

Student Assessment of Teachers

In spite of several policy recommendations, student assessment of teacher performance remains a non-starter. This article outlines the modalities of such a system that would begin in a phased manner in universities and colleges, with the UGC playing a central coordinating role. The system of assessment would offer a cure for several ills that currently beset the higher education system in the country.

AMRIK SINGH

Any one talking about student assessment of teachers in India invites either ridicule or criticism. "This is an American idea" some people would say. "It cannot work in India" would assert others and so on. Why such strong reactions to such a simple proposal? This issue requires some elucidation.

To be fair, one must understand the American system a little more precisely than is generally understood. In that country, student assessment of teachers (through a proforma administered after every semester) is used for two purposes. One is to find out what students think about the instruction being imparted to them and the extent to which they profit from it and the other is to use this input not only for academic promotions but also to determine how much raise in salary is to be given to a particular teacher.

Unlike our country, there is no fixed scale of pay for most academics in that country nor is the rate of annual increment certain or predetermined. Everything depends upon the performance of the teacher. One way of judging his performance is to find out what students have to say about him. It must also be added that this is not the only yardstick used. Peer judgment is also given a certain degree of weightage. So is the research work done by him and a couple of other things.

In our situation, the introduction of this system would be regarded as somewhat

far-fetched. Teacher absenteeism is widespread in our country. As to the kind and quality of teaching done in the classroom, several misgivings can be, and indeed are, expressed from time to time. With the kind of system that has got evolved, there is no way any one can find out if a teacher even came to the institution on a particular day or not.

So far no method has been devised to deal with this problem. This is for three reasons. One of them is obvious. The American system cannot be transplanted to India. It has to be indigenised, if one may put it that way. Any suggestion of a teacher – or any one for that matter – being penalised for not doing his job will not work beyond a point. In our situation, underperformance is not an offence. On the contrary, it is lived with, day after day and year after year. If this particular dimension of the problem can be taken care of, the quality of teaching will improve immensely. And hence the case for student assessment of teachers.

Secondly, we cannot have a situation where we swing over from complete passivity to unremitting activity overnight. In other words, it will take time both for teachers and students to get adjusted to the new drill in the classroom. Today a large number of teachers are convinced that they have nothing to learn from their students. As for the students, they would not deny that they have a good deal to learn from their teachers. That they have also something to 'teach' their teachers is a thought that has never occurred to them. It takes some time for a teacher

to learn that students not only 'learn' from their teachers, they have something to 'teach' them too. This notional reversal of roles is an exciting experience and should be a part of the teaching-learning encounter.

To move from the existing laissez-faire situation to one of active and productive cooperation in which both students and teachers are equally involved will take a few years before it gets accepted as a part of our academic functioning.

Thirdly, in tactical terms, it would be best to begin at the postgraduate level. Students at that level are mature enough to understand what is happening to and around them. In plain words, the switchover should begin at that level, and then work downwards. At the same time, there are something like a thousand colleges where, even at the undergraduate level, the quality of students is fairly good. It would require only a little effort to involve them in this new experiment and most of them would gladly play the game.

What about the teachers? It would require sustained effort to draw them into this exercise. They would distrust, even oppose, this system. But partly through patient explanation and partly through enforcement of the new system, things will begin to change. In the first phase which in my judgment should be spread over two years, the following developments can take place.

(a) At the end of each term, every student is asked to fill in a proforma in regard to the regularity, overall performance and several other relevant features of the teacher/s instructing him. All details like the format of the proforma, the date and time when it is to be administered, who is entitled to participate in it (more details later), reports about the safe custody of the responses and a dozen other things would have to be worked out by the principal or dean of the faculty. But the actual exercise would be done by the teacher concerned at the time and place specified and a report to that effect submitted to the authorities.

(b) This proforma, once filled up, would stay with the teacher concerned and not be handed over either to the dean of the faculty or the principal or anyone else connected with the management. In other

words, the whole thing would be a strictly private transaction between the students and the teachers.

