

WHERE GUESTS DEMAND PERMANENCY

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

Academic activities in government degree colleges in Karnataka have been badly hit for over 50 days, with guest faculty going on strike demanding that they be absorbed into regular service.

With only a little over 5,100 permanent teaching staff in 430 colleges, the Department of Collegiate Education (DCE) has had a tough task at hand. There are no lecturers to teach many core subjects in hundreds of colleges, even as the State government has announced implementation of the new National Education Policy, advocating multi-disciplinary studies. The colleges are dependent on the 14,567 guest lecturers who have been recruited over the years. Meanwhile, universities to which the degree colleges are affiliated have announced their timetable for semester exams. The students are worried that the syllabus will not be completed on time.

Guest lecturers have been working for an honorarium: 13,000 for those with UGC-prescribed qualifications and 11,000 for those without. They are recruited for that academic year with no promise of job security. They have often complained about erratic payment of salaries.

The lecturers began their protest on December 10, 2021, demanding that the government absorb them into government service. They held a dharna at Belagavi, where the Karnataka Legislature was meeting for the winter session in December. They continued to boycott classes when the government constituted a team of officers to recommend measures to resolve the issue.

On January 14, the Higher Education Minister announced a hike in honorarium. The two slabs were expanded to four slabs varying from 26,000 to 32,000. Those who have more than five years of experience besides the UGC qualification will get the highest amount. However, an increase in honorarium was accompanied by an increase in working hours. The lecturers, who were recruited earlier for eight hours of duty a week were told to work for 15 hours. This also meant that at least half of them would lose their jobs due to no workload. The association of guest lecturers felt that the move was aimed at dividing the unity of lecturers.

Meanwhile, the government decided to recruit more guest faculty while considering their State-level ranking in work experience, and educational qualifications. According to the DCE, more than 60,000 people applied, of which 10,636 got jobs. From February 1, the lecturers selected through this process started reporting for duty. However, this may only be a reprieve as the issue of job security remains unaddressed. The guest faculty can lose their jobs whenever permanent faculty are recruited or deputed to their post. And so they have urged the government to absorb them to fill up the vacancies in various government departments. In the Education Department alone, more than 7,000 non-teaching posts are vacant.

The government has often said absorption of temporary employees into regular service is impossible, given the Supreme Court judgment in *State of Karnataka v. Umadevi and Others* (2006). When the guest lecturers were appointed earlier, there was no set procedure. They now want to be absorbed into permanent service just like doctors who have completed certain years of service.

At the heart of the problem is the failure of successive governments to fill up teaching posts even as they opened new colleges. Guest lecturers have always been seen as an ad-hoc arrangement. The last recruitment of permanent teachers was done in 2017 and before that, in

2009. At present, the process to recruit 1,242 lecturers is on. However, the number is insufficient given the vacancies.

Guest lecturers are seen as a financially less burdensome option. However, this alternative has proved too costly on other counts.

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