

CHAPTER IV

‘ROLE ANALYSIS’ OF COLLEGE PRINCIPALS

4.1 Introduction

A ‘Role’ may be understood as a set of norms or expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position. A college principal holds a key position in the educational system, and all manifest work output depends to a great extent on his application to the job – to which are ascribed a number of rights and duties.

The ‘role’ concept was introduced into the terminology of social sciences by Linton-- whose formulation about ‘role’ was :

The term ‘role’ will be used to designate the sum total of the culture patterns associated with a particular status. It thus includes the attitudes, values and behaviours ascribed by the society to any and all persons occupying the status. It can even be extended to include the legitimate expectations of such persons with respect to the behaviour towards them of persons in other statuses within the same system.

In light of the above definition of role and in the context of the present study, it was thus pertinent to do a ‘role’ analysis of college principals (preceding the ‘Needs Assessment’ survey and the development of the module in Communication) – in terms of the nature of the work they attend to and their interaction with different people – in the overall cultural setting at work.

4.2 Procedure Undertaken for ‘Role Analysis’

The ‘Role Analysis’ was done with the help of a ‘Role Analysis Schedule’. Clearly, as stated earlier, college principals shoulder major responsibilities at the work place and have to deal with people and issues of different nature and dimensions – cutting across all levels of organizational hierarchy. This was amply evident to the researcher who visited over fifty colleges/institutes (as sampled) at least twice – and met and interacted with the principals during office hours – with

each session lasting for about 30 to 40 minutes. At twenty six of the colleges, the researcher was able to meet the principals both the times; at twenty two of the colleges the researcher met the principal once, and at two of the colleges she was unable to meet the principals at both her visits. Nevertheless, the visits to the colleges helped the researcher to make interesting observations and take notes (with the help of the tool) – which are elaborated below.

In the descriptive analysis, the physical setting of the colleges is described since it is important to understand the dynamics at the work place in totality. The general ambience, and the nature of infrastructure and facilities available at the colleges, determine to a great extent the level of morale, as also work efficiency and output of the principals; as indeed it would affect any other professional. Descriptions of colleges have been clubbed together under various Faculty heads. The analysis of the ‘role’ of college principals has been presented in detail in the summation of the chapter since there were no particular attributes that could be ascribed to the principals vis-à-vis the faculty-wise colleges that they headed.

4.3 Description of the physical and infrastructural setting of the colleges and interaction with the college principals at work

The following is the ‘Role Analysis’ description highlighting the role of the principals in the work setting of their respective colleges.

4.3.1 Medical and Paramedical Colleges

The researcher had begun her work with the first visit made to the Civil Hospital compound, Asarwa, Ahmedabad; which housed four of the medical / paramedical colleges sampled for the study – viz. the College of Nursing, the Dental College, the School (College) of Physiotherapy, and the B J. Medical College. While the whole campus was abuzz with lots of activities – (patients from all over Gujarat and even neighbouring states come here in huge numbers for medical attention to their problems) – the colleges portrayed a certain “quiet sense of importance” about them, after all they were the seat of learning of such important streams of education and application.

The Principal of the College of Nursing, a lady, had an efficient air about her and conveyed that she had been with the institute for almost twenty years and knew the place and the system so well that she never faced any real problems in the performance of her job. She further elaborated that since most of her students were young girls / women – she managed to strike a good rapport with them. She dismissed infrastructural and other problems with staff administration as ‘routine’ and conveyed that the important thing was to keep the academics going.

The Principal of the College of Physiotherapy was more forthcoming in his interaction with the researcher and conveyed that he did have some problems performing his role as a principal. Having been with the institute for over twenty five years, he said he had ‘grown’ with the job. The biggest and most difficult obstacle that he had to contend with was the ‘ego problem’ of some of his staff, he said. And next to that and more frustrating according to him – was the problem of having to deal with the irresponsible ‘absentism’ of female staff. He conveyed that he did understand the social obligations and family responsibilities that weigh heavily on working women; but what about their accountability towards the work place then? Clearly frustrated by the problem, he also expressed anguish about having to keep a calm and tactful approach all the time when the women in question had to be ‘communicated’ the problems that were created at the work place owing to their negligent and often indifferent attitude and behaviour. When questioned further he said the situation precipitated by absentism or late reporting most often percolated right down to students who keep waiting indefinitely for classes to happen, or patients waiting interminably for their turn for consultation or treatment, apart from so much other juggling of time with the administrative jobs at hand. All of this, coupled with inadequate infrastructural support, he said, often made it difficult to keep a cool head at work.

