

Conventionalities and answer ability in the teaching employment

V.M.Inamdar

Professor in Applied Mechanics, Walchand College of Engineering, Sangli 416415 and former Professor and HOD Structures Department, College of Military Engineering, Pune 411 031

I. INTRODUCTION

Belonging to a particular employment means a certain if not complete acceptance of the objectives, values and ethical norms of that employment. The learned employments like engineering, medicine, Commerce and law have evolved their objectives which form the basis of written code of their unbiased conventionalities. These codes demand that the specialised knowledge of these employments be used for the service of society with high degree of competence as well as with a high degree of moral responsibility. It is this moral obligation of upholding objective which sets apart these higher employments from certain other less evolved fields like basic forms of trade or other forms of earning livelihood. An employment is an occupation that a person chooses from himself according to his liking and suitability and the man in his occupational employment is entitled to adequate returns for his services, respect and status in the organisation and society. It is understood that in the employment's equitable work and ethical environment, is the simple but important fact that the call of objective duty takes precedence over expectations of monetary rewards; that the knowledge, authority and the trust reposed in the employment are not misused for purely personal gains or tools of exploitation.

The ethical demands of the academic employment are always higher in all the civilised societies. The society has entrusted its most precious resource the "youth" to this brilliant path for imparting a high level of intellectual training in specialised areas of knowledge and for developing the social and moral personality of its future citizens. This important task of education demands a higher level of ethical commitment and conduct from academics in their employment, personal and social conducts. This is why teaching has been called a noble employment.

The need for a serious examination of the ethical dimensions of the teaching employment, along with those of other employments, has assumed special significance and urgency in the present day socio- economic culture of our society. Otherwise, in spite of techno-economic material progress, we may fail to create a good society and a

happy society. The twofold objective of such an Examination ought to be,

- (i) Arousing the ethical alertness of the modern objective man.
- (ii) Delineating procedures for demanding proper answerability of different objective groups towards their nonpartisan objective and towards the rest of the society.

II. THE ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

A teacher interacts with and owes moral responsibility towards a number of different groups:

1. The students,
2. Colleagues in the teaching employment, and
3. The society at large.

In addition he also has his commitment and sincerity towards the general ethos of the academic discipline and to the particular institution which employs him. In relation to the students he performs a variety of functional roles, like an instructor in the classroom, a supervisor for project/dissertation work, an examiner, an administrator like warden, Head of Department, Staff Officer (Exam), Dean Etcetera. In all these roles he commands a high degree of confidence and authority over students. This relationship of confidence and authority can be sustained only if the teacher unconditionally accepts his moral obligation to perform these job roles to the best of his ability, and to the best interest of his students.

Thinkers on education says, "reflection on process of learning the subject matter and what is intellectually necessary to teach it adequately is crucial in improving one's teaching."

Executing the evaluations regularly from students also sends a clear message that teaching effectiveness matters, and not just in personnel decisions.

When student evaluations are approached with the intentions of improving teaching effectiveness, the focus is rightly on the students who always stand to gain from changes.

As a member of a work group he has obligations towards his colleagues and co-workers. The descriptive terms for healthy interpersonal relationships in a successful work group would be friendliness, cooperation, tolerance of diverging viewpoints, encouragement, help and guidance from seniors and due respect and courtesy from juniors. It is these qualities of work life which make a supportive work environment. The responsibility for creating this work environment and for upholding the dignity and prestige of the teaching employment lies on every individual member who takes upon this employment.

As a member of the academic community the teacher owes devotion to the fundamental academic values and ethos. These may be expressed as love and respect for learning, intellectual eagerness, pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, reliance on reason and intellectual methods of enquiry for deciding issues, objective and honest reporting of one's own work and criticism of other's work etcetera. It is the teacher's moral and objective responsibility to cultivate this academic interest and to help others to do so.

The responsibilities of a teacher extend beyond his students, institution and academic ethos. As a guardian of the intellectual heritage of the human race, he has to be alive and responsive to the problems and processes of social development. The society looks up to the learned academics for proper examination and explanation of these problems and for guidance and advice on methods for their solution, as well as for meeting the challenges of the future. They have a moral duty to exert their influence by providing their expert opinion on the plans and policies which affect the welfare and progress of the nation. In a democracy the weight of this expert opinion is an essential safeguard for the long term, overall interests of the society against the populist but harmful measures many a times adopted by the government of the day to gain political advantages, can also be observed very much.

III. POSSIBLE RESPONSES

The first need is to have proper get together for discussion of problems related to academic conventionalities. A centre of academic conventionalities could be formed at college level.

An effective step for ensuring answerability of teachers in performance of the normal academic work would be a fair system of monitoring and evaluation. Measures like student evaluation, peer evaluation, superior evaluation have become standard institutional policies in many universities abroad. Unfortunately suggestions for their introduction in our country have not found a

favourable response in the academic community. The two main reasons for this attitude appear to be:

- (i) The psychological barrier of teachers, who have always been evaluators for others, in submitting themselves to evaluation, particularly by students; and
- (ii) A suspicion that such procedures would become instruments of exploitation and harassment of teachers.

To an extent this hostile attitude exists only because these measures are seen as imposition from above, rather than evolving out of teachers own concern for furthering open mindness through self-regulation. Open deliberation in representative academic bodies could clarify many of the misgivings associated with these measures. The mechanics of implementation should be worked out by these bodies to ensure that proper safeguards are built into them so that the system serves its objectives and does not lend itself to misconduct.

It is about time that the academic employment adopts a code of objective conduct similar to those adopted by other learned employments. Mere formal adoption of a code of objective conventionalities may not promote professional idealism. We should also have an effective system for ensuring its proper implementation. Corrective measures to improve the defaulting teachers are only one aspect of the problem. Many a time's individual teachers taking a stand on ethical issues come in conflict with the administrative authorities or vested interests of pressure groups in different departments in college. It is the moral responsibility of the academic employment to support such teachers so that they are not left to fight the ethical battle single handed.

Many of the ills of the system of higher education, including the non-ethical academic arise because of the non-performance of their assigned administrative functions by academic authorities like Vice Chancellor, the Dean and College Principals/Directors. In fact, before demanding answerability from teachers, the system must demand answerability from the academic authorities. One way of doing this would be to require the academic authorities to prepare annual answerability reports which should be placed before and debated by the appropriate academic body. For example the Vice-Chancellor should prepare his answerability report outlining the institutional goals, the challenges and problems before the university, the efforts made in meeting those challenges, the results achieved and the proposed future course of action. This report should be placed before and debated upon by the Academic Council of the university. It should also be submitted to the government bodies and other funding agencies. Similarly answerability of Dean,

Heads of departments and College Principals/Directors should be placed before university.

The academic administrators and teachers both belong to the same academic employment with different functional roles. They do not constitute two different groups. However, in practice the perceptions and attitudes are somewhat different. However both groups should work in healthy, autonomous manner of self-regulation. Existence of self-regulating autonomous groups is an essential requirement of a modern democratic society. The noble teaching employment should take a lead in this direction and set up an example for other employments.

References

- [1] Positive stokes RGI group of Institutions, Nagpur