

**Precarity and Exploitation in Academia: A Critical Study of Ad-hoc Faculty in
Shridhar's story "Diva Bale"**

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Abstract: The paper examines the precarity and exploitation of temporary faculty members in the institutions of higher learning. It investigates how ad-hoc teachers are systematically exploited and victimized in academic world. This study seeks to address pertinent questions: Are the academics generally interested in teaching? What is plight of temporary faculty in academia? What type of treatment is meted out to them in higher education institutions? In what ways are they exploited in colleges? To explore these questions, Shridhar's short story "Diva Bale" has been selected for critical analysis. The analysis of the story is based on close critical reading of the text to decipher its embedded meanings. The study reveals that temporary faculty members are subjected to ill-treatment by both the management and permanent faculty. It shows how they live in constant anxiety of losing their temporary jobs, which negatively effects their professional and personal lives.

Keywords: Ad-hoc faculty, exploitation, academic hypocrisy, anxiety for job etc.

Introduction: The story Diva Bale by Shridhar deals with the plight of temporary faculty in higher education institutions. It is a pungent satire on the intellectual bareness and academic hypocrisy of academics. The author highlights the exploitation of ad-hoc teachers who are portrayed more intellectual than permanent ones. The temporary teachers are portrayed as virtually absent in the system- physically present in the classroom and staffroom, but legally and institutionally absent from records, benefits, and decision-making. The story begins with the meeting of the Academic council of the prestigious G.G.S.N.D. college located in the capital New Delhi. Almost all the permanent and temporary assistant professors and associate professors are present in the meeting. The technical terms 'permanent' and 'temporary' are prevalent. This is a new class division in the academia. Temporary includes 'contracted', 'ad-hoc' or 'guest' etc. On such occasions, temporary teachers usually sit in a corner and become silent witnesses of the meeting. They are discussing the new circular of the university in which there is a new provision of mandatory stay of the teachers for at least five hours per day in the college. The principal of the college, Manjeet Kaur says that this situation has been created by faculty. She comes to the conclusion that there are four types of faculty members in the college: First, those who come in the morning; park their cars in the parking lot and go to handle their business. The second category is of those who go to class twenty minutes late and leave twenty minutes early after taking attendance. The third category teachers come to the staff room but do not even go to class. There are a few people who teach and come on time.... (Shridhar 240).

Through a sharp typology of permanent faculty, the author exposes the deep-rooted hypocrisy and academic decadence prevalent in higher education institutions. Sardar Devender Singh Pandher, the head of college teachers' association protests that principal is directly making false allegations against the teachers. Though Pandher claims to be associated with the progressive Teachers' Association of the University but he is also all-inclusive. The principal considers him to be 'her man' and the teachers 'their representative'. He has been elected President of the college Teachers Association unopposed for the third time. His disciples occupy the Students Union every year. The temporary teachers touch his feet thrice a day and seek his blessings.

The author highlights the prevalence of corruption in higher education system. Principal, Manjeet Kaur has a strong hold on the college Management Committee. Her husband has an export business. Every year, her husband donates equal amount to BJP, Congress, Akali and now AAP. That's why she is occupying the chair of the principal defeating the great scholars in the race of principalship. She is not afraid of anyone She gets angry at Pandher and says that she has the 'janam pathri' of everyone and can take action against them. Shridhar explains the significance of Janam-Pathri:

Someone had received Ph.D. degree by unfair means. Many had already exhausted their travelling allowance without actually travelling. Someone had been paid their medical bills without getting sick. Someone had gained commission in the purchase of chairs and tables, while someone's wife was teaching on ad hoc basis and was hoping for a permanent job. Someone's son and daughter were preparing for NET and they wanted to ensure the future of their children before their retirement. (Shridhar 246)

Shridhar lists the systemic corruption in higher education. He questions the very foundation of academic merit in academia. The institution has become a site for petty bureaucratic looting. Shridhar shows that the exploitation of ad-hoc faculty is not an accident but a structural necessity for a corrupt system. The sincere, punctual and anxious ad-hoc teacher is kept perpetually insecure because their insecurity guarantees the security and corrupt practices of the permanent faculty.

Shridhar highlights the problems faced by temporary faculty members in colleges. They remain in constant anxiety of losing their temporary jobs. There is a total of one hundred and twelve assistant and associate professors in the college, out of which more than half are temporary ones. This shows that the college is being run by temporary labour. The ad-hoc teachers are appointed for four months with a note that they can be fired at any time without any notice. After four months, on the basis of their devotion, they are given extension of service for the next four months. A gap of one day is kept in between so that they cannot take legal recourse. But it is not so easy to get this temporary job. Shridhar describes the plight of ad-hoc teachers:

Hundreds of people tried to solve the complexities to the best of their ability for each post. He would collect recommendations from powerful professors and self-proclaimed ministers. Only if they could make all the planets and constellations favorable to them, they would be able to achieve success. And after getting this ad-hoc job, keeping it safe was like flowing a river of ganga out of sand. These ad-hoc teachers had to serve with their body, mind, money and pen from the heads of the departments to the leaders of teachers' organizations who change every year. (Shridhar 247)

