

Faculty for hire

This has reference to the excellent editorial by Balaram¹ on the subject of Academic Appointments: Contracts and Tenure. I agree with almost all the feelings and opinions expressed in that editorial. However, having spent about 30 years in the university system, I feel compelled to supplement the matter concerned with the following points.

(i) There seems to be an implied and tacit assumption both by UGC and other such establishments that the main reason for the downfall of standards in university education is attributable to the decreasing quality of teacher's/researcher's performance. In a way, this may not be far from truth since if one looks at the annual report of any university (if they are available), it would comprise, from the beginning to the end, all the achievements of the faculty apart from some other routine information. However, it will be unwise not to take into account the administrative and admission procedures adopted by the given system.

(ii) Therefore, the concern of UGC should be ways and means to improve the quality of teachers/researchers in the university system. It requires a multipronged approach to do so. There is need for a careful examination of the existing university system. There are always a reasonable number of good quality faculty in almost every university, and in some, this number may be quite significant. The tragedy is that the conditions in the system are hardly conducive for even

these small number of people to use their full potential. Without going into the details of this complicated scenario, suffice it to say that majority of the faculty in the university system feel that they are being treated like hired labourers and do not have a real say in any of the decision making and implementing machinery of the system. There may be an apparent democracy in some universities in that faculty members are part of many of the policy-framing bodies, but in reality these bodies only serve the purpose of providing the necessary stamp for the agenda prepared by non-academic personnel. In essence and in spirit, the professors in a university constitute a dispensable community, even with the so-called permanency of job.

(iii) In view of the above, the idea of appointing faculty in universities on a contractual basis (hired basis) suffers from lack of originality and is going to inflict further misery to the already eroded self-respect of the teaching community. Would really talented and qualified people take up such contract appointments when the next door neighbour is having a comfortable job as a bank officer? Can we expect the best from such faculty appointed on contract? Can such faculty initiate any worthwhile research activity? What will be the psychological impact on these young faculty appointed on contract basis, while in a different stream of the same system or in other organizations, the recruitment policy is of

a different nature. In other words, contract appointments must be a national policy. They may have undesirable effects if applied and experimented with the already debilitated education system.

(iv) The need of the hour is to bring in a change in the management of higher education, in particular, the university system. The age-old British system must be done away with. As our Honourable Prime Minister exhorted recently during the Science Congress, the bureaucracy must be minimized. Faculty must be made to manage the system and therefore be made responsible. Imaginative inputs are necessary to lift the infrastructural facilities in the university system to a level that can be shown with reasonable confidence. The system must be modified to facilitate the recognition of talent and merit and create healthy competitive spirit. Contractual appointments may have to wait for a while until the country and university system as such attain enough maturity.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 5–6.

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The mores of publishing in science

The editorial¹ 'The mores of publishing in science', suggests that Alpher was a fictitious author in Alpher, Bethe and Gamow, and attributes this information to Halmos². The truth is that Alpher is real and the work was done by Gamow and him. It was Gamow's sense of humour that had him talk Bethe into becoming a co-author.

A description of this episode will be found among other places, in an article by Alpher and Herman³.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **83**, 1429–1430.
2. Halmos, P. R., *Sci. Am.*, May 1957, pp. 77–81.

3. Alpher, R. A. and Herman, R. C., *Phys. Today*, 1988, **41**, 24.

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