(c) It follows that there would be no question of any kind of penal action being taken against any teacher. Data in regard to how teachers are performing would be with the teacher concerned and it would not be available to anyone else. There is no question therefore of anyone taking any punitive action against any teacher.

Somebody may turn around and ask, "Would all this effort serve any purpose?" The answer is twofold. One, all those teachers who get a favourable reaction from their students would go out of their way to share this information with their colleagues, friends, and even the principal or the dean. They would feel happy at the fact that their performance in the classroom is being appreciated. It is natural for everyone to talk of things that go in one's favour and not talk of those which go against one.

Secondly, whether we plan it or not, it would get known within a year who is performing well and who is not. Would this have an impact on those who may be described as the confirmed sinners? The answer would depend upon how the college or the university is run. If the vice-chancellor/principal does his job sincerely and functions not because he is a manipulator but because he is looked upon as the natural leader of the team, there would be no problem. But if either of them somehow managed to get that job and all that goes with it, the situation would not improve except marginally.

It stands to reason that even the most hard boiled of evaders would sooner or later feel embarrassed about the negative verdict on them. That such a verdict would be repeated term after term, year after year, does not have to be underlined. Even if the transaction is private and not public, it would have an undoubted impact.

As of today, a substantial number of people take their job casually. A little less than one quarter of them take it seriously and the system is functioning because of them. The majority would like to copy their example, adopt their approach and ways of doing things. But the negative example of the unrepentant 10 per cent or so unsettles them. What is required is how to isolate this 10 per cent of professional non performers. That quite a few of them are politically influential and are aligned with one political group or another is not entirely an accident. Hence this

proposal to have student assessment of teachers.

II

As projected here, the process would get entirely Indianised and there would be nothing American about it. If some teachers feel that this system is open to certain objections, let them come forward with their misgivings and give reasons why they find this harmless novelty unacceptable.

After two years, it would be time to move to the second phase of this initiative. Reporting in 1986, on the pay scales of university and college teachers the Mehrotra Committee had made several important recommendations in order to ensure the accountability of teachers. One of them was student assessment of teachers. This proposal was reiterated by the Rastogi Committee in 1997.

The earlier committee had recommended that, though not indigenous to the soil of India, its introduction on a gradual and selective basis would be welcome. Along with several other similar recommendations, this one too was not implemented. The earlier committee had left things to the good sense of the teachers. However almost nothing got done. Returning to this issue, the Rastogi Committee said that there was no further time to lose or even to introduce it selectively or gradually; instead it should be introduced rightaway.

Such a thing is easier said than done. The number of colleges are so many that it needs no argument to show that the UGC alone would not be able to handle the job. Since it is the state governments which look after 99 per cent of the colleges, they will have to own up this responsibility, otherwise it will remain undone; and this is precisely what is happening. What to do in this situation?

Before everything else, the UGC should set an example. It should ensure that institutions funded by it directly, i e, those in the central universities, start enforcing it. What the UGC has to do is to make up its mind about enforcing this particular item of work. More than anything else, this single step would achieve much more than several other steps either suggested or contemplated. At the same time, it should be recognised that the UGC, as constituted at present, would talk about it but do little in the matter.

Secondly, in this unenviable situation, it can at least resolve upon one thing. The

next revision of scales, still several years away, should be made contingent on the introduction of this system. Indeed such a statement should come from the minister of HRD rather than the UGC. In the ultimate analysis, it is all a question of what is generally described as the political will. If everything around us is administered casually, to expect the UGC to function differently would be hoping against hope.

But surely the UGC can do one thing. This condition can be made mandatory wherever and whenever a grant is given. Every grant, sanctioned and released should be subject to certain conditions. Why cannot student assessment of teachers be one of the conditions? This is not all that difficult, as some people think. Once the UGC finetunes its conditions of grant, the rest would follow almost automatically. There would be problems about the follow up. But that is an issue which requires to be discussed in some detail.

