

Deplorable Condition of Guest Lecturers in West Bengal

I aspired to teach in a college right from the time when I was in my fifth standard. My mother used to teach me and she inspired me to think in this manner right from that tender age. Unaware of the hardships that entailed this desire, I happily told everybody that I wish to become a professor and inspire countless young minds. As I grew up, I realised that it is going to be long tenuous journey towards my dream job. Getting a permanent job as an assistant professor in a general degree college is not similar to getting a job in an IT sector company just after completing your graduation in engineering. It takes a lot of patience coupled with relentless hard work for years to even come close to what you had aspired. Unless you manage to end up with one such permanent job, your wish to teach in a college gets obliquely fulfilled with joining any educational institution as a guest lecturer. My journey was also no different in that case. I started teaching as a guest lecturer in the year 2017, and got associated with two very reputed colleges in North and South Kolkata. In the first year of my job, I was just living my long-cherished dream. Teaching students in big galleried classrooms, sitting in a staffroom

with so many learned and senior colleagues and receiving so much of love and respect from people for being a college lecturer – all of these aspects of my new-found job role were keeping me on cloud nine. As time passed by, I started to see the flip side of the coin. From my personal experience as well as by listening to multiple accounts by various guest lecturers working across the state in various educational institutions, I realised that an inconceivable marginalization of the guest lecturers takes place within the system of higher education in our state as well as in our nation. According to the rules set by the system, the guest lecturers are not entitled to receive any fixed pay/salary every month. They are paid per class, that is, their monthly income is directly proportional to the total number of classes taken by them in a single month. The number of classes vary from time to time, hence the amount received at the end of every month never remains fixed. The remuneration given to the guest lecturers working in Kolkata and the suburbs for each class is even lower than the per-day income of a driver or any other daily wage earner. Yes, it is the truth. You can find out the authenticity of this claim by asking any guest lecturer in your circle. But these hapless young bright scholars have no other way but to be stuck in

this system of oppression to remain a part of the higher education system, so that their working experience adds some more points to their profile when they appear for the interviews conducted by bodies like the College service Commission(CSC) or the Public Service Commission(PSC). This constant marginalization irreparably affects the psyche of these budding scholars who are bound to lose their spirit very soon after becoming a part of this system.

The Guest teachers are young and energetic and they are always serving their respective institutions with happy and enthusiastic faces. They cover quite a big chunk of the syllabus every academic session and constantly assist the students with their queries throughout the day. They do not only take classes but do other related departmental works without raising any question, for which the system never gives any thought for payment. The respective departments have to rely on their regularity, teaching ability and complete cooperation. But there exists a terrible lack of empathy for the guest teachers who are here clearly by proving their merit at various levels and by clearing rigorous, brain-storming interviews. The guest lecturers are not doing any kind of 'charity' - they do not have any 'obligation' towards the

institution they are working for, that is often cited as a reason when their perennial wait for receiving the meagre amount of remuneration goes overboard. It is their place of work and they earn their livelihood from it.

With this sudden nationwide lockdown due to the spread of COVID 19 virus, the situation of the guest lecturers have become even more pathetic. In spite of the direction given by the Education Minister of West Bengal, Mr. Partha Chatterjee, in his press conferences post lockdown, the administration of various colleges across the state are denying to provide remuneration for the online classes taken by the guest lecturers from the second half of March, 2020. The Higher Education minister has also requested the colleges to provide pay protection to the guest lecturers in these trying times, so that they can sustain themselves and their families. In spite of relentless efforts and negotiations initiated by senior teachers and HODs of respective institutions with the administrative bodies, the guest lecturers are being denied even a meagre payment at the end of the month during this lockdown.

Sometimes we wonder whether the lockdown is just a cause or an excuse for not regulating our minimum incentive. I guess the recruiters from the college administration have just

forgotten that we exist or are deliberately trying to stay indifferent to the deplorable economic condition of the guest lecturers in this dire time of distress because these learned but 'underprivileged' scholars are the most fertile sites of exploitation for them.

