute values but indicator of merits which varies from time to time and institution to institution although having the legal footing at the time of using thy system. In general the % of pass, 1st class and the level of marking were static in this country in British days and started going up from 60's. But it does not mean that students of today are more meritorious than previous days. These are relative not absolute positions as I have indicated above.

Let us use a microscope to see the functioning of Private Universities. The medium of instruction is English and the semester system is followed. The input is coming from annual (biannual to be exact i.e. IX, X and XI, XII) system following a Bengali medium. Moreover they are preparing themselves not in class rooms but in coaching centers/tutorial homes. This high yielding variety in terms of no. of students and grades obtained is not natural and hence the attributes are like food and food grain (lacking in minerals and other micronutrients) we take today. These students in general lack sustainability, initiatives, analytical mind and above all they have addiction to fertilizers i.e. coaching centers. It is a captive market for both the students and the tutors in the complimentary way. Moreover they get a long preparatory leave in SSC & HSC examinations. It takes minimum one year to overcome the initial deficiencies of language, system of education and preparation for examination. The teachers taking classes in 1st year, (1st semester and 2nd semester) must be careful about the responsiveness of their students. They must help the students in overcoming the difficulties. There is no unique way of doing this. Arranging tutorial classes by the teacher or good students of the class may be one way. Developing communicating & expressing skill in English is badly needed. Seminar/English courses are prescribed in some cases in the country and abroad.

Counselling time or availability of teachers may be notified/indicated in their offices or department. Another item which the UGC should look is the exemption given by individual University to a student at the time of transfer and admission of diploma holders. Course plan is approved by the UGC and any change including exemption should also be approved by the UGC for diploma holders. A curriculum similar to DUET (Dhaka University of Engineering & Technology) at Gazipur may be prescribed by the UGC.

When it is stated by a Private University that classes were held on 317 days in 2009 or any figure above or near 300 days in a year, every body has every right to think that the figure was fictitious. When a person looks at the banner on the light post or on a branch of a tree or on the corner of a building, of a Private University with the words "Admission going on" on the banner, he forms a poor idea about the University. The absence of co curricular and extra curricular activities in a university is not desirable for overall development of a student. But these are some of the drawbacks of some of the Private Universities. Some Universities do not follow the ethics of education in admission, in giving proper academic atmosphere and proper grading and care basically for monetary gain.

UGC is supposed to form (as per Act) an Accrediting body (Accreditation board or councilor committee) to look into the academic standard of the education offered by the Private Universities. This body should have proper mandate & terms of reference (TOR) and the composition of the body should be carefully decided. In fact Public University should also be audited by external assessors because the level of quality there also has gone down. The students are not attracted by sports, games, literary competition, debate or other healthy hobbies. Private tuition, political activities, antisocial activities and other fruitless efforts are the order of the day in many Public Universities. Regular classes, research and development of laboratories and academic activities are interrupted by student unrest. Just as our nails travel over our fingers without bleeding, education should be allowed to proceed without injury or bleeding in the country. The UGC monitoring should be more intensive. Research budget in Private Universities should be increased and teachers should be asked to give adequate time in research and teaching in the Universities.

Private Universities Act 2010 does not contain any clause to recognize the merit of the student in the form of waiver or scholarship though some Universities give some incentive in this direction. UGC can help with a package for capital expenditure of Private Universities under some strict control. This is logical because Private Universities are giving service to the nation. UGC fellowship for PhD within the country may be opened up for teachers of Private Universities. This may help to solve to some extent the teacher problem of Private Universities. All the Private Universities are following semester system and it is very difficult to have external examiner for student's assessment because of time element. This puts a very pious responsibility on the teacher. Any weakness of any form (internal or external pressure) will damage the whole structure and its credibility. Therefore to become a teacher a person has to sacrifice many things in his life but he earns respect from the students. Let Private Universities not become an advanced model of coaching center. Let it be an institution of preparing students for future career in terms of knowledge & character.

The grading system followed in Private Universities can be moderated by the UGC so as to give more stress on final examination of the semester. The question comes that if there is no external examiner then we depend and rely on internal teachers. But even then the final examination is more formal and is expected to be more reliable indicator of student's merit. Class tests are meant to keep the students alive. Marks given on attendance is a recent step and is not found in Canada, Australia & USA. The expenditure per student per year in Private Universities in 2009 varied from 1:15 to 1:60 depending on the nature of subjects offered. Availability of experienced teacher is a problem and rat-race of snatching tendency is there but by this the country does not gain though personal and institutional gains are there. UGC can come up with a project to train up teachers for Private Universities through Public Private Participation. After all these Private Universities are serving the nation and the better they serve, better will be the quality of teaching. The table below shows the share of Private Universities in nation building. With all its misgivings it has the advantage of not having a session jam.

Year	Public Universities			Private Universities		
	No. of Universities	Number of Students	Average per University	No. of Universities	Number of Students	Average per University
2000	11	78192	7108	17	32791	1929
2001	15	92562	6171	22	27245	1238
2002	15	92152	6143	37	34432	930
2003	19	104736	5512	52	46080	886
2004	19	112327	5912	53	62856	1185
2005	19	116397	6126	54	88669	1642
2006	23	153249	6663	51	124267	2436
2007	25	163004	6520	51	170505	3343
2008	27	164624	6097	51	182641	3581
2009	29	165937	5722	51	200939	3940

Bangladesh is a small country with a big population and its problems do affect the university education. Universities (Private or Public or International) should have inbuilt governance system to ensure quality education. The Chancellor can appoint bodies/committees to probe at the micro level functioning only occasionally. The guardians should monitor the ward's performance including attendance and grades from the office. Twenty years is not a long time to develop a culture in Private Universities but I expect that in another twenty years we will have a fairly good trend towards quality education with the sincere efforts of teachers, students and the Sponsors/Board of Trustees. We should know the difference between pampering and nursing. Figures given are from the UGC reports but opinions given are mine. After 55 years of my career I even now think that if you are a teacher you will command respect from your students and I will say that value of values has not decreased.

I thank the authority for giving me the chance of giving the 4th Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Memorial lecture and I also thank the learned audience for being present here and for listening to the lecture.