III

The argument put forward so far amounts to this: the system of teacher assessment needs to be introduced but it is not advisable to rush headlong into it. There are two principal reasons why this system cannot be introduced rightaway. The most important of them is the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Despite the same scale of pay for both categories of teachers, they are to be distinguished from each other in respect of the background of their students, their earlier track record, level of instruction and career expectations.

At the postgraduate level, it can be introduced rightaway and indeed it should be made mandatory. Two-thirds of those enrolled at the postgraduate level are enrolled in colleges. A substantial number of these colleges do not perform well though there is no reason why they should not. Student assessment of teachers at that level would in any case for that reason alone improve things. Since this category of colleges are likely to receive a grant from the UGC, to insist upon this precondition, as suggested above, should neither be difficult nor unfeasible.

At the undergraduate level however, things are different. The situation is far from uniform throughout the country. In most states, students are anything but serious about what they are doing. A large number of them join college not because

they are interested in pursuing higher studies or are even hopeful about securing a job eventually. They join college because this is the only alternative available to them.

The tuition fee at this level is so low that not many people think twice before joining college. More than that, colleges come to be established not always because there is a demand for them but for all kinds of other, generally political, reasons. Quite a proportion of these undergraduate colleges do not even have adequate student strength. They therefore are inclined to admit whoever comes along. Approximately half the colleges affiliated to different universities are ineligible for UGC grant. The latter has laid down certain minimum conditions for this purpose but almost half the colleges are unable to fulfil them.

To ask these undergraduate students to assess the teaching performance of their teachers would not be exactly the right thing to do. As one of the teachers put it graphically, it would amount to letting a monkey use the shaving blade; the monkey would not know how and where to use it. Nor can it be ruled out that such students will not sometimes be manipulated by clever individuals. In other words, a certain element of selectivity would have to be introduced.

Secondly, and this is logical without question, the right thing for the UGC to do would be to set up a committee with some experienced persons and a select group of teachers to thresh out these issues in detail. Hopefully, they will come up with a set of recommendations which would take into account the differing conditions of colleges, the state of development of the area in which the college is located and so on. Student assessment must be made mandatory in certain circumstances. At the same time, some colleges may be exempted from the operation of this particular provision for a stated period of time and for reasons to be made public. For how long and subject to what conditions are issues to which the UGC committee should provide an answer. But there should be no question of any university or university-level institution being exempted.

The experience of one of the leading colleges of Tamil Nadu, Loyola College, Madras, struck me as particularly noteworthy and may be referred to here. Like some other colleges in the country, it started following the same format of assessment which others were following. With the

passage of time, it came to be seen that the opinion expressed by the student, even though completely anonymous, could not be taken as its face value. If a student was himself absent, how could he sit in judgment over a teacher? Eventually the college came to the conclusion that only those students may be asked for their opinion whose bonafides were impeccable. How to convert their bonafides into a mathematical formula? The answer was that full value should be attached only to the opinion of those students who had attended 80 per cent of the classes. That in consequence of this decision, students take their attendance in the class much more seriously than before goes without saying.

IV

What weightage is to be given to student assessment of teachers? The obvious answer is: in whatever way the weightage is eventually quantified. At the postgraduate level, the weightage should be substantial. By that time, students are fairly mature, have had exposure to college education for a number of years and, all said and done, do not generally join a postgraduate course because they have nothing else to do. This last statement may not be true in certain individual cases but is true as a whole.

At the undergraduate stage, wherever this system is enforced; the weightage cannot be particularly high, at least to start with. It may be one-third in the first year of the college. In the second year, it may be raised to one-half and, in the third year, what students have to say may carry something like two-thirds weightage. Even this cannot be enforced rightaway. The introduction of the system will have to be preceded by a certain degree of systematic and sustained student education. As of today, our students are not accustomed to this mode of working which involves the simultaneous assessment of the teachers who instruct them. Clearly, they have first to be educated about the whole concept, then introduce it gradually and it is only after this that it can be enforced. Once introduced, it would be found that there is no more decisive mode of assessing teachers' work than to go by what the students have to say.

