

Early Career Academics In India

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Abstract

*The post-independence India consciously drew a direct connection between education policy and the need for socio-economic transformation of the Indian polity from colonial 'underdevelopment' to 'self-reliant development'. The role of education was seen in terms of 'nation building' and the role of 'teacher' was given preeminent status. The National Policy on Education, 1968, which is a landmark document resolved to promote the development of education. With the NPE and the consequent entrenchment of neoliberal policies of the Indian government, higher education sector is in crisis. A neoliberal policy framework seeks to construct a quasi-market for higher education with the role of the state being redefined from that of welfare state to that of a regulator in creating conditions, framing laws and institutions necessary for the operation of market (Olssen et al 2004:136- 137). From the 1980s, it has been a worldwide trend for universities to adopt commercial models of knowledge, skills, curriculum, finance, accounting, and management organisation. Under the influence of neo-liberal ideology, government policy has deliberately facilitated the "commercialization" of universities. Governments have increasingly seen universities as economic institutions serving economic goals, specifically, power and profits in the global, knowledge economy. They have, therefore, required them to become more "accountable"; to be managed like businesses; to measure research and curricula in terms of their cost and commercial impact; **to rely more heavily on larger classes and part-time faculty**. In light of the above this paper explores the challenges in the life of 'early career academics in India' popularly known as Adhoc, guest or contractual teachers particularly in context of quality measuring indexes such as API and PBAS. The academic workforce needs to be strengthened by some measures highlighted in the paper.*

Key Words: adhoc, neoliberalism, planning, API, Indian higher Education

According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a teacher "must be a committed man, committed to faith in the future of man, in the future of humanity, in the future of the country and the world." The profession of a teacher "should not be reduced to a trade; it is a calling, a vocation, a mission." Teachers, according to Dr. Radhakrishnan, must impart to the students "zest for new experience, love for adventure in knowledge." Love of the pupils is therefore the first essential quality of a teacher. Teachers must try to understand their pupils – their needs, their interests, their abilities, their wishes, their attitudes and their problems (qtd. In Shivendra. K. Verma, "Radhakrishnan's Philosophy of Education," *The University News*, Vol. 28, No. 19, p.3). As the eminent educationist Kireet Joshi puts it, "if teachers are to ensure integral development of their students,

they themselves have to be trained to attain higher and higher degrees of integration of their own personalities” (A *National Agenda for Education* (Delhi : The Mother’s Institute of Research, 2000) p. 16).

Contrary to above philosophers, the 21st century, especially in the context of an emerging global society has posed different challenges for teachers. Teachers in the contemporary society need to be thorough professionals fully equipped with high academic standards, pedagogical and practical skills and ethical and moral values. The educational policy of every nation emphasizes that the quality of education can be achieved only when teachers are professionally satisfied, motivated, committed and are willing to perform for the benefit of the learners, the community and the society.

In a recent article, ‘Four months at a time’ in India’s national daily, The Indian Express, the following narratives explain the harsh realities of 4,000 teachers who have adhoc status at University of Delhi:

“I don’t know when I will be without a job. We teach children about our guaranteed fundamental human rights, about how standing up for your rights and the rights of others is what makes you a good person. But as an adhoc teacher at Delhi University, I feel like a fraud when I talk to students about these things.” “As an adhoc teacher, I have no hope for career advancement as I cannot get promotions or individual research grants. My research work will need the support of a permanent teacher irrespective of my qualification or work experience. I am not afforded the luxury of study leave” says 31- year- old Manoj Kumar.

‘Four Months’ is a period of their contract with no job security, no maternity leave, no medical leave and only one sanctioned leave per month putting these teachers at disadvantage! In the light of the current scenario, it is only expedient to examine what are the challenges, problems faced by them. This is also a global scenario. ‘The academic workforce around the world is changing, becoming more diverse, less secure and, arguably, less happy. At the same time governments expect universities to provide educational experiences for more and more diverse students, and demand accountability for how each dollar of government funding is spent’ (Sutherland et al, 2015).

