Academic degrees and unemployment

The recent notifications regarding vacancies for street cleaning/peon/porter jobs in Uttar Pradesh (UP) evoked tremendous response reflecting on the prevailing unemployment situation in the country. It is a serious matter when applicants for such menial jobs are doctoral degree holders, engineers, lawyers, MBAs and postgraduates and graduates. For instance, MBA/B Tech/doctoral degree holders were among 17,000 candidates who applied for 114 posts of sweeper in Amroha Municipal Corporation[1,2] in 2015. In September 2016, for 368 posts of peon in UP Secretariat, among 23 lakh candidates 150,000 were graduates, 24,969 were postgraduates and 255 were doctorates[3]. In Maharashtra, for porter job, the State Public Service Commission received applications from five M Phil degree holders[4]. There is no harm, if by choice, one does such work. In a social milieu where a degree is considered as a gateway to a white-collar job, graduates or doctorates applying for such menial tasks indicates their fight for survival and job security.

Though a small fraction of students may be opting for such jobs, this reflects the deplorable condition of our academic system. Obviously, there is a big gap in what is offered to have and what is delivered.

Doctorates earn their degrees after four/five years of work under a supervisor, followed by more or less similar due evaluation process. If they do not get suitable jobs, the blame should be shared by both the candidates and their supervisors, as they work in close unison. Poor capabilities of both parties concerned, coupled with unprofessional or casual approach of evaluators are responsible for the sorry state. In some cases, universities are also actively involved in offer for financial considerations[5]. If candidates with questionable competence join academics or research fields, then they would be a liability in the system. UGC's regulations to improve the situation, viz. conducting entrance exams, pre-Ph D lab courses, registration by research degree committee or by a board of study, progress reports, etc. resulted into counter effects making the system slower, and with more bureaucratic hurdles. To improve the situation, only capable faculty should be permitted to guide students with simple procedure of admission and doing away with the pre-Ph D courses which serve no useful purpose as they are not taken seriously by either the faculty or scholars. Instead, scholars should spend time in the library preparing reviews of reference books and published papers, and in the laboratories to get familiar with instruments and experimental techniques.

Liberalization in academics suddenly opened a vast field of fortune with low investment. In a short time, colleges and universities had started all over the country, many of which were not properly equipped with faculty, instruments, library and other infrastructural facilities. The nexus between such institutions and authorities made it convenient for students with poor academic credentials to get a degree. Demand and supply have forced a good number of colleges every year to either exit (100 engineering colleges in 2016) from the system[6], or turn to basic fields of science, arts and commerce. Most of the government-owned institutes are in a bad position due to lack of accountability at all levels, despite far better pay packages.

The rot in the system needs to be tackled firmly to make it accountable and transparent by convergence of approaches of all stakeholders, viz. policy makers, academic administrators, regulators, universities, associations/unions, teachers, students and parents. Identification of the malaise and corrective measures and their implementation would be a tough and time-consuming process, and doors have to be shown to questionable performers, be they institutions or individuals.

1. http://indianexpress.com/article/education, dated 22 January 2016
2. http://catchnews.com/india-news, dated 25 January 2016.
3. http://hindustantimes.com, dated 17 September 2016.
4. http://indiatoday.intoday.in, dated 21 June 2016.
5. http://dawn.com/news, dated 2 June 2013.
6. http://economictimes.com/education, dated 24 May 2016.

A. K. BIYANI

Department of Geology,
DBS (PG) College,
Dehradun 248 001, India
e-mail: biyani_ajay@yahoo.co.in

Interdisciplinary research: a twilight area in Indian institutions

Daniel and Srivastava[1] have aptly described the problems faced by expat Indian scientists opting to return to India after their research training and experience abroad. I agree with the authors that the Indian universities do not teach innovative and interdisciplinary courses at the Master's level, and there is lack of faculty positions to promote research guidance in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary areas. The authors have also proposed globalized reverse migratory scientist recruitment initiative scheme for direct admission of eligible visiting Indian scientists from abroad and persons of Indian origin.

The situation in India will change sooner or later as innovative research demands knowledge of multidisciplinary areas. For example, the advent of nanotechnology has removed this barrier of monopoly in both teaching and research in universities and paved the way for interdisciplinary research. Most universities have set up infrastructure facilities as a common pool to cater to the needs for inter- and cross-disciplinary research. IISc, Bengaluru is the first institution in India to recruit faculty in multidisciplinary areas. There is hardly any such appointment made in Indian universities and IITs. However, this practice is quite common in universities