

Death of collegiality.

Another day; another show cause notice threatening the faculty with disciplinary and lately judicial action. This seems to be the state of affairs at the University of Delhi lately. Consider some of the happenings in the University recently.

In a departmental meeting, some faculty members raise some genuine academic and logistical concerns about the hurried manner in which the University wants the semester system to be implemented. Before the next meeting, some dissenting members receive phone calls from university functionaries threatening them with disciplinary measures and worse. It is also rumoured that the Head of the Department was threatened that he better get the proposals passed through various statutory bodies, or else there wont be any appointments or promotions in his department.

In the most recent incident, some members of a department call for a department meeting to discuss their concerns and when it is not called, resign from some committees of a non-statutory nature like purchase committee etc. At 8.30 pm, they all get a letter from the Registrar asking them to explain why they should not be considered on strike and hence action should not be taken against them. The administration cites a completely irrelevant ruling of the High Court and also marks the letter to the Registrar of the High Court. This is not before it places, no doubt in a genuine, though surprising spirit of transparency, the said judgement on the official website.

These are but two of the most recent incidents in a long chain of events of the last several years at the University- events which started with the previous administration's millenarian zeal to impose half-baked semesterization in the University in the face of genuine concerns and resistance from the faculty. Whatever might be the merits or otherwise of this change- and there is enough evidence to show that most of the misgivings of the so-called naysayers are coming true- in the long run, the most damaging impact of the way things have been done, is the erosion of collegiality amongst the various stake holders.

Collegiality- the cooperative relationship of colleagues, historically referred to the participation of bishops in the governing of the Catholic church in collaboration with the Pope. In the context of the University, it commonly denotes the taking on board the faculty members by the University administration for all major decisions. Of course, almost by definition, the

University being the arena of ideas, there would be dissent. But dissent, discussion and debate need to be part and parcel of the decision making process in an academic environment.

The dissent and discussion that we are talking about is not just what one encounters in purely formal fora like the Academic Council with its elected representatives and nominated members. That of course has its own place. But just like any government needs to be responsive to feelings and ideas not just of the elected parliamentary representatives but the civil society at large, it is imperative for the university administration to not restrict its concerns to those raised in statutory bodies. Indeed, it is in fact much more important in the University to genuinely engage a wide variety of opinion because of the unique position occupied by the University in the generation of ideas.

But what have we been seeing? When a majority of the college teachers respond with their concerns to the initial scheme of semesterisation about 4 years ago, the University ignores these concerns. It is important to remember that a large number of these teachers sent detailed, well thought out reactions to the original proposals. These academic and logistical concerns are brushed aside as coming from people who are either “political” or “shirkers” or worse, both.

When the faculty members were reluctant to cooperate in what was obviously a hurried attempt at making syllabi for teaching in the semester mode, threats were used to get some of them on board. The syllabi were then hurriedly passed without discussion, thereby violating the spirit if not the letter of the statutes.

There are many such examples. The net result is that we see, that for the last few years there has been a complete erosion of trust between the administration and the faculty members. The faculty members think of the administration as an entity which rides roughshod over all dissent and is not concerned about genuine concerns. The administration on the other hand, wants to implement its agenda and views all dissent as politically motivated and obstructive.

With the erosion of mutual trust and respect, the scope for any genuine discussion and debate is diminishing rapidly. With the adoption of what may be called strong-arm tactics of intimidation, both formally and informally, whatever space for debate was there, is also vanishing.

And this rapid deterioration in the collegiality amongst the various sections of the University is what to our mind is very significant- not just because it leads to

an atmosphere of fear and distrust. But also because, the core strength of an academic institution is the quality, motivation and commitment of its faculty. When large numbers of them start feeling disenchanting with a system which is so totally unresponsive and in fact inimical to their ideas and opinions, it follows that the impact on the quality of teaching and research would be disastrous. The collegiality amongst colleagues, which is built over a long period, is being destroyed with serious long term consequences.