This clearly illustrates how ad-hoc teachers are exploited in every situation. It is a total servitude. Shridhar also depicts the difficulties of ad-hoc female teachers who are not able to get married on time. And even if they get married, they are not able to plan for the child because they do not have the facility of maternity leave. Within a second, they too are shown the way out. In the story, Principal warns temporary staff members not to let their confidence get high by getting fooled by permanent faculty members. As she threatens them, "No one of them will be of any use after four months and they will be found wandering on the streets" (Shridhar 242). Thus, their exploitation turns into servitude because exploitation is economic but servitude is existential. As the writer comments:

It was their compulsion to please the principal. All the activities taking place among the students like drama, debate, sports, National Service Scheme etc. were conducted by the ad-hoc teachers only, whose achievements were boasted by the heads of these committees who were empowered by being permanent class. It was the destiny of their class to laugh and say 'yes-yes' with smile in every situation. (Shridhar 247)

The writer exposes the intellectual hypocrisy and barrenness of academicians Through the character of Dr. H.S. Dhal. Shridhar uses him as the archetype of the exploitative permanent faculty. Dr. Dhal received a bag in an international seminar he attended seventeen years ago. He always carries that bag on which 'international seminar' is still lightly visible and it gives him the certificate of international intellectuality. He tries to look young even at the age of fifty-eight and considers himself a great guru. He is the author of twenty-seven exam notes and guides, most of which have been written

by temporary teachers. He has given a total of 237 lectures from India to Canada on the topic 'Employment Opportunities in Advertisement Production' and 'Seeds of All-Round Development of Personality'. Whenever girl students remain absent from his class, he gives the responsibility of his class to ad-hoc teacher Chandraprakash.

Shridhar highlights the pitiable condition and exploitation of temporary teachers through the portrayal of Chandraprakash. He is the perfect representative of the precarious class. He is a temporary teacher in the department of Hindi. He is always found busy carrying out the works of one professor or the other. Manjeet Kaur gives him the task of preparing a draft of an essay on the topic 'Tradition of Cleanliness in India' for her son who is participating in Inter-college Essay Writing Competition. After getting his degree and wandering continuously for almost ten years, he has got this ad-hoc job. So, he does not want to lose it. He is happy that if madam keeps requiring essays and poems every week, at least his ad-hoc job will be secure.

Chandraprakash declared himself to be the all-rounder in the interview. He writes poetry, stories, essays, criticism and everything. After his appointment, his abilities became the reason of his slavery. Last year, Dr. Dhal made Chandraprakash to write an emotional love story and got it published in his name in the college magazine. Dr Dhal got a total of fourteen hundred and sixty-five copies of that story photocopied and distributed them among the students, teachers and staff. He also received innumerable accolades. In the last three years, Chandraprakash composed in almost every genre but all in the name of permanent teachers in order to save his ad-hoc job. Two years ago, he helped the head of Department Harmanjeet in getting his Ph.D. degree, which was pending for years, by writing three chapters of it. He composed a total of thirty poems for last years' head of department, Dr. Sabarjit Singh Dhillon which Dr. Dhillon got published dedicating to the principal. And within two months of the publication of this book, Dr. Dhillon was promoted from Assistant to Associate Professor. Shridhar shows that ad-hocism is not just exploitation of labour, rather, it is expropriation of intellect and authorship.

Chandraprakash is not much worried when Dr. Dhal is the current head of the department. He is scared of Dr Gagandeep Kaur who will become the head of the department next year. She has started insisting him on teaching her class a year ago. She has already made him write three research papers for her. One day she even called him to her house to take care of his five years so Dabbu while she was going out for some urgent work. He thinks, "What else will have to be done to save this *adhocgiri*. (ad hoc job) (Shridhar 252). Similarly, in *Professor Ki Diary*, Laxman Yadav notes the pain and frustration of temporary faculty in Delhi university colleges.

Shridhar exposes the economic and academic exploitation of ad-hoc faculty. Chandraprakash is the classic "ghost worker" of academia. He is often taken by Dr. Dhal to check the copies at answer book evaluation Centre. According to the current rule, only fifty answer books of a regular course are given to a teacher for evaluation. Similarly, a total of three hundred answer sheets of the corresponding course are given for evaluation at an interval of seven days. Due to this new system, teachers have resentment because they used to earn lakhs but now, they have to satisfy with thousands only. Staying within the rule, Dr. Dhal tries to evaluate as many answer sheets as possible with the help of an ad-hoc teacher. He takes one or two classes of each paper of each course, so that he can evaluate the answer sheets of each paper. Apart from taking extra classes of IGNOU and distance education, he collects so much money by checking copies that he can easily save ninety percent of his salary.

