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UNIVERSITY: SOCIETY'S MAJOR INSTRUMENT

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In an essay entitled “The Power of University,” Zaynah Aftab gives very brief commentaries on two pieces of art. Thus, mine is interestingly a commentary on another commentary. The first artwork represents the future lives of university students after they graduate. Aftab writes of the importance of a university in helping students to become the best they can be. This involves, among other things, helping them to explore and exploit the opportunities available to them. Among such opportunities should be those that involve the development of social skills. Aftab observes that the geographical location of some universities may prevent or at least make it difficult for students from ethnic minorities to enroll therein. This will have a negative impact on important issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in those institutions. Where a university has very little or no representation of students from ethnic minorities, it means that students who attend them are deprived of opportunities to interact with those from different cultures. As these students from the ethnic majority enter into the world of work, they are likely to lack the social skills of living and working together with those from ethnic minorities. This may negatively impact on social cohesion. Although in a negative sense, all this illustrates the power of a university.

In response to the COVID pandemic, universities had to pay extraordinary attention to students' health and well-being. They effected online learning approaches. However, the latter learning modes have negatively impacted students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as those with learning difficulties because they were not provided with both the necessary resources and skills. This is a very important matter, requiring more work on the part of societies in general, and universities in particular, to provide greater support to such students. Without such efforts, equity, inclusion, and diversity would be threatened.

The second artwork depicts a boy smiling, but deep down he is crying, in turmoil. Aftab raises an important issue that in institutions of learning, for some students, on the surface things may appear fine, hence the boy's contrived smile, but deep down, they are often not. Why the boy is smiling and yet deep down he is burning is something a caring institution of learning must unearth. Not only must the dynamics involved be unearthed, but institutions must also create opportunities for students to voice their concerns. Further, they must create chances for students to co-create solutions. The more students are able to voice their concerns in safe environments, and to suggest solutions, the more they feel a sense of belonging to the institution. This would have a long-term impact on the type of adult citizens those students would become. The power of the university lies in its ability to accept that both students and staff face a variety of difficulties and to generate and implement solutions thereto. Aftab's essay raises big potential problems students may face such as mental ill-health and racism. With the rising cost of education, some students may struggle to pay for their tuition.

Overall, a university is a place where not only the future of those learning therein is shaped, but more importantly, a platform where minds are molded. Where a university gets it right, the student's future is brightened, but where it does not, the future is destroyed. Whichever way things happen, the “power of university” remains.

Reference

Aftab, Z. (2023). The Power of University. *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, 40. <https://repository.brynmawr.edu/tlthe/vol1/iss40/11>