Sometimes students are carried away by a particular teacher's style of delivery, his ability to handle people and similar social skills. But these personal characteristics

should not be allowed to influence decision-making beyond a point. What should count is the capability of the teacher to communicate what he knows, the quantum and content of what he knows and imparts to his students and, no less important, his willingness to establish some kind of a rapport with students. In the ultimate analysis, students are the best judge of how they are being taught.

There is an additional point to be made here. While opinion may be divided as to the extent to which students still on rolls can be relied upon to return a responsible response by way of assessment, those who have passed out or are in the process of doing so or are ex-students who passed out a few years ago are in a unique position to sit in judgment on those who instructed them. A minor variation on the recommendation made by the Rastogi Committee may thus be considered as an alternative. To be called the 'Exit Poll', it may be described as follows.

When students are leaving, they may be asked to grade their teachers. Or they may be asked such questions that would bring into focus the strengths and weaknesses of various teachers under whom they have studied. Informally speaking, this is being done all the time. Older students are always telling younger students about how a teacher is to be approached, what kind of interaction they can expect and so on. In plain words, they are, even without being asked, sharing their assessment of the teachers with the newcomers.

This is how legends are born. Over the years, certain teachers come to acquire certain reputations. These are based on what, generally speaking, students are glad to say about their respective teachers willingly and even without being prompted to do so. What is proposed is a formalisation of that phenomenon.

In those undergraduate colleges, particularly in certain states, where a systematic use of a proforma may not be easily possible, the exit poll system may be tried out with profit.

V

That the UGC itself has been passive about the whole thing so far should be clear from one single fact. At no stage has the UGC gone into this issue with any degree of depth or thoroughness. Committees appointed by it have made recommendations in their own sleepy way, and, the UGC has simply endorsed them. At no

stage did anyone in the UGC go into the question of how precisely the job is to be done. The issue of the limitations of the scheme as well as the safeguards to be provided was never gone into. But, as should be evident even from this brief discussion, the issue has many more dimensions than has been recognised until now. The distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate classes is basic to the whole issue. Once this is recognised, so many consequences would flow from it.

Not only that, a methodology of assessment is yet to get evolved. Mistakes that can occur have to be identified and guarded against. Indeed a number of other salutary safeguards can be anticipated and provided for. In what manner this information is to be used is an issue by itself. The fact of the matter is that, as in so many other things, the UGC has not chosen to go into this matter thoroughly.

Going further, it should be clear by now that unless we make a beginning at the postgraduate level, this innovation will not take off. This single fact underlines the importance of choosing the right strategy. While beginning at the postgraduate level is the obvious thing to do, there is also another minor dimension to it.

Of the three things recommended both by the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Mehrotra Committee (about the same time), student assessment of teachers is one; the other two are self appraisal by the teacher and appraisal by his peers on the basis of his published work. Both these requirements are difficult to quantify and to enforce whereas instituting the system of student assessment is much more feasible as argued above. More than that, once this particular requirement is complied with, the other two will more or less get taken care of almost automatically. Therefore, comparatively speaking, to institute the system of student assessment of teachers is not so difficult an undertaking as is generally believed and, to reinforce the first point, relatively easy to enforce. What it requires is a changed mode of thinking and a somewhat easily understood procedure of work.

Two things should be clear from the foregoing analysis. It would not be possible to enforce one uniform, unvarying system across the board. Regional and other kinds of variations and a certain degree of time differential would have to be allowed for. At the state level, there would have to be some kind of a nodal

agency to keep a tab on these things. Secondly, the UGC would have to have a standing committee to review reports received from the states. In any case, the UGC would have to reformulate the scheme as argued above and, no less important, concretise it in terms of priorities, mode of working and the eventual objective of close and fruitful interaction between students and teachers.

