

Teachers' pay scales

By M. J. Audi

The Government of India have announced new pay scales for teachers in Colleges and Universities and measures for the maintenance of standards in higher education. They provide for the recruitment of teachers on the basis of merit through all-India advertisement and selection and career advancement through stages. The hierarchical ladder in the Colleges consists of four rungs and it has eight rungs in the Universities. In all cases minimum pay is Rs. 2200/- and maximum Rs. 8000/- per month. After forty years of freedom, the noble profession is thought worthy of parity of pay with the IAS. Within the profession, the Professors of Eminence are placed above the Vice-Chancellors. Thereby the powers that be concede that the Vice-Chancellors are not necessarily eminent scholars. The Government of India deserve praise for these two points of their scheme which bristles with blunders.

Irrational

The distinction between College and University teachers is irrational and malicious. There is no empirical evidence to support the thesis that the colleges are inferior to the universities particularly when the college teachers have heavier workload and limited academic facilities than the university teachers. It is patently absurd to generalise that college teachers are 'nuts' and university teachers are 'gems'. There is nothing new in the provision that all appointments will be made on the basis of merit. This has always been the contention and there have been always all-India advertisements. Does merit govern selection? It is an open secret that in nine out of ten cases, the patronage of politicians and university authorities govern the selection of candidates. The candidates should satisfy the U.G.C. qualifications. But fertile brains of university administrators interpret the U.G.C. rules to suit their favourites. Discretionary powers of the vice-chancellor, the secrecy of operations and university autonomy are the protective armours of unscrupulous educationists and the administrators. True, the aggrieved parties can seek justice through the courts of law but that does not affect the mischief-makers. On their behalf, university hires expensive lawyers. Even when the university loses the case, the university administrators lose nothing. There is no exemplary punishment for them for the abuse of power nor are they compelled to reimburse to the university money spent on the case. How are the Government of India going to eliminate such malpractices in the selection of teachers?

The provision of multiple grades is the most mischievous part of the scheme. India's experience, since independence, proves beyond dispute that hierarchy is the sworn enemy of excellence. Under the new scheme, 'career advancement' would be 'advancement' only for the chosen favourites and 'stagnation' for the non-favourites. Promotions would not be the recognition of merit but reward for manipulations. In the past, manipulators have managed quick rises in the hierarchy and the dedicated had stagnated and retired in the lowest rung of the ladder. The future would not be different. New scheme is a badly revised edition of the old story.

Dedication

No dedicated teacher shirks his work. Preparation of lecture is as important as its delivery in the classroom. Both need physical and mental labour. A brain that does not work rusts. A brain that overworks cracks. Hence do not make teachers dull routiners or nervous breakdowns. Doubtless, there are black sheep in the profession. By all means identify them and weed them

out but do not torture the sincere and destroy quality of teaching in the name of workload. As regards research, today importance is attached not to the substance of publications but to their numbers. A tree is always known by its fruits. It is but proper that a publication should be always known by the worth of its substance and nothing else. Emphasis on quantity severely damages quality of work. The scholars indulge into academic jugglery to win the rattrace. Consequently, research has ceased to be a quest for and conquest of knowledge. Research has become a ritual and books are drab drudgeries.

At present the top brass is keen to evaluate those below but claim immunity from evaluation for themselves. Their claim is not based upon excellence to their credit but upon the positions they hold and their positions are the doles from their patrons. Evaluation at fixed intervals is a pre-condition for continuation of excellence. The evaluation can bear fruits only when the evaluators and the evaluated evaluate one another in an open assembly. The evaluation proceedings should be taped and given to the parties concerned. Any other procedure of evaluation would not be fair. There must be code of conduct not only for teachers but also for the principals, vice-chancellors, college managements and the members of the university bodies. The temples of learning would be fine places only when the priests practise the sermons they preach to the flock. None would question the need for refresher courses and academic staff colleges. What must be questioned is their organisation. Would they freshen the minds of participants? Would they provide insights into nuances of knowledge? Our experience of such courses is disheartening. The greatest course of scholarship in Swaraj is imitation. To be in touch with the latest developments in any field means echoing what western scholars say or write. Mastery of western jargon passes for an achievement. No wonder, in the world of knowledge, India is a client state. The academic staff colleges of imitation. The credentials of should not become the schools their faculty should be such as to inspire the participants. Otherwise it would be yet another wastage of valuable public money on parasites in the name of quality of higher education.

Standards

We have no definite standards to evaluate excellence. Hence connections and right contacts decide the prizes. Those who get them are rarely known for excellence. 'Eminence' is a matter of opinion and the fiat of authorities sets the seal. Therefore, the scholars concentrate on humouring the powers that be at political level and the authorities that presently we have no criteria to determine eminence and promise to frame them soon. The Government would be well advised to circulate their criteria to the teaching fraternity and invite its reactions before their final adoption. Initially, the Government propose to have one hundred Professors of Eminence. Let these hundred be not dross but pure gold.