The Principal (Dean) of the B.J. Medical College was one of the busiest person visited by the researcher during her stint of data collection. A lot of students were seen walking around in the corridors, and staff was also seen making their way in and out of the Dean’s Office, as well as the other offices lined along the corridor – with bundles / files of papers in their hands. The Dean apparently had

many visitors, and the researcher after having patiently waited until the watch showed 5 p.m. (appointment time), walked into the office – to be immediately struck by its spacious interior; the Dean at a big oblong table, deeply immersed in some paperwork, surrounded by four men. Two of them were desperately trying to send across an urgent fax to Gandhinagar, one trying to make a phone call some place; and one of them attending to the Dean's queries to the work at hand. While patiently awaiting the Dean's attention, the researcher looked around the room to find almost all the information she was seeking – clearly displayed on a board on the wall. The courses available, recognized centers for internships / scholarships, list of incumbents to the post of Dean since the inception of the college; and finally a list of the college level committees for the following task areas : viz – Advisory, College Council, Action Plan, Admission Cell, Library, Medical Educational Unit, Repairs, Purchase, Auction, Condemnation, P.W.D. (Public Works Department), Institutional, Regional, Class IV, Parks and Gardens, Curriculum Planning – all of this information was put up clearly for anyone to read. Amounts of grants received and spent the previous academic year – as well as information about the financial status for the current year was also put up on the board.

Though wallowing in a spate of administrative jobs demanding his attention, the Dean kept remarkably composed, and though with a few words only – he attended to everyone who came into his room. Thus the atmosphere in the room remained amicable. It was the month of September, and central admissions to state colleges for medical and engineering were in progress (at another venue), and the Dean was often found making clarifications on queries about new admissions. Some of the other issues the Dean attended to in the presence of the researcher were .

- Signing / Passing purchase bill for some books for the Department of Pathology.
- Sorting out the problem of records of a transcript requested by a student who had passed out as early as 1977 from the college!
- Attended to the draft of a letter brought in by one of the administrative office staff; and

— Attended to the complaint of a representative of an air-conditioning company, whose grievance was that despite his job at the college being done a few weeks ago; his bill for payment had not yet been passed. (The complainant left after an assurance from the Dean that he would sort out the matter in a few days.)

All of the above gave the researcher an acute sense of *deja vu*, the administrative issues she realized were the same everywhere. It was a world of papers, documents, bills, signatures and approvals . . .

Later, talking to the researcher, the Dean explained that for Heads of Government institutions like his, there were mainly four types of communication functions :

- i.) Functional Communication with the government machinery and affiliated university officials,
- ii.) Communication on legal matters,
- iii.) Policy level communication, and
- iv.) Communication with present and past alumni students – both local, within India and abroad.

Communication at the work place, he elaborated, cuts across all levels of hierarchy at the college and he played a pivotal role in getting done all the day-to-day work requirements and the (near) futuristic planning for the institute in terms of academics as well as management. The researcher spent over an hour at the B.J. Medical College and was quite satisfied with the data collected here.

The Municipal (Corporation) Medical College (located in the Paldi area) presented a slightly different picture – in that it appeared to be a more ‘techno savvy’ place with the Dean hardly looking up from his computer to talk to anyone around him. He spoke to the researcher briefly and told her that his main ‘role’ as Dean of the Institute was to interact with people at all levels to get different jobs done; and often, he said, he found himself more of a ‘manager’ than a ‘doctor’!

4.3.2 Government Colleges

The researcher also visited the only other one Government College in Ahmedabad – viz. The Gujarat College – located in the Ellisbridge area of

Ahmedabad. Renowned for its high stature of discipline and academics since the time of the British Raj, the sprawling campus – as it appears presently – disappointed the researcher. While the red brick buildings retained their overt splendour, a close look at the grounds, corridors and classrooms, presented a dry landscape and a rather dull ambience, though a lot of students were around on the campus, and all offices functioning. The researcher met all the principals of the three colleges on campus – viz. The Gujarat Arts and Science College, The Gujarat Commerce College, and The Gujarat Arts and Commerce College (evening).