It has been well documented that the first few years in an academic job are crucial for developing the skills, attitudes and knowledge that will lead to success and productivity in research and teaching. However, academic success is about more than meeting externally imposed standards in research output, reputation and profile, or about generating satisfactory student ratings in teaching. It is also about self-fulfilment (Archer, 2008), enjoyment (Lucas & Murry, 2002), autonomy (Archer, 2008; Baruch & Hall, 2004; Laudel & Glaser, 2008; Warhurst, 2008) security (Bazeley, 2003) and balance. So, how can early career academics balance their own aspirations with the expectations of their institutions, communities and students? While the work of Robert Boice (1991, 1996, 2000) on successful early career faculty (those he calls “Quick Starters”) has informed the research literature on academic success and the practice of faculty development in the United States, very little research of a comparable nature has been carried out in India.

Some of the possible questions that can be posed are:

- 1) What factors influence the success, productivity and satisfaction of early career academics in Indian universities?
- 2) What institutional and personal processes and support need to be in place to support early career academics to be satisfied and confident researchers and teachers in Indian universities?
- 3) What resources can we develop that will be of use at a national, regional and local level to support early career academics?

A growing body of international literature has looked at the identities, productivity and satisfaction of early career academics (see, for example, the 2011 special issue of the *International Journal for Academic Development*, Sutherland & Taylor 2011, as well as other work by Bazeley, 2003; Kahn, 2009; Rice, Sorcinelli & Austin, 2000; Smith, 2010; and Solem & Foote, 2004). There are also many handbooks on how to succeed in academia. However, few empirical studies directly consider just what constitutes success in academia. In a special issue of the journal *Gender, Work and Organization*, the editors note that despite ongoing investigations into gender issues in academia, most research “overlook[s] any critical reflection on the concept of success...” and they call for a “critical examination of hierarchical life and its associated criteria of success” (Knights and Kerfoot, 2008, p. 234).

An interrogation of the limited research literature on success in academia, and the wider body of literature on the experiences of early career academics navigating their way into successful careers, reveals that **success in academia is primarily about productivity and output in research, and reputation amongst disciplinary peers. Teaching is noticeably absent from the narratives on success for early career academics.** This is particularly interesting in context of India where all policy documents have emphasised the role of a teacher.

Mapping International Surveys on Academic Workforce

Internationally, we identified several projects on early career academic experiences that have been conducted on a national scale, including the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey on Tenure-Track Faculty Job Satisfaction in the United States, which has collected data on job satisfaction from nearly 10,000 academics at 149 universities and colleges in the US since 2005 (COACHE, 2010), and the National Science Foundation’s 2001 Survey of Doctorate Recipients that Corley and Sabharwal (2007) used to compare productivity levels, work satisfaction levels and career trajectories of foreign-born scientists and US-born scientists. In the United Kingdom, Colin Bryson’s *Working in Higher Education Survey* (Bryson, 2004) investigated the environmental, personal and biographical circumstances and opinions of academics at a stratified sample of UK higher education institutions, and elicited 1586 responses. In Australia, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has commissioned a number of projects on the academic workforce in recent years. In particular, Edwards, Bexley and Richardson (2011), in *Regenerating the academic workforce*, report on the findings from the National Research Student Survey (NRSS) and identify the careers, intentions and motivations of higherdegree research students in

Australia. Their report covers the views of more than 11,000 PhD and Masters students from 38 of the 39 Australia universities.

In terms of studies with an international scope, the most recent data is from a book by Bentley, Coates and Dobson (2013), called Job satisfaction around the academic world. They use findings from the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) Survey to investigate the academic profession, focussing on the organising concept of 'career satisfaction' in 11 countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, Portugal, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Academics from around the world, especially those early in their careers, are not, it would seem, very satisfied with their careers. In particular, "only 57% of academics in junior ranks reported satisfaction" (Bentley, Coates, Dobson, Goedegebuure & Meek, 2013b, p. 251).