Whilst framing and adopting the criteria of eminence, the academic community should be vigilant to see that the pretenders, who dominate our academic life, do not succeed in imposing their reflexes as the standards for others. Such criteria as training or teaching in so-called prestigious universities or publications in so-called prestigious journals or attending international conferences are projected as a proof of eminence. They are only proof of inferiority complex. Basking in the reflected glory of others is a proof not of excellence but of decay. As Aurobindo put it 'if an ancient Indian of the time of the Upanishad, of the

Buddha or the later classical age were to be set down in modern India he would be amazed by the extent of the mental poverty, the cessation of science, the sterility of art and the feebleness of the creative intuition'.

Knowledge

There are no Meccas in the world of knowledge. With proper environment and opportunities, knowledge flourishes anywhere. Shankar and Socrates, Bhaskar and Newton, Kalhana and Carlyle had neither had neither training abroad nor labourious publications to their credit. They and their likes are real contributors to knowledge. Their works stand the test of scholarship whereas publications of persons belonging to prestigious universities and more prestigious centres and institutes collect dust in the libraries which buy them out of pity for the book-sellers. True scholar's approach to knowledge would be like Mahatma Gandhi's approach to cultures. Gandhi said 'I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.' Due to the indifference of Indian academic community, the Delhi-based academics have successfully posed as the custodians of the standards of education in India. It is time to explode this myth. Those seeking a rise through the favours of Delhi Durbar are obliged to crowd in the capital of country. It is a gross mistake to think that intellectuals in India are to be found only in and around Delhi.

In India the best schemes are sabotaged during their implementation. It appears that under the new scheme, the appointment of the Professors of Eminence and the Vice-Chancellors would be done by the politicians in power. The university authorities and the college managements would be the arbiters of the fate of other categories. The academic community, therefore, should explain to the society what needs to be done.

Our first need is to fix criteria and devise definite standards and apply them to all from top to bottom without any exception. The standards should be in clear, concise and precise words having one and the same interpretation. The application of standards should not be left to the discretion of any authority. Natural classification of intellect is mediocrity, talent and eminence. Everywhere in the world, majority is mediocrity. One need not be sorry for being mediocre. One should be thoroughly ashamed to pretend what one is not. Indian academic world is full of pretenders. Hierarchy compels many to be pretentious. The dividing line between mediocrity and talent is very thin. Mediocrity with diligence and perseverance becomes talent. The vital difference is between these two on side and eminence on the other.

Our second need is one and the same running pay scale for college and university teachers. It does justice to mediocrity, talent and eminence. The Government of India are opposed to the running scale on the grounds that hierarchy is the only protector of standards. If one asks which standards, the Government have no answer. Fact of matter is that the hierarchy degrades scholarship and destroys excellence. Hierarchy converts scholars into the pedlars of patronage and the beggars of positions. It is submitted that there could be one running scale of Rs. 2200 — 150 — 5000 — 250 — 7500 for all teachers including the principals and vice-chancellors with three types of increment — normal, talent and eminence. The in-

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(Contd. from Col. 3)

increments between 2200 and 5000 will be normal increments. Increments after 5000 will be talent increments. The teachers should prove their talent during the period of normal increments. If they do not, they would not be entitled for increments till they show their talent. The eminence increment of Rs 500 will be given to a teacher the moment he establishes his eminence. It would be in addition to his normal or talent increment. Only teachers of eminence will go up to Rs. 12,000/- per month. A land that reveres Guru next to God must give befitting Gurudakshana to teachers of eminence. Talent and eminence increments would be governed by clear-cut criteria known to all well in advance. The teachers would get them automatically. Wide publicity would be given to talent and eminence increments for two reasons. First it would mean the recognition of merit.

Secondly, it will be an opportunity to doubting Thomases to verify whether a given claim is real or fake. This way, we can enable our teachers to scale the highest peaks of excellence and guarantee their accountability to the society. If the teachers do not come up to the expectations despite such provisions, society has every right to throw them out.

Grievances

The teachers should not look to the courts of law to redress their grievances because there justice is expensive and time-consuming. Our third need is the establishment of Education Council of India. Its composition should be as follows. Twenty-five per cent should be the nominees of the Central Government and the Governments of the States. Twenty-five per cent should be elected by professional bodies excluding the teaching profession. Fifty per cent should be selected by lot from all-India register of college and university teachers. No person should be its member for more than one term of four years. It should be empowered to settle all grievances of teachers relating to appointment, promotions and service conditions. It should determine the criteria and standards to assess talent and eminence and enforce them. It should scrutinize the claims of aspirants for various prizes in the field of higher education. Education Council of India should be the watchdog of everything pertaining to higher education.

Short of such steps, academic excellence in India would be only a name and not a thing. If the Government do not modify their scheme, one would be forced to infer that the powers that be are interested in the continued politicisation of colleges and universities through their patronage and they approve manipulations and malpractices within the colleges and universities.