The Principals of the Commerce Colleges had one major complaint – that of having to accommodate and manage a rush of over three thousand students in the Commerce stream against hardly even half that capacity to enroll; as also having to face inadequate infrastructure in physical terms as well as lack of teachers recruited to take as many classes. This they said was the main issue looming large over them year after year.

The lady Principal of the Arts and Science College seemed more confident, disciplinarian, and confident in her stance in the performance of her role as a college principal. She admonished students for unnecessarily hanging around her office and rapped the peon for allowing the students to do so. Even in her brief interaction with the researcher she appeared in control of things, and requested to be seen again some other time for a more detailed talk.

4.3.3 Engineering Colleges

Of the two engineering colleges which the researcher visited, one was located on the Gujarat University campus, in fact, exactly opposite the main university office tower; and the other, a private institute, a long drive away on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, on the Sola-Gandhinagar highway. Both the college campuses were huge and sprawling, the newer private institute with its arched structures and well maintained patches of green exuding a fresh feel of professionalism, and the other one – more staid in its ambience, with old low, single storied, red bricked buildings (the different departments), and a few new ones hidden amongst huge shady trees.

Both the colleges had good facilities of laboratory and library, perhaps the private college having more modern and updated amenities. Both the Heads of Institute, too, one designated Principal and the other Director (private college), turned out to possess quite opposite overt personality traits. The Principal of the University College was very outspoken and talked with pride about his personal achievements, while the Director at the private Engineering College, a soft spoken person, talked about his vision for the institute and how he envisaged his own role in it as a facilitator. The college principal expressed that his main role was to keep the academics going by looking after the overall administration; and the private college director said he was in the process of initiating newer courses and facilities each year, and trying his best to coordinate seminars, conferences, interface with industry and placements for students.

4.3.4 Arts and Science Colleges

The (only) other Arts and Science College in Ahmedabad (the previous one – the Gujarat Arts and Science College already discussed earlier) – the St. Xaviers College – is one of the best and most renowned in the city. Quite impressive in its setting near the Gujarat University, its principal briefly talked to the researcher about communication on different issues with the university authorities and the University Grants Commission (UGC) as one of the key functions which he had to perform, apart from the other jobs like managing the academics, co-curricular activities (including of course interaction with teachers and students); and most importantly financial matters of college administration.

4.3.5 College of Pharmacy

In proximity to the St. Xavier's College is located the only College of Pharmacy in Ahmedabad. Predictably, a strong stench of chemicals hit the researcher as she entered the premises. The students here too (like on the Medical College campus), wore crisp white apron coats.

The principal of the college said he enjoyed his time with students and was very comfortable in his role as a teacher. He maintained a formality only when he

was in his 'Principal's office / cabin' in a managerial capacity. Otherwise, he said, everyone (specially students) could easily access him. He believed that as an administrator / and an academician, it was important to upgrade and update oneself. He said he earlier used the Overhead Projector and transparencies for presentations; but now was quite comfortable using Power Point on the computer. He said one may have to work hard, but that was imperative if one had to fulfill the many different expectations from a job like his.

4.3.6 Science Colleges

Neighbouring the Pharmacy College was located one of the two Science Colleges of the researchers sample. Surfing the net while talking to her, the Principal of the College was very clear in expressing that while he enjoyed academics per se – i.e. teaching and advanced research, he found playing the role of an administrator very difficult. He ascribed this to his personal inclination towards hard core academics on one hand and the frustrations of having to cope with the limitations within the university system/s on the other.

The Principal of the other Science College (located in the Maninagar area) which the researcher visited was a picture of composure and soft spokenness. Apparently all was well at the college; the classes were in progress, the office staff was hard at work and there was a sense of order on the premises. (Wall to wall to the college building, was also a school bustling with children.)

The principal spoke briefly to the researcher but shared very pertinent information about his role as a Principal of Science College. He said that apart from having to manage the time-table for the academic sessions in terms of theory and practicals classes, conducting examinations, and seeing through co-curricular activities for the students - it was the purchase of laboratory material and managing the funds and records of the same that became a major responsibility for him, and a peculiarity for a Science College.