Some of the factors affecting early career academics are:

Individual Characteristics: Family situation, work-life balance, research and teaching interests, loyalty to institution and discipline, perceived control over working conditions

Prior experiences and qualifications: Academic qualifications, Postgraduate training and/or doctoral experiences, Teaching qualifications

Structural and organisational influences: Appointment type, workload, disciplinary involvement, provision of resources, services and training, Working relationships and support (including support from Head of Department)

In this paper I wish to focus upon the structural and organizational influences in India particularly in context of neoliberalism.

Planning and Education in Post- independent India

Although it would not be incorrect to say that in India the state is the central actor in any programme for economic development, such a statement can be problematic. As Partha Chatterjee explains, "to talk about, the state as an 'actor' is to endow it with a will; to say that it acts according to coherent and rational principle of choice is further to endow it with a consciousness. How is this will and consciousness produced? These are not, one would presumably agree, questions with which the economic literature on planning has concerned itself. For the most part, that literature has taken what it calls 'socio-political' conditions as parametric for its exercise". He further explains that what the state thinks as politically necessary or feasible is 'given' to the planner; it is determined by a process of politics that is extraneous to the planning per se. Planning, is an exercise in instrumental rationality- the task of the planner is to work out the consistencies between different objectives, weigh the costs and benefits of different alternatives and suggest an efficient or optimal mix of strategies.

The post-independence nation-state consciously drew a direct connection between education policy and the need for socio-economic transformation of the Indian polity from colonial 'underdevelopment' to 'self-reliant development'. The role of education was seen in terms of 'nation building' and the role of 'teacher' was given pre-eminent status. The National Policy on

Education, 1968, which is a landmark document resolved to promote the development of education in the country in accordance with the principles like free and compulsory education, development of languages, sports, equalisation of educational opportunity, science education and research, university education etc. The NPE, 1968 states *“Of all factors which determine the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the teacher is undoubtedly the most important. Their emoluments and other service conditions should be adequate and satisfactory. The academic freedom of teachers to pursue and publish independent studies and researches and to speak and write about significant national and international issues should be protected. Teacher education, particularly in-service education should receive due emphasis”*

Similar emphasis on the status, role and freedom of teachers has been given in NPE, 1986 which states in Part IX that *“the status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society: it is said no people can rise above the level of its teachers. The Government and community should endeavour to create conditions, which help motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines. Teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of and concerns of the community. The methods of recruiting teachers will be to ensure merit, objectivity and conformity with spatial and functional requirements. The pay and service conditions of teachers have to be commensurate with their social and professional responsibilities and with the need to attract talent in the profession. Efforts will be made to reach the desirable objective of uniform emoluments, service conditions and grievance –removal mechanisms for teachers throughout the country. Teachers’ association must play a significant role in upholding professional integrity, enhancing the dignity of teacher”*

It would be worthwhile to juxtapose the vision and spirit of the committees with reference to the problems of early career academics in India which remains a serious, yet a neglected issue by the various governments in power. These have been in complete contravention to the letter and spirit of NPE, 1968 and 1986 and more so in the context of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism and Higher Education in India

The educational reforms we are witnessing today are usually attributed to the changing requirements of the economic system. This is in addition to serve the needs of the new ‘Ideological State Apparatus’, to use Louis Althusser’s term, that must come into being to correspond to the change in the economic regime. The direction of the current education ‘reforms’ is such that they serve both purposes i.e. they are in conformity with a changed totality. The hallmark of this new conjuncture is that while the state remains nation-state, capital is international; it can freely move around globally. Hence, willynilly the nation state must pursue such policies as cater to the whims and caprices of international finance capital, for otherwise capital would simply leave its shores and move elsewhere, precipitating acute economic difficulties (Patnaik, 2013).