Its other job would be to keep an eye over how the system is evolving, what difficulties are being encountered and how these are to be resolved. It may not be out of place to add however that what students have to say about teachers would eventually come to be the single most decisive factor when it comes to how the latter are eventually evaluated.

Those who have got accustomed to a system of non-performance are not going to accept this proposal willingly or easily. A certain degree of enforcement would have to be ensured. Some kind of provision for review, etc, would also have to be provided. When it is first introduced, the system should be somewhat flexible. But, within a couple of years, as more and more experience is gained, it can be made mandatory while retaining those elements of flexibility which would make it workable as well as credible.

On a visit to Pondicherry as a member of a NAAC team some years ago, it was gratifying to discover one thing. This university had introduced the system of student assessment of teachers only a year earlier. When, towards the end of the visit, we compared our assessment of what we had observed for ourselves over three days and what the students had to say about their teachers, there was an uncanny resemblance between the two sets of perceptions.

Was it a coincidence or was there an inner logic at work? I'd like to believe that it was the latter. As the saying goes, you can fool some people for all time, a large number of people for some time, but not all people all the time. If that can be done, as they say, you deserve to win in any case. The truth of the matter is that as there can be no secrets between parents and children, there can be no secrets between students and teachers.

At the postgraduate level, if one may sum up, students seldom go wrong. Indeed their perception is unerring. Whether students at the undergraduate level would be equally perceptive remains to be seen. Once the system gets established, their judgment

would be perhaps as weighty as that of their seniors.

VI

In conclusion, the argument may both be recapitulated and expanded in this manner.

(i) The system of student assessment of teachers will have to be comprehensively and thoroughly Indianised.

(ii) It would be advisable to begin with postgraduate students who constitute something like 10 per cent of the total student strength. To handle them and the teachers who instruct them would be a manageable proposition, to start with. Even here, students would have to be educated about the objectives and the process in the full sense of the word. This whole idea of assessment by students is something so new in India that it would take everybody some time to understand its significance as also how its objectives are to be carried out. Some kind of a manual could have to be drafted and appropriate guidelines laid down. It is necessary to repeat however that to begin at any level other than the postgraduate level is likely to create problems rather than solve them.

(iii) For the first two years as suggested, teachers and students may get used to the new system. Since the whole thing is to remain confidential at that stage, a whole series of lessons would inevitably be learnt from the procedures that would get evolved. Almost everything will be tentative and it is more or less by the end of two years that a well established system will evolve.

(iv) Without the willing and unqualified cooperation of the state governments, the system will not be able to get off the ground. In a sense, this is likely to prove the most contentious part of the scheme. More than 66 per cent of the students are enrolled in postgraduate colleges which are entirely controlled by the state governments. Except for a handful of central universities, all the other universities are controlled by different states. Procedures and mechanisms will therefore have to be evolved through discussion with state governments. Let some of these state governments be represented on the committee which will be set up by the UGC. Should some of them choose to put forward any new proposals at any stage, those can be immediately discussed and an appropriate decision taken. Total collaboration between the UGC and the state

governments would have to be ensured in the way suggested here or in any other way that may be thought of.

(v) This is a task which the UGC would find it difficult to do entirely on its own. Substantial cooperation of the ministry of the HRD is imperative. In regard to several other matters, there has been disagreement between the ministry of HRD and state governments. But in regard to this matter, there is no room for disagreement or contention. What states have to do is to accept the proposal which is formulated by the UGC and the ministry of HRD. Furthermore, the central cabinet will have to take a decision to this effect that unless the system of student assessment of teachers gets enforced within the next 3-4 years, there would be no question of the next revision of scales of pay. Both the Mehrotra Committee and the Rastogi Committee had made out a case for the introduction of this scheme. But there was no follow up with the result that the job remains undone. Teachers who are not accustomed to this mode of assessment do not want to accept the system for reasons that do not have to be elaborated. If they could get the revised scales of pay without any of the other related recommendations being enforced, as has happened so far, why bother about other things? Since it is this state of mind which is sought to be changed, this will not get done without specific political intervention by the centre. While the UGC can prepare a detailed plan of action, political intervention is imperative.

