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A Short Overview of the Dark Sides of Doing a Ph.D. in India

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ABSTRACT-

We all know that, in the academic sector Ph.D. is one of the most essential requirements nowadays. However, the journey of a Ph.D. is not good for many of the students in India as well as in the globe. Students are facing boss issues, funding issues, and many other issues that cannot be expressed in words. Many students committed suicide because of their bad bosses and lab politics, specifically in science subjects. Sometimes, it is often seen that students are doing various personal works of their bosses to get a job. In the market, oiling buttering for a position in a college, or university is a very common thing. In this regard, I am sharing some of my experiences along with proper references through this article. Maybe I am rude, but I cannot stop expressing myself. I think this is high time to raise my voice against those issues. To me, in the present scenario, a Ph.D. is nothing other than a market product. The glory of the degree is lost to money. A lot of private universities are selling degrees. It does not guarantee any job or a position in academia without proper channels to the passed-out students. Sometimes, it is often seen that Ph.D. holders are applying for a group-D government job to support their expenses and family needs. I am not lowering the value of any job in this regard but the state/country must have the capacity to absorb the passed-out candidates. Else, the concept of productive employment loses its value. A lot of young Indian doctorates/Ph.D. holders are just spending a frustrated life & no one cares about that. In this article, I am trying to give a picture of those issues.

Keywords: Ph.D., Suicide, Nepotism, Recruitment, Lobbies, Frustration

Introduction:

For those who love studies, getting a degree becomes an addiction. Those who have proper economic support irrespective of government/ privately funded scholarships, [1,2] can continue their studies up to the age of 35-40. Though, in this time of technological advancement life-long learning is a key to our survival but a student from any middle-class/poor economic background does not think about long-term study because of various responsibilities to his/her family. Traditionally, one such degree that places people in a good position in higher education or education sector is the Ph.D. or Doctor of Philosophy. Different countries have different concepts or ideas about obtaining this Ph.D. degree but I am trying to highlight the scenarios of India or West Bengal in this article. This is written entirely from my personal experiences. I have seen them happen. I have a lot of pain in writing this. I am sorry if anyone is getting hurt after reading this article.

First, those who love academics have a dream of teaching in a school or in a college, or in a university. There was a time when higher education had limited options. But nowadays it has many options and many people (if he/she has sound economic conditions as well as merit) can obtain any kind of degree very easily. I am sharing some insights with you that I have experienced in my own eyes.

Discussion-

Once, a graduation or a master's degree is enough to teach students in schools/colleges/universities. But in the context of India or West Bengal, this picture has changed radically over the last 20 years. The main reason for this is the growth of private educational institutions (Here I mean Universities) along with government institutions in various ways [3]. Many of the private educational institutions (Universities) do not provide quality education or have the proper infrastructure but many people are enrolled with them to just get a degree. I will highlight more about the Ph.D. because many people in our society have the idea that a doctorate title next to the name will bring much more respect [4]. So anyway, it must be done from one place. Many respected academicians have criticized the declining quality of research, a society filled with mediocrity, but very few have come forward to solve the issue. Because many of their students are working in these private universities. They think if they protest, either their face value will be lost or they may lose their job or they may be transferred to a different place that is far away from his/her residence.

In India, upon completion of the master's or during the second semester of the master's a student must appear in NET (National Eligibility Test), SET (State Eligibility Test), GATE (Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering), or RET (Research Entrance Test) organized by the institute to get admission into Ph.D. There are two types of posts in the NET exam. One is for a lectureship or assistant professorship and another one is Junior Research Fellowship (JRF). NET JRF qualifiers get a monthly stipend and after conducting two years of research they are promoted to a Senior Research Fellowship (SRF). Whether NET LS and SET qualified candidates are nearly the same in this respect. Though SET is only valid for a particular state [5,6]. They can pursue

a Ph.D. with institutional fellowship/ Project fellowship/ Self-funded way in full-time or part-time mode. Part-time mode is opted by most of the working professionals. This is a little different in the case of the GATE exam or other reputed university entrance exams as the GATE score is also used for admission to M.Tech. programs in various technical institutions [5]. Now let us come to the real thing. All the students who have qualified for the NET or SET or GATE exam, some of them get admission to the institution of their choice and some of them do not. They seem to have taken their careers in a different direction. We have had this thing here before, still have it, and will have it here in the future. It is desirable to have this because, without this diversity, our society will not progress. Let me say here that even in the case of getting admission to the institution of your choice, nepotism works, and for those who are not able to pass the NET or SET with their merit, the professors of the universities also provide the research entrance question (Preferably RET for Ph.D.) of their university to their in-house students. In some cases, the advertisement is just a show-off. Everything has pre-decided [7]. "Inbreeding and nepotism have for long been features of universities. The favored students go from being postgraduates to doctorates and then become lecturers, all within the same university. This has naturally had a negative impact on academic culture" [7,8]. And a group of students who have talent and money is not in favor of staying in this country at all. They are taking exams like the GRE (Graduate Record Examinations)/ TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)/ IELTS (International English Language Testing System) etc. for going abroad [9]. Now I am sharing my matter, I also had results and got offers from various foreign universities but did not go due to financial and family conditions not being compatible. Foreign universities always charge higher fees for international students and getting a full scholarship is a matter of luck. I have also seen here, all the places where there is a full scholarship there are also lobbies of bureaucrats or professors working. There is no fee required to apply to many of the universities abroad, especially in the UK. I did so. I also got an offer. Not one but many that also include Russell's group's university. But they said I must clear English qualification. I told them that I did not have enough money to take that exam at that moment, and I gave sufficient proof of that. Moreover, I have completed all the alternative formalities but they did not listen to any of my pleas.