4.3.7 Law Colleges

At the Law Colleges (evening) that the researcher visited, there wasn't much activity visible. The college principals, one of them a lady, appeared quite in control of things in their respective offices, one located on Ashram Road, and the other in the Ellisbridge area. They expressed that students of Law were usually pursuing the course along with some other degree / diploma or even employment, and hence their involvement was restricted mostly to the classes that they attended and taking examinations, and thus their role too was to a great extent an administrative one.

4.3.8 Arts Colleges

In contrast to the Law Colleges, were the general stream colleges – where the student population was quite high. The researcher visited four of the sampled Arts Colleges; one of them located near Lal Darwaja being a college only for girls. The other three colleges too, one of them located in the Ellisbridge area, another on Ashram Road, and the fourth in the Gujarat University area, Navrangpura; which was one of the 'better looking' colleges of all – that the researcher visited. It was at this college that the researcher found the principal out in the compound supervising the parking lot, talking to students hanging around in the compound – either to get into the classrooms or leave the premises. He was also inquiring about their classes schedule for the day, urging them not to 'bunk' classes.

The researcher was mistaken by some girl students to be a (fellow) student visitor, and they made small talk with her as she (the researcher) watched the principal 'in action'. They shared with her that on some occasions when students guilty of some mistake tried to make off on their two wheelers; the principal, quite uninhibited about it, would get into an autorickshaw and give them a chase! The principals of the other three colleges too were seen interacting a lot with students, staff and visitors. Two students were given encouraging words for their performances at co-curricular activities, one administrative staff member was allowed to go home early in order to take care of a health problem of a family member; an employee was admonished for not having opened the gate and cleaned/

swept up the premises on time; while an academic staff member was taken to task for making too many personal phone calls from office.

One principal was also found discussing in a meeting with colleagues – how the problem of waste of water and electricity on campus could be tackled. He lamented the carelessness of students in keeping the lights / fans on in the classroom despite not being in use.

The principals were also seen attending to several phone calls one after the other; having to switch talk from ‘courtesy speak’, to confirming the lecture of an invited guest, to inquiring about the health of the wife of a colleague ...; playing multiple roles indeed!

4.3.9 Arts and Commerce Colleges

The researcher visited six Arts and Commerce Colleges scattered in different areas of Ahmedabad. Two of these, one in the Raipur area, and another in the Paldi area – were meant for girls only; and the latter even efficiently managed by a lady principal.

The researcher found the principal of the college located in the Khanpur area standing at the gate of the college. He was personally checking the identity cards of students who were appearing for internal tests. Later talking to the researcher in his office, he told her that maintaining discipline and order among his students was his top priority. He said that he attended to all other matters as a principal quite ‘routinely’; but took very seriously his role as an administrative head – in instilling a sense of responsibility and a value for good education in his students.

Seated in a small ground floor office, the principal of the college located in the Navawadaj area shared with the researcher how lack of infrastructure and inadequate facilities bogged him down and made it difficult to keep things going. He also added that having to deal with problems all the time made it difficult to keep up one's enthusiasm for the job. Despite all the drawbacks, he said, he tried to do his best at his job.

The Sabarmati Arts and Commerce College, tucked away in the folds of the Sabarmati area behind the picturesque old railway station; was located at the tip of

a lane of a housing colony. Climbing up a steep spiral staircase the researcher found the principal seated in his small office on the first floor of the premises. He exchanged pleasantries and talked briefly about how he managed the college (with a relatively small strength of students) by always trying to take care of day-to-day matters immediately, not postponing work indefinitely – to enable smooth functioning of the college.