(vi) Introducing the scheme even at the postgraduate level would be a massive operation and would require the whole-hearted support of state governments. Indeed the latter would have to evolve a certain system of management and control which does not exist as of today. This is where the bottlenecks are likely to arise. Let it also be added here that, if the job is undertaken seriously, the number of autonomous colleges will rise substantially within the next 3-4 years. Perhaps the number can go up to 3-4,000 by the end of Xth Plan. Thus if this system gets introduced both in university departments and the better-managed colleges as proposed, that would be a modest but significant advance upon the existing, virtually stagnant, situation. This should be the target in the first round. In the second round which will come after 2-3 years, the rest of the colleges can be covered.

(vii) Can this political intervention be challenged on legal grounds? The brief answer is in the negative. It is sectors other than higher education which were given the concurrent status in 1976. That there has been no follow-up legislation after that date is something to be deplored. As far as higher education is concerned, the centre always had powers to coordinate and determine standards. In pursuance of that power, if the centre wants student assessment of teachers to be introduced, no one can question that directive. In plain words, the states would have no legal right to disregard this direction of the union government. The painful truth is that the centre has not chosen to exercise the powers already vested in it. An initiative in this direction will be accepted by the states, perhaps after a certain amount of discussion and adjustment in terms of the local situation.

(viii) There is another angle to this issue. States have been responding to all kinds of questionable pressures, setting up colleges even for no reason other than this that a local politician wants it done that way and so on. At no stage was any form of planning undertaken. Today, almost all states have reached a stage when they do not have enough funds to meet even their existing commitments. Once, the system of student assessment of teachers is introduced, they would have no choice except to undertake a review of what they have been doing and also initiate a certain amount of fresh planning. In other words, the existing chaotic system of ad hoc decision-making will have to be, in the minimum, moderated. In about five years, expenditure on higher education will get rationalised and, to that extent, become more productive. This would be a gain of enormous importance. If, between them, the two key sectors of power (some crucial steps are already in progress) and education (as proposed now) are better managed, the performance of the states will undergo a dramatic change.

(ix) Should the proposal under discussion get implemented within the next 2-3 years, it would have two types of consequences. One would be on the student body as a whole. This issue will be taken up a little later. But the other consequences would be no less significant. To take one simple example. Today, colleges are set up without any forethought or planning. Not only that, rules regarding the establishment of colleges and their affiliation to universities are not all that precisely defined. The UGC hardly figures anywhere

in the picture. Indeed it comes into the picture when, some years later, the issue of recognising a particular college under Section 2 (f) of the UGC Act is to be considered. By then, the college has been in existence for something like half a decade, if not longer. Not to recognise it would not mean that the college would cease to exist. Since it will continue to function, this is likely to lead to further dilution of standards. The minimum therefore that would happen is that, once student assessment of teachers gets under way, hopefully, colleges would be set up according to a certain plan, the state grants would be given only on certain conditions and the policy of squeezing the universities at one time and then the colleges at another time would be given up.

The ugly truth is that there is no clear cut mechanism either for the establishment of new colleges or their regulation. Whoever happens to be in power (that refers to politicians) or in position (that refers to the bureaucratic category) takes a decision and it becomes binding on the state to keep on honouring it. The job as a matter of fact is so immense that, through the weight of sheer default, the UGC has virtually given up any intention of seeking to regulate the colleges. This is tragic from the policy point of view and indefensible from the academic point of view.