Dr. Dhal forces Chandraprakash to first check his copies and he will come after taking tea. Jackfruit curry is favourite of Dr. Dhal. Chandraprakash often brings jackfruit curry for Dr. Dhal who ate it with great gusto and assure him of getting him permanent. This is not just a food but a brilliant sociological metaphor for the patron-client relationship in India academia. Thus, Chandraprakash's precarity makes him complicit in his own exploitation. Dr. Dhal represents the system where the permanent teacher is intellectually barren, morally compromised, and economically parasitic. His entire existence is possible only because a precarious Chandraprakash is always available to check his copies, write his guides, and take his unwanted classes. The writer portrays the difficulties faced by ad-hoc teachers:

As soon as the month of May arrives the blood pressure of Ad-hoc teachers start increasing. It is a different matter that there was no fixed date or month when they will get that salary. They remain busy in making arrangements of house rent, ration- water, fees of children during almost two months till July. Meanwhile, they remain engaged in carrying out all the tasks assigned to them by the principal and the next head of the department while beating their rivals in the job. While the permanent teachers enjoy holidays by visiting tourist places all over the country in summer vacation, these ad-hoc teachers keep roaming around the college. (Shridhar 263).

The writer comments that every year in July, before the start of the new session, interviews are conducted by the college for ad-hoc appointment. The basic objective of the interview is to investigate the devotion and self- motivation of the ad-hoc teachers. A line of ad-hoc teachers is seen “waiting to get dust at the feet of Principal Manjeet Kaur”. Meanwhile “the court of Staff Association head, Sardar Pandher is also buzzing with ad-hoc professors” and “they would have been reassured by considering his smile as an ad-hoc assurance” (Shridhar 263). Chandraprakash is little more worried and scared this year. He has to pay more than seventeen thousand rupees as EMI of the loan he took for the treatment of his father’s cancer. If he loses the job, he will be forced to commit suicide. He is not sure about the mood of principal though he had not neglected any of her tasks. But last year, Khal had whispered a few harsh sentences against him into her ears. As a result, he could not join in July and was deprived of salary of summer vacation. He managed to take some guest classes in September with the help of Dr. Dhal who requested a lot to Principal. At last, he got the ad-hoc job in January only after he worked day and night scouring the libraries and prepared such a research proposal for Dr. Harmanjeet Singh that he got two years of academic leave for his D.Litt.

The date of ad-hoc interview has been fixed and Chandraprakash sees Dr. Dhal as his only savior. It is on the request of Dr. Dhal that he brings the dust of madam principal’s feet. He also bows and prostrates before Dr. Pandher. This time too, Dr. Dhal is going to sit as a senior teacher in the interview team for reinstatement of ad-hoc and the other two are the principal and the head of the department Gagandeep Kaur. Dr. Dhal was busy in preparing the list of questions to be asked in the interview for a week. Dr. Gagandeep has assigned the task of preparing list of questions to Dr. Parvinder Kaur who had been working as ad-hoc teacher in the department of Hindi for twelve years. There is a huge crowd of candidates for the interview. He appears in the interview and is assured of his appointment with the support of Dr. Dhal. But he keeps assuring himself that he has served the college so well. He formed a Drama troupe and trained students for debate competition. This time his students have received many awards in inter-college competitions. Every student praises him in the class. So, he can not be expelled. But his name is nowhere found in the selection list. Dr. Dhal informs him that he kept his name at number one but the principal put his name at number four. Pandher’s sister-in-law has been put at number three, Parvinder Kaur at number one and Parvati Shukla at number two. If workload increases and Pandher’s sister-in-law does not join, only then Chandraprakash will be called. Dr. Dhal gets very emotional and tells:

The truth is that there was not a single candidate like you. And Pandher’s sister-in-law could not answer even a single question. She has bought and brought her Ph.D. from Sikkim. Even she is not NET qualified... I hear that both the Principal and Pandher have shares in that private university. But, what can I do? You already know that Pandher is a union leader. And if I say anything, this bastard will not even let me retire happily... Forgive me friend, my sympathies are with you. (Shridhar 271).

This clearly reflects the corruption in selection of ad-hoc faculty members in higher education. The confession of Dr. Dhal destroys the entire myth of merit. Chandraprakash’s journey from all-rounder to all-slave ends in unemployment, with only sympathy and a thought of suicide. The story proves that ad-hocism is not a temporary structure but a permanent of precarity, nepotism, and private-university-degree mafia where touching the dust of feet is more valuable than a decade of research.

Conclusion: The critical analysis of the story “Diva Bale” by Shridhar shows that ad-hoc system does not just exploit labour, rather it corrupts the exploited turning them into sycophants. Ad-hoc exploitation

is economic, academic, institutional, and emotional. The story presents ad-hocism not as a temporary employment arrangement but as a regime of *adhocgiri*- a system where the permanent faculty extracts academic, intellectual, and even domestic labour from a perpetually anxious temporary worker whose years of wandering for job forces him to think of his slavery as security.

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