

Of degrees and awards on sale

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June 28, 2024

A few days back, there was the news about a fake university having sold out 1000 PhD degrees against which action has been taken by the authorities. The sale of degrees by fake or lesser-known universities has been going on for a long time now. Even though the UGC issues annually the list of fake universities and posts it on its website, yet the business of selling degrees continues to flourish because there is little investment made in the business but the returns are huge.

In this business, the doctorate degree is the most sought after because it adds the honorifics 'doctor' to the name which makes you special in the eyes of your community. In the normal course, getting the PhD degree in any discipline means you have to be eligible and then proceed to get admission to a university through an arduous process, thereafter finish the semester or year-long course work, and then spend a minimum two more years labouring over the thesis. This period could extend to six years!

But there is no such thing needed in case of fake universities which award the doctorate for 'honoris causa', of course, for a good bit of money. The practice of awarding such degrees in 'honoris causa' mode started with the bestowal of such degrees on visiting VIP as chief guest in any university on the occasion of the convocation. That is the mark of respect from a grateful university just as it is for a visiting head of state to be honoured a state award by a foreign head of state.

However, these days, anyone willing to spend a lakh or two of rupees or so (depending on negotiations) can get such a degree. As an eyewash, the basis of 'honoris causa' conferment will be shown as social service or some such matter. There is no question of any course or examination, because the degree has been purchased. And those who can pay enjoy flaunting these degrees. So, one sees a beeline of affluent people wanting to buy the degree.

Again, it is so easy to lure the Indian aspirants drooling over the prospect of getting a degree even from a 'foreign university'. After all, the rot is not contained to India only. It's not that one must travel to a foreign country to get the degree. The 'university' sends its representative – any Indian professor or better, a white-skinned person who is presented as a Dean or even Vice Chancellor! The 'convocation' is another fake event organized normally in a hotel. The name of the 'university' is normally a take on any well-known university.

There is indeed big money in this business. In India, such shady universities have been found located in one or two rooms in some non-descript locality. They do not have to appoint any faculty or maintain infrastructure. All this is needed if you start a school or a small college, but starting a university and selling Ph.D. degrees is so easy and lucrative.

Only the name of the set-up must have the word 'university' attached to it. The candidates get registered even back date, pay the money and get the 'degree'. Action has been taken against such businesses in the past by the authorities, but as it happens with spurious businesses or organizations, the names change easily after one has been proved to be fake. The issue is what is the use of such degrees. There is no validity attached to them. The only use for a receiver is the ego satisfaction that comes with flaunting the suffix 'Doctor' with the name, but such degrees can impress the gullible people only.

As with degrees, so with the awards and fancy titles bestowed by various organizations for a price, of course. These need not be supported by any 'university', and yet the sponsors can make good bit of money. So, both the giver and the receiver of the fake degrees and awards are blessed and happy. Reminds one of John Dryden's famous poem *Absalom and Achitophel*, in which the character of Zimri is portrayed thus: "Beggared by fools whom still he found too late: He had his jest, and they had his estate"!

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Ashok

10 days ago

Felt so proud, a few years ago, when a girl cousin secured a doctorate. The first such honour in an extended family of highly educated people. And then recently read that PhDs are ... [Read More](#)

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