The researcher visited the ‘Rashtra Bhasha Hindi Bhavan’, the only Hindi medium college of Gujarat University located in Ahmedabad. Standing tall opposite a prestigious Municipal Eye Hospital in the Ellisbridge area, the lean three storied building was almost bursting at its seams with students. The principal spoke to the researcher in chaste Hindi, and his main problem he said was that of having to manage a huge strength of over three thousand students enrolled in the college, and being equipped with poor infrastructure to combat that. He expressed great pride though, which was quite valid, in being the head of a unique Hindi medium college which was doing its best to sustain and popularize Hindi as a language. He said he was happy to have a significant role to play in such an important endeavour. They coordinated activities (apart from the regular curriculum of classes and exams) like poetry, essay and drama writing, reading, and performance, in Hindi; as also conducting the ‘Rashtra Bhasha Hindi Parishad’ school level examinations, and organizing meetings, seminars and rallies for public awareness too, he added.

4.3.10 Commerce Colleges

The researcher visited eleven Commerce Colleges. She had a tough time of finding the college located on the (Eastern) periphery of Ahmedabad (the Ghodasar-Vatva area); an only girls college. After inquiring at several places on the way, she had found the college housed in an interior residential area, the small premises of which were abuzz with activity (There was also a school on the same premises.) Initially, a thought crossed the researcher’s mind, ‘Why was a college located here?’ But she realized soon enough that this was so beneficial to the girls of the locality who could attend classes here instead of having to commute right

across the city to other colleges. The name of the college was the name of the principal himself, and he is obviously a revered name in the field of education in Ahmedabad. He spoke to the researcher briefly and told her how after so many years in the field he was quite above so many things and just as the researcher had surmised he said that he now simply envisioned his role as a facilitator for education, particularly for (underprivileged) young girls in order to help them better their future. The principal of the college located in the Vastapur area was quite vocal about some of the problems he faced with teachers. Seated in his office was also the retired principal of the college and together they shared with the researcher information about the 'Protection Act' under which all teachers employed in the University were covered. Due to the 'protection' which they received owing to this Act, they said, it became difficult to take action against erring teachers who were falling short in dispensing their responsibilities. There were teachers who would remain absent a lot or would come in only for a few hours, or would be there in the college a lot of the time but not involve themselves as much as they should in academics or research. All this often led to piled up work and imbalance of work distribution – with the staff members who were sincere having to shoulder much more than their fair share; and most importantly, students – too often turning a disgruntled lot – not satisfied with the inputs that they got. Overall, the principal said, it became a mire of communication problems, which cumulatively led to a 'not-so-pleasant' work environment. Coupled with this was of course the genuine problem of overcrowding in commerce colleges with students enrolled in thousands, and inadequate infrastructure to cope with the situation.

Thoughts on similar lines (about the teachers' problems) were also expressed by another principal of a college located near the Laldarwaja area. He said it was a sorry state of affairs at most places and very few teachers were really academic in their inclination or sincere about their jobs.

And of course, the problem of accommodating huge numbers of students in commerce colleges was a common thread of emphatic complaint running through the information shared by all the commerce college principals.

At yet another college of the commerce stream, the researcher found the principal in deep consultation with a colleague trying to figure out how they could act on a circular which reached them late making it difficult for them to get the instructions implemented. It appears from their talk that the circular was about the ensuing Youth Festival to be hosted by the Gujarat University, and the finalization of student teams to be participating in the same; and this information was necessary to be sent across to the main university office – within a few hours deadline. Despite the pressure of work, the principal spoke to the researcher, endorsing the importance of research in Education, and the support that he always tried to extend to all activities related to academics and co-curriculum. He did not need to elaborate much on that, his actions indeed (as the researcher observed during her brief stay in the office) – did speak more than probably his words could have!

The principal of the college located in Ambawadi had a very commanding personality. He seemed totally in control of all things at the college. He took the researcher around the premises and showed her how each and every class was filled to capacity, and teachers were animatedly conducting the sessions. The parking spaces were full of hundreds of two-wheelers in neat rows. He also showed her the nicely maintained garden with pretty flower beds and trees in the compound; and also made her meet up with the security person explaining how he had tightened the security check for visitors, staff and students alike.

The example of this college was really worth emulating. Clearly, the principal played a significant role in sustaining such impressive management of the college.

