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## The Guest Lecturer

Mudasir Gul

Soon after completing his Master's degree in English with 1<sup>st</sup> class from the University of Kashmir, Abid Hussain was suggested by his teachers and seniors to apply for the post of contractual lecturer in the Higher Education in the office of the Nodal Principal, AS College, Srinagar despite the fact that he wanted to go for further studies but couldn't do because of straitened financial circumstances.

As soon as Abid received his PG marks certificate, he went to AS College, Srinagar to apply for the post of contractual lecturer. After two days, he received his appointment order of joining at Government Women College, Srinagar. At first, he was reluctant to join as he was shy by nature and the thought of teaching the opposite sex made him more bashful. But after being motivated by his teachers and encouraged by family as well as friends, he decided to join.

He joined the college on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2001. Here is how he joined. He entered the college gate at 9:30 AM to make sure to be on time and was directed to the Principal chamber where he had to wait for nearly an hour as the principal reached late by half an hour. After waiting for further 15 minutes he was allowed to meet the principal.

"Am I allowed to get in, madam?" said Abid.

"Yes, please," replied the principal.

"I have come to join as a contractual lecturer in English and here is my appointment order along with my joining report," said Abid.

The principal marked the joining report and said, "Take these documents to the office and submit there. You have to do some more formalities which you will come to know about in the office. Then go and report to the Head of Department, English who will help you in your work. And wish you all the best!"

"Thanks a lot," said Abid and went with the peon who was directed by the principal to help him.

April is the month when the academic session is at its peak in Kashmir. So, on the very first day, Abid was asked by his HOD to deliver four lectures.

Abid said, "But I am without any preparation."

The HOD replied, "Don't worry too much. Please do have only interaction with the students today and start teaching from tomorrow. But don't forget to collect copies of the time-table and the syllabus from my assistant who is sitting in the side room."



Abid received the time-table and the syllabus from the assistant and went to deliver his first lecture that was scheduled at 11:00 AM in the Arts Block (Lecture Hall No. 4). His second lecture was at 12:40 PM in the same block (Lecture Hall No. 1), the third lecture at 1:20 PM in the Medical Block (Lecture Hall No. 2) and the last lecture at 2:40 PM in the Computer Science Block (Lecture Hall No. 3). On the first day, Abid did as was told by the HOD.

In the meantime, there was an atmosphere of festivity at Abid's home as all the relatives, neighbours and friends poured in with gifts (both in cash and kind) to congratulate the family for his appointment in a government job and that too on a gazetted post but little did they know that their joy was only ephemeral. They were also very happy on account that they would not now have to move from pillar to post to get their documents attested as there was no gazetted officer within a radius of three kilometers.

Back in the college, Abid engaged the students nicely in his first and the second classes and left a lasting impression on the students in both the classes. In his third class in the Medical Block where the students of B.Sc. (1<sup>st</sup> Year) were to be taught, no one turned up in the class from the first day of the session to the last. Though Abid reported the matter to the HOD, but she took it for granted initially on the pretext of their being busy with the preparation of the Common Entrance Test (CET) as has been the practice in other degree colleges of the state to be lenient with those students. After two months when the CET was over, Abid again took up the issue of absenteeism of B.Sc. (1<sup>st</sup> Year) students but this time, the HOD avoided to comment or discuss it by leaving her office on the excuse of having an urgent meeting with the Principal. Later, whenever Abid tried to report the matter to the HOD, she evaded it on one or the other pretext.

In his last class, Abid really had a tough time as it was the class of BCA (Final Year) students who were not at all interested in English Communication class come what may. Though Abid used all kinds of motivational techniques that he could lay his hands on but all proved unsuccessful. He consulted his teachers as well as his senior colleagues but all expressed directly or indirectly their helplessness in this matter. Finally, he decided to be very strict with the students in this class and that to some extent proved fruitful, though not fully.

Abid besides the preparation for the lectures and teaching came in contact with other serious issues in the college. He came to know from the office of the college that his salary would be paid after four or five months or at the end of the session when he went there to enquire about it after he completed his one month in the college. After some months, he became aware of other exploitations from a few other contractual lecturers some of whom had become his good friends by then. He was told about the step motherly treatment being meted out to them by the college administration as well as the permanent faculty members with some exceptional ones.

“Do you know how much is our salary?” said one of the contractual lecturers.

“It is less than four times being paid to a permanent faculty member,” added the other one.