The plight of the guest lecturers are like the migrant labourers and peasants of this country - they are the pillars who facilitate the smooth run of the concerned institutional bodies, but nobody from the administrative councils of those institutions bother to take responsibility of their well-being by providing them with the necessary pay protection that they deserve in difficult times like this.

As I have already mentioned earlier, there is a lot of respect and adulation associated with someone, who is teaching in a college. Students shower their love incessantly. People take you and your words seriously. These are the only two reasons to smile and be happy for these helpless, hardworking academicians who invest their blood and sweat into teaching their beloved students but then spend the rest of the time in convincing the administrative body of their respective institution that they are also supposed to be paid for the job that they are doing. Even when the guest lecturers were taking

regular classes in college, they were not paid regularly – the administration exploited them by ignoring their basic right to earn. After investing a significant amount of their time in the college every week, the guest teachers had to repeatedly remind the concerned authorities about not receiving the due remuneration. After countless pleas, guest lecturers working in certain institutions were ‘fortunate’ enough to receive their due remuneration once in two or three months. I personally know a few people, working as guest lecturers, who haven’t received their due payment for six months at a stretch and yet they have continued to contribute to the teaching process and proper functioning of the concerned department of that college.

There are many colleges in West Bengal who are not following the notice issued by the State Government regarding providing pay protection to the guest lecturers in this time of distress, until the Government resumes the process of verifying documents of guest lecturers for SACT recruitment. But unfortunately, many colleges right in the heart of the city of Kolkata are turning a deaf ear to this notice and doing what they deem fit. If such things can happen in Kolkata itself, I wonder what can be the situation in the

outskirts and suburbs whose voices never reach us? I shudder to think about the situation of lecturers who have to run their entire family expenses amidst this uncertainty. As is evident from the news published in the Bengali daily newspaper, Anandabazar Patrika on 11th June 2020, they are finding other ways of earning livelihood by either selling fruits or working as a mason.

This is how the learned academicians are being exploited by the so-called 'renowned' educational institutions, who are emerging as the true flagbearers of the tradition of normalizing unpaid labour in the higher education system for decades now.

Ananya Bhattacharyya

Department of English (Morning
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আনন্দবাজার পত্রিকা বৃহস্পতিবার ১১ জুন ২০২০

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ভাতা নেই, বিপন্ন অতিথি শিক্ষকেরা

▶▶ খোদ মুখ্যমন্ত্রী গত ১ জানুয়ারি থেকে ভাতা চালু করার প্রতিশ্রুতি দিলেও রাজ্যের অতিথি শিক্ষকেরা তা পাচ্ছেন না বলে অভিযোগ তুলল পশ্চিমবঙ্গ অতিথি অধ্যাপক সমিতি। সংগঠনের সাধারণ সম্পাদক গোপালচন্দ্র ঘোষ বলেন, “অতিথি অধ্যাপকদের ‘ডেরিফিকেশন’ বা যাচাইয়ের কাজও শেষ করেছে সরকার। কিন্তু তার পরে কলেজের ‘অ্যাক্রডাল’ বা অনুমোদন আটকে গিয়েছে।” গোপালবাবু জানান, অতিথি শিক্ষকেরা সরকারি ভাতা তো পাচ্ছেনই না। কলেজ থেকে যে-পারিশ্রমিক পেতেন, পাচ্ছেন না সেটাও। ফলে রাজ্যের অন্তত ৮৫০০ অতিথি শিক্ষক চরম দুর্দশায় দিন কাটাচ্ছেন। “পাঁচ মাস ধরে পারিশ্রমিক না-পেয়ে অনেক অতিথি অধ্যাপককে ফল বিক্রি করতে হয়েছে। রাজমন্ত্রির মজুরের কাজও করতে হয়েছে,” বলেন গোপালবাবু।

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Written by:
Ananya Bhattacharyya
Department of English

Morning Shift

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