Find the screenshot of my mail



I received such bad behavior from a World's first-class university. Maybe it was not in their rulebook but do you know what happens here? Talent is lost to money. There are so many cases like this [10,11,12]. This is not the story of mine; this is the story of many other students [13]. Many people here can say to me "you were poor, why did you like to go abroad? You could also give NET/SET or take the tests for public sector jobs." Let me tell them that neither I did not have the mindset to do a government job, nor I had the time to prepare because I needed a job urgently at that moment. Otherwise, I would not have been able to support my family. Hence, I was indirectly forced to join a job from the college recruitment drive. Why didn't I go to the NET/SET examination? I heard from many seniors that even though they were NET JRF (Junior Research Fellows) at that time, they did not get regular monthly payments. This is still common in India. Even in the top most research institutes researchers are working with huge financial stress. Anyway, they have had someone to support them at their crucial age, but I had to take responsibility of my family, so I lost interest in that aspect as well. I thought if I went abroad at any cost, my life would be better [9]. Later, I must add that while working, I cleared the WBSET exam and completed my 'Professional Doctorate' from a foreign university. I enrolled during COVID-19 time and collected data through various online forums. That is why most recruiters think my degree is invalid in the Indian context. I cannot make it clear that online data collection, and writing a research paper is still one kind of research but they avoid me. UGC in India does not grant any kind of remote research. I do not know why? Many organizations and many foreign bodies are providing remote doctoral courses. Even top-class universities (those that are in the top 50 of the QS world ranking) from all over the World support & accept remote research but in India, the recruiters/professors do not. The greatest joke is here that many private universities as well as government universities are now offering part-time PhD with higher fees (4-5 lacs package minimum) in India. It should not be good to name those universities in this article but it happens. In many cases, the enrolled scholars are doing remote research there. But when it is done from a foreign accredited university, it becomes invalid in India. Some companies are there who are doing business by writing a thesis for Ph.D. enrolled candidates in those private universities. In some cases, full-time scholars of government universities are seeking help from them by paying a huge amount of money.

OK leaving everything, what about my job? I got my degree and now I must get a job. But now I talk about all the toxicity of the recruitment atmosphere in India. Specifically, in each & every university, even in IITs & IIMs, professors are practicing lobbies. Not all are bad but many of them are doing it. Nepotism is very common here. Frankly speaking, in some cases respected male professors are taking advantage of female students to meet their frustration or biological needs [13,14]. Many students commit Suicide just because of their bad bosses. Here I add the recent incident from IIT Madras [15]. If I am not considering government colleges or universities, it is becoming very common practice in private universities day by day. I have a research plan; I want to contribute in academia as well as in research but do not get any position due to internal politics. In our state (West Bengal), recruitment from the government side is not familiar and not common. They release notifications within a 5-8-year gap and without a competent political source or lobby getting a position is quite hard [7]. It is often seen that Ph.D. qualified candidates are applying for group-D jobs [16,17,18,19] or some are teaching in part-time mode at college/university with a very low pay scale. It is also observed that sometimes people without a Ph.D. are getting recruited because of providing money to the competent authorities. Though a Ph.D. is not mandatory for recruitment of assistant professors in colleges/universities as per UGC guidelines but it matters in those subjects where competition is so high. In private universities or colleges, this nepotism,

channelized recruitment, etc. also becomes very common practice day after day. Now the question is, what can I do with my degree? How can I utilize it? Therefore, it seems clear that NET or SET qualification or a PhD does not guarantee a job in the academic sector in India as of now. Moreover, UGC has recently started a specific portal named Professor of Practice for industry experts [UGC Professor of Practice portal link- https://pop.ugc.ac.in/]. But the same condition applies to there. I do not know, where I am going. I have been teaching in a premier institute in Eastern India for the last seven years where students are preparing for various public sector examinations. The students are almost college or university passed-out students & some of them are Ph.D. holders also but when I sit for an interview for a university position, the recruiters believe I will be not a good fit as I have no experience in teaching university students. I do not find any logical reason for rejecting me. It does not feel good to be rejected for multiple times especially when you have experience and confident about your role.

This article is based on all my observations and experiences. Therefore, treat this as a paper of statement or appeal to the various research communities, vice-chancellors, teachers, professors, etc. I request my government to please investigate the matter & stop nepotism in university recruitment. Stop practicing lobbies in the name of recruitment. To maintain quality in academia, please hear the voices of candidates as well as budding researchers. I want India as a hub of Nobel laureates. I know, our country has talents. Please, respect Indian scholars, Indian Postdoctoral fellows and respect the dream of the younger generation. Give them chances, give them flexibility in research, and create more opportunities. So, we can together make our nation proud.

Conclusion:

As I said before, this article is completely based on my personal experiences. This is not the story of mine but many others [20,21,22,23]. Through this article, I just tried to raise a statement for all the negative sides of getting a Ph.D. in India. I am hopeful that this article will bring changes to the lives of many people and make our education system stronger. Moreover, I must add that UGC has recently declared a specific NET score will be used for Ph.D. admission to various universities. The outcome of this decision needs to be studied further [24]. Here I say, that teachers/professors must act as leaders to solve the issue [25]. Supervisors must know the differences between a boss & a leader [26]. Thank you everyone for reading.

Finally, from this article researchers can research on the following topics/domains further-

1. Is having a Ph.D. a reason for frustration nowadays?
2. Recruitment practices in Indian colleges and Universities
3. Possibilities of Indian scholars in the coming days
4. Impact of Indian post-docs & foreign post-doc faculties in the research atmosphere of India
5. Online University degree vs Offline University degree
6. Impact of remote Ph.D. in India even when it is not considered as valid
7. Job market in INDIA after Ph.D.
8. Ph.D. & Unemployment

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