A neoliberal policy framework seeks to construct a quasi-market for higher education with the role of the state being redefined from that of welfare state to that of a regulator in creating conditions, framing laws and institutions necessary for the operation of market (Olssen et al 2004:136-137). The main mechanism through which neoliberal economic reforms were

introduced and operated in the world has been the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) followed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The neoliberal policy agenda has spread into the education sector throughout the western world. Although the education sector was not the prime focus of IFIs until the 1970s, their view changed in the 1980s. Through various agreements (for instance, GATS, which came into force on January 1, 1995) the WTO aimed to liberalise trade in services. The immediate impact would be the privatization of some services that have so far been provided by governments. Governments would be obliged to sell off such services as housing, education and water. There are three processes of integrating neo-liberalism in the education sector:

- the educational service market is opened up to profit based educational management through international trade and investment agreement, such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).
- educational costs are reduced. This reduction often happens through downsizing, such as closing school libraries, reducing the number of special needs teachers and increasing class sizes.
- curriculum standards and “accountability” are created .But the main agenda of neo-liberalism in education is to privatize and decentralise public education.

Initially, the attempt to incorporate the neoliberal policy agenda was made primarily in the primary and secondary education sector. From the 1980s, it has been a worldwide trend for universities to adopt commercial models of knowledge, skills, curriculum, finance, accounting, and management organisation. Under the influence of neoliberal ideology, government policy has deliberately facilitated the “commercialization” of universities. Governments have increasingly seen universities as economic institutions serving economic goals, specifically, power and profits in the global, knowledge economy. They have, therefore, required them to become more “accountable”; to be managed like businesses; to measure research and curricula in terms of their cost and commercial impact; **to rely more heavily on larger classes and part-time faculty**. Reduced public funding for universities has required them to become more dependent on corporate funding and commercial endeavours. Entrepreneurial practices are adopted in many universities in which the universities not only develop profit making activities but also become business partners. **Many universities have adapted business models, cutting costs, reducing academic activities, increasing faculty teaching responsibility, and privatizing various institutional functions**. In promoting a neoliberal agenda in the higher education sector, the World Bank provided all the necessary support to developing countries. The key features of this policy are privatisation, deregulation, and marketization of the higher education sector (Goswami, 2013).

In the higher education sector, the neoliberal agenda proposes four major areas for reforms. These are efficiency and accountability of the university, accreditation and universalization, international competitiveness, and privatisation. In order to incorporate the neoliberal policy agenda in the higher education sector, the World Bank (1998) proposed ten recommendations, namely to introduce a large amount of registration fees, to charge full fees for room and board,

introduce a mechanism to investigate economic resources for student loans and grants, introduce student loans based on the market interest, introduce private companies to collect student loans, impose graduation fees and implement them, promote philanthropy, ensure entrepreneurial training for improving quality education, offer for sale research project findings and training courses, and increase the number of private institutions with a decrease in public education etc.

Due to the turn towards neoliberalism, higher education in India remains under threat

With ‘early career academics’ impacted negatively. Highlighted below are some issues:

Entry level challenges: Service conditions

- a. Continuous scaling down of workload norms, for example, the recent 3rd Amendment to the UGC Regulations 2010 notified on 10 May 2016 have been one of the most serious challenges. The Delhi University Teachers Association noted that the new workload norms would have had an adverse impact on more than 4500 posts and increased workload for all teachers which would have led to the dilution of the quality of the teaching learning process. In a ‘Meri Awaaz Suno’ meeting, Ad hoc teachers described the exploitation and humiliation faced by them in having to renew their appointment every four months, getting no increments, struggling for their summer salary and managing without maternity leave, medical leave etc (DUTA press release, July 2016)
- b. Incorrect modalities for reservation adopted by several universities had led to serious violations in the Constitutional provisions of reservation of posts for SC/ST/OBC and PWD. Parliamentary Standing Committee for Welfare of SC/ST had submitted a report in which Delhi University had been indicted for following modalities that violated the Reservation Policy of the Government of India.
- c. High gestation period in and after completing PhD.