(x) Another variation of this theme might be found equally pertinent. In most of the substandard colleges, there is not even a chair and a table for a teacher to sit. There is only the staffroom to which teachers go, wait for their classes to begin and then come back after the classes are over. The staffroom therefore has a social personality but performs no other function. Nor does it have any academic context whatsoever. The situation of the college library is equally pathetic. Indeed the less said about it, the better. Students rely upon made-easy guides and other shortcuts to learning. No wonder approximately half of them fail in the examination. In some of the rural colleges and even the urban ones, most people work for only 3-4 hours per day. Nobody spends any extra time in the college. There is no occasion to interact with students even when some of the teachers would like to do so. A certain proportion of teachers are thus obliged to become part-time teachers, though they may draw wages of a full-time teacher.

When students are required to sit in judgment on their teachers, there would be something phoney about the process if the

teaching hours are so limited and interaction between students and teachers is casual. In supporting the case for student assessment of teachers therefore, one is also supporting the case for better physical and academic arrangements in colleges. The minimum requirement is a chair and a table for each teacher and somewhat fruitful visits to the college library, both for teachers and students, than is possible today.

(xi) One unavoidable outcome of the provision of some of these minimum facilities would be that the state governments would have to think a second time before they accord permission to set up a new college. The present day response in certain situations shows nothing but ad hocism. In certain states like Maharashtra, for instance, new teaching positions are not sanctioned easily. In certain other states, Punjab for example, the rate of government grant which is currently 95 per cent of the deficit is sought to be lowered. A compromise might be worked out and the awkward moment tided over but, sooner or later, these problems are bound to recur.

There is also the issue of distribution between the two sectors – universities and colleges. How much to give to one and how much to the other? A related question is about postgraduate education. Can a college insist upon a certain teaching position being filled because the postgraduate course being run in a particular department is weak? There are scores of issues like that, but most of them remain unaddressed.

(xii) Also there would be the issue of what happens to those students who do not attend 80 per cent of the lectures? Will they be permitted to express their opinion about their teachers? If they are, what weightage would be given to their opinion? There can also be alternative solutions. In most universities, the permissible limit of attending lectures is generally between two-thirds and three-fourths. What about those students who do not measure up even to the minimum requirement? Furthermore, can some other solutions be thought of? Different states while participating in the deliberations of the UGC committee might come up with new ideas. That is why it has been said that it will take a few years before the scheme gets properly evolved and suitably indigenised. In brief, instituting the system of student assessment of teachers is going to be a virtual revamp of the entire system of higher education.

(xiii) Nothing will transform the academic atmosphere and the mode of working of colleges more decisively than this system of assessment by students which will have to be imposed (there should be no doubt about it) in the manner suggested above. Simultaneously, the UGC will have to amend its rules so that all grants made by it are subject to this additional condition that whatever be the nature of the grant or its quantum, assessment by students would be an inseparable part of it.

(xiv) So far, the focus of discussion has been on what the teachers say or think. This is an important dimension of the problem without question. What about the students however? In my opinion, introducing this system would have a strong impact both on their thinking and conduct. Their first reaction might be in the direction of a certain kind of wildness, even delinquency but, within no time, the teachers themselves will bring them back to the right path. One or two incidents in different parts of the country and the wildness will get tamed! Then will follow the next phase of how to conduct themselves in a more responsible way. Both these phases

of development will take a few months to crystallise. Once things get stabilised, as they will, the atmosphere will begin to change. It would be a new experience for the young people to discover that their word counts and what they say would eventually make a difference in their lives as well as the functioning of the educational institutions.

(xv) To dwell on it any further should not be necessary. The only safe thing one can say at this stage is that this system, if successfully introduced, will bring about a striking change in the life of everyone concerned. The journey from delinquency to responsibility is a journey which is both necessary and self-rewarding. No one grows up without becoming responsible. As of today, the journey is erratic and uncertain. Once adolescents are treated like adults, they will grow up fast. There are problems which are peculiar both to adolescence and adulthood. What happens today is that adolescence gets much too prolonged and adulthood is delayed more than it should be. **EWV**

Address for correspondence:
amrik@hotmail.com