Another one added, “In terms of workload, we are supposed to deliver a minimum of four lectures per day whereas a permanent faculty member delivers only two lectures, some only one.”

The fourth one with his moist eyes noted, “The height of the exploitation is that we cannot use the washrooms being used by the permanent faculty as if we were untouchables.”

One more in the group angrily said, “And there is no provision for any kind of leave even if you are serious. We are like bonded labours”

After hearing all this, Abid first deeply regretted his decision of joining this job but with the passage of time he submitted to his fate of becoming a contractual lecturer and started his struggle against the exploitations being meted out to them.

Whenever, he raised his voice against any wrong-doing done to any contractual lecturer, Abid had to face a lot of problems from the college administration as well as the permanent faculty members. On one such occasion, he was awarded the punishment of measuring the total metres of polythene used to cover the windows of the hostel, which otherwise was the job of a class IV employee.

Finally, when Abid lost his patience of tolerating the exploitations, he wrote an open letter to the Chief Minister of the state. Here is the letter:

*Respected sir,*

*Sadly but truly, I am one of those unfortunate persons who happen to be contractual college lecturers. It may sound strange, but it is as true as death and the tale which I am going to narrate is also as true as death.*

*Soon after completing my post graduation, I got a chance to teach at a college, i.e., I was appointed as a lecturer on contractual basis and posted at one of the prestigious degree colleges of J&K. The moment my near and dear ones came to know of this, they all felt happy and congratulated me and some even brought costly presents to express their congratulations. But little did they know at that time that their joy and happiness might prove ephemeral. However, when I joined the college, I found myself in a suffocating atmosphere. There my colleagues informed me that the contract would expire after eight months as I wasn't aware of the terms and conditions at that time because I was appointed in the mid-session. Moreover, my colleagues also informed me that salary wouldn't be given on monthly basis. At first, I thought of leaving the job, but after much shilly-shallying, I decided to continue and worked there for over six months during which period I received only two months' salary which I spent on bus fare as I had been posted some 50kms from my home. I received the remaining salary in two installments in the following year. And believe me, I have not received till date the remuneration of exam duty of first year class. Nevertheless, this is one of the many facets of our government's so called*



*“Healing touch” policy. Is it “Healing touch” or “Hurting touch”? You decide. The present government is giving us jobs but only for eight months without letting us know what to do in the remaining four months. Perhaps waiting for the salary and applying again for the same job as soon as the advertisement comes out. This may sound farcical but this is a stark reality which a college contractual lecturer faces every year.*

*There is another aspect of the story which is even darker. That is the inhuman attitude, in fact I would say callousness, which we face on the part of permanent employees (both teaching and non-teaching), obviously not all of them but majority. Though there are many cruelties which we face but the gravest amongst them I think is the work-load. The moment, a contractual lecturer joins, he is asked to deliver four lectures per day; sometimes at a stretch. They (the permanent teaching faculty) ask that a contractual lecturer has to deliver four lectures per day. Is it a Divine Edict or an order issued by the Higher Education Department? On the other hand, the irony is that they themselves deliver only two lectures per day. In fact, some only one despite the fact that they are holding a permanent job and receive hefty salaries as per UGC norms.*

*One more cruelty which merits attention is that we are bereft of any kind of provision for leave. If a contractual lecturer falls ill, s/he has to first attend the duty and then s/he can visit a doctor for treatment. In fact the condition is that if some contractual lecturer’s near and dear one dies, s/he cannot attend the obsequies before putting her/his signatures on the arrival and departure register strictly monitored by the head of the college. Now if anyone remains absent even after conveying verbally as well as in writing, s/he has to wash off her/his hands from that day’s or days’ salary just like a daily-wager labor. This is the ultima thule of inhumanity we are victims of. Are we lecturers or labours?*

*Finally, what hectors me, not only me but almost every contractual lecturer is the question what is our sin? Why are we being beleaguered from every side? Why is this step-motherly attitude being meted out to us? And last but not the least, how much time have we to face this humiliation, brutality, cruelty and oppression at the hands of the government as well as college authorities.*

*Thanking you,*

*With regards,*

*Abid Hussain*

The letter received a lot of feedback from various quarters but no response from the CM as Abid like other contractual lecturers was shown the door at the end of the academic session. However, the only thing that changed was that from then onwards he was being addressed as the “guest lecturer”.