In-service problems of early career academics: service conditions, promotions

- a. Young permanent teachers have been denied promotions. Most universities, for example Delhi University decided to apply the API scheme from 31.12.2008 almost five years before the date of its introduction on 17.8.2013! While the API system had led to a severe dilution of quality of research and teaching, and led to denial of promotions all over the country, its adoption from a back date in DU has had a devastating effect on thousands of teachers in DU who were eligible for promotion under the earlier Merit Promotion Scheme on a date between 31.12.2008 and 17.8.2013. Highly qualified teachers talked about their frustration at zero upward mobility, that had driven scores of teachers to seek better working conditions elsewhere such as JNU, Ambedkar University, Ashoka and Shiv Nadar.
- b. API/PBAS is a measure to quantify a teacher’s performance, which primarily affects young teachers. It is detrimental for healthy academic practices and antithetical to the teaching –learning process as well as quality research for the following reasons:

- Teaching contribution measured in terms of time cannot ensure quality.
- Compulsion to attend seminars and conferences for points has led to neglect of classroom teaching
- Insistence of time-bound and specified quantity of research output has led to devaluing both teaching and research. Both cannot be regimented
- Prevalent student-teacher ratio stipulation of minimum teaching hours, evaluation of large no. of students and engagement with institutional life has led to “overburdening” of teachers
- Unreasonable hours of teaching and extension activities to get points.
- Unhealthy competition to occupy minor administrative positions leading to culture of patronage
- Mechanical homogenisation and standardisation inimical to cultural diversity
- Stipulated span period for calculation of API at every stage is disadvantageous to teachers
- Introduction of student feedback and its link with promotion is extremely disabling and negative for both teacher and student.
- Recent provision(May 2016) of publishing in UGC approved journals leads to a loss of critical thinking and independent research.

c. Teacher Training: Lack of Adequate In-Service Training Programs

- There are virtually no teacher training Programs unlike Teacher Education (B.Ed) for schools
- Orientation programs of UGC simply inadequate to meet needs of new appointees. For example, detailed service rules, teaching methods. There should be specialised programs exclusively for this.
- Refresher Programs of UGC most often do not touch upon current trends of research of the subject, state of the discipline

d. No Pension Benefits

- There are no Pension Benefits for a whole generation of young appointees since 2004 which is a loss of social security for teachers.

e. Workload

- Most institutions in India have very few teachers and too many students because of which quality of teaching and evaluation is suffering. The government says it wants our universities to achieve global rankings but its policy of unhealthy student teacher puts a very heavy workload on teachers (ratio at University of Delhi of 21:1 as compared to 13:1 for average Asian countries).

Possible Solutions: Way forward

Education is the only commodity whose quality is produced in the classroom jointly by the teachers and students, and they do so on behalf of the society (Patnaik,2007). This profound statement brings to the fore the pitfalls of marketization of education. Teachers are not semi-skilled workers in a factory who are a trained to adhere to a set of instructions and deliver quality output in a system where they feel alienated from the policy makers and the authorities. Kumar (2013) argues that the teachers are often at the receiving end because of the bureaucratic attitude of university authorities and UGC. What is the way forward?

- Creation of Permanent jobs
- Availability of in service training
- Avenues of promotion to be delinked with performance based Index
- Decrease in workload for effective teaching-learning process
- Old Pension scheme may be brought back

Overall neo-liberalism represents a most dangerous threat to higher education, public life, and democracy itself. Education system must be envisioned in such a way that it can foster critical and human thought, respond with sensibility to the pupils aspirations for equitable distribution of resource, protect socio-cultural diversity and to secure democratic right guaranteed by the constitution. There is need for abolition of trade in education, abandoning so called PPP, strengthening public university, democratizing administration in education, building an education system in conformity with the basic values of the constitution. What India needs at this juncture is a plan to improve the quality of 500+ universities, 22,000 colleges along with several fold increase in public funding and the number of educational institutions in all disciplines, including professional areas.

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