



From the eyes of a teacher

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Teachers, insofar as higher education is concerned, have been in the news, albeit more prominently recently. The occasions have apparently been created by the rather sudden insistence of the government authorities on compliance of work norms attendant with the expectations. There have been talks of rationalisation of staff building up some apprehensions in the past and the latest is a tirade against the private tuition industry run by those in active government service. College and university teachers have come in for a lot of criticism from almost all quarters of the society. Accusations revolve around: (i) fat pay packets, (ii) a lot of holidays, (iii) a few hours of work and that too at will, (iv) no accountability, and then, on top of it, (v) running private tuition centres. So much so that the UGC has been forced to sit back and come out with a lot of remedial measures. Guidelines have been issued with a view to check the deteriorating slide. It is good to introspect, analyse and to adopt a corrective approach. After all, there is always room for improvement! And what can be better than that the teaching dons don the mantle themselves and rise to the occasion?

Scales of college teachers

The pay scales granted by the University Grants Commission for college and university teachers, no doubt, make these categories a very well paid group. Along with such high pay scales and time-bound assured promotional avenues, have been defined the responsibilities in a somewhat focused manner. The UGC has done well in issuing clear-cut guidelines for the teaching faculty regarding their workload, minimum number of hours for which they should be available in the college as well as the minimum number of teaching days in a calendar year. These are also followed by a detailed "Code of Conduct". The instructions issued to the hilt, things seem hunky-dory on the paper for the policymakers. But to what effect? Does it serve the required purpose? And if not, why?

A bit of introspection would certainly throw up some analysis.

Commitment level

There is no doubt that a considerable number of teachers lack commitment to the profession. They 'specialise' in bunking classes, manipulating time-tables to justify work-loads and whisking students away from classes. There are others who 'preserve' their casual leave only to be availed during the peak teaching season. Notwithstanding all that has been stated above, it would be unfair to the community to label them as parasites and discard the noble profession with a single stick. If there are shirkers, there are extremely dedicated teachers as well. And any person with a sense of commitment to his or her profession would certainly feel hurt on being condemned outright.

Let us take stock of what the UGC guidelines prescribe, what has been done to enforce compliance thereof and whether the objective sought to be achieved is being achieved or not. The objective is that the teaching community must come up to the expectations and deliver at least commensurate with what they are paid. Three most visible steps taken in the process pertain to (i) minimum of 180 teaching days, (ii) minimum prescribed direct teaching hours, and (iii) forty hours of work in a week and (iv) the mandatory presence of five hours in the work-place. How does one respond to these?

UGC guidelines

As regards 180 days of teaching, there should be no quarrels. But it is matter more administrative in nature and the teachers can't be faulted for this. Teachers themselves find it difficult to cover their syllabi in the available time (I am referring to the committed ones). It is for the university administration to meticulously prepare the academic calendar and then adhere to the schedules. Let the exams be conducted in time, let the results be declared in time.

As far as the work-load norms, there should be no dispute again. Heavy costs are involved and there is no reason why the minimum prescribed

direct teaching hours should not be adhered to. No manipulation of time-tables should be allowed. If somebody resorts to this practice, it needs to be condemned with the contempt it deserves.

Third and the last — the five-hour-stay in the college. The laudable idea is that the teachers should be available to the students for attending to their problems and consultation after the regular classes as well. It could also be that they should not simply 'touch and vanish'. (This directive may also give some sort of sadistic pleasure to the 'nine-to-five office-goers' who always seem 'jealous' of the 'two-three-period job of a college/university teacher). Allotting them well-spread time-tables can certainly regulate this. Their attendance can also be ensured by making them sign the attendance registers twice-a-day. But would it achieve the objective and ensure effective teaching in any way? There are serious doubts.

The five-hour time schedule, it appears, does not take into consideration the time a teacher has to spend in preparing for his or her lessons for next day, especially if the teacher is teaching an Honours Course or the postgraduate level. Teachers are not pre-programmed robots who can be switched on in the classrooms with the push of a button and switched-off automatically outside the classrooms. I have never found myself in a comfortable position in teaching one hour of Masters class unless I have worked for at least three unless in preparing my lecture. There are certain other issues that need to be equally emphasised. Knowledge, whether the acquisition or imparting thereof, does need a conducive environment to grow and spread.

I don't mind spending eight hours in the college (rather than five) and prepare my next day's lectures in the college itself. But where do I sit?

There are no individual rooms/cabins for teachers except the common staffroom which can at best serve as a general gossip room. You want a cup of tea — either there are no canteen facilities or these are most unhygienic.

Society

ic. You need to go to the toilets — but you can't dare enter as these stink. Mutual fault-finding can be an endless process. Teachers and administrators could continue trading charges for generations. But that's not the objective. The objective is to improve the quality of teaching, restore the sense of dignity and respectability to the teaching profession and inculcate a sense of commitment to the cause among all the three players in the game — administrators, teachers and students. This calls for a continuous process of dialogue with open minds.

Student evaluation

As for the teachers, student evaluation system, to start with at postgraduate levels, could be introduced straightaway. Students should not be required to write their names on the evaluation feedback forms. Teachers could even be asked to submit their tentative lecture plans on a monthly basis. (College should provide facilities of photocopying for circulation thereof among the students and the HOD's office). Actual performance should be assessed against this plan and corrective advice-notes from the principal should be a quarterly feature.

Thus a system could be devised to ensure that the teachers do not skip or bunk classes when they are actually present in the college premises. Teachers should be encouraged to write research papers with their efforts suitably recognised in the form of appreciation letters so as to ensure that they remain abreast with the latest in their subject.

Management's role

As for the management or the administration, consider some of the following:

- Before the colleges reopen, let the maintenance of available facilities be reviewed.
- The college has water-coolers with adequate capacity, preferably with aqua-guard filters, to ensure safe drinking water for all, class-rooms and the toilets are cleaned daily.
- Libraries should be equipped with photocopiers. These need not even be purchased. Only a corner could be provided to a private operator.