4.3.11 Education Colleges

The researcher visited seven colleges of Education, one of them meant only for girls. Much to her satisfaction, the researcher found the principals of these colleges the most interactive and responsive. Four of the seven colleges had affiliated school units, hence there appeared much more activity on those premises. The 'Education' colleges are scattered all over Ahmedabad, with only one located in the Gujarat University, Navrangpura area. Two were quite far on the Northern

periphery of Ahmedabad, while another two were right across in the Paldi area – one of these two tucked away deep at the end of a row of residential houses. One of the colleges was located in the Vasna area, and yet another was (relatively) centrally located in the Ellisbridge area. All the principals talked to researcher of their role as Heads of Education Colleges – and the commonality in the job responsibility that emerged for them was that of having to coordinate exhaustive theory as well as practicals sessions for the students. Tutorials for B.Ed. and M.Ed. students had to be fitted in with school time-tables; and a number of workshops and seminars had to be organized round the year to optimize inputs for this very important stream of higher education. Many activities / projects were also taken up / supported at the schools with which they affiliated academically.

One of the college principals, a lady, even opined that since the students coming in were themselves quite serious about procuring jobs at the end of their studies, they remained a motivated lot; and thus as principals they too had to try their best to project professionalism into the curriculum and enthusiasm into its implementation as well.

The principal of one of the better equipped colleges emphasized how his being Head of an Education College was very important since he trained future teachers, he said, who in turn taught many more students, thus individuals, groups and ultimately a society at large was cultivated and groomed.

4.3.12 Self-Financed Colleges

The researcher visited six self-financed colleges, three of them offering a Bachelors programme in Computer Applications and three offering a Bachelors programme in Business Administration.

The Directors (Principals) of the Institutes (Colleges) said the main challenge they had was to cope with the expectations of students – which are indeed many more than what their counterparts in other colleges have – perhaps owing to the fact that they pay much higher fees too. The Director of one of the Trust Institutes located on Ashram Road, also a writer and visionary, expressed his reservations about many of prevalent practices in the present educational system.

He said he was very much against the 'rote' mode by which the students had to study for examinations, and emphasized that more appropriate methods of evaluation needed to be introduced. It was important he said to provide students with more avenues for exploring their aptitudes and abilities – particularly at the higher education level – so that they could make their lives holistically meaningful. It was here, he opined, that the principals could go beyond the scope of their role as administrators and influence and motivate students towards meaningful tasks in life. He said he was trying to urge younger people to take up the mantle of these challenges.

While the private institutes housed in the older college buildings seemed in their physical appearance and functioning just like regular colleges, the newer ones gave a distinctly different 'feel' (of private tuition classes?) to the researcher – clearly they were more 'modern' in their functioning with the colleges being 'new look' kind of structures, with reception centers, lifts, and all other such facilities.

4.3.13 Post-Graduate Departments

In addition to the above described forty-eight colleges, the researcher visited two post-graduate departments of the Gujarat University, one the School of Management Studies; and the second a Centre for Communication Studies. Low, one storied structures, open and spacious, nestled among shady trees on the Gujarat University campus, both institutes have over the years evolved distinct identities of their own. Of so many of the post-graduate departments of the Gujarat University, the researcher decided to include these two in her sample – since her study amalgamated the areas of 'Education', 'Management', and 'Communication'; and it was appropriate and pertinent for the researcher to elicit views and opinions of the heads (incidentally – both women) of institutes teaching these subjects.

The Director / Principal of the Management Institute expressed that as a post-graduate institute, they had to ensure quality curriculum and research, and try to help students groom themselves for fitting careers in the field. She perceived a need of better infrastructure and support from the university in order to function more efficiently and enhance better output.

The Coordinator of the Communications Centre shared pertinent and interesting information with the researcher. From her experience, she said, it was best to be 'tactful' with students – by being not too overpowering, nor too friendly or democratic. Post-graduate students, particularly of professional programmes, being of good caliber and quite mature; it always helped if one was transparent with them about administrative problems and infrastructural inadequacies. This dilutes their criticism or frustration and often helps them take more responsibility and remain co-operative as a group. As heads of such institutes it is important to be assertive in ones administrative style with people at all levels. But it is also important to perform sincerely ones own duties at the job. This way one can command respect for oneself and thus open up the communication channels. A lot hinges around the head / (principal) in such organizations, she said, for he / she can make or break the staff and students confidence and trust, thereby setting the tone and pace for the way in which work could get done. Also, by taking a genuine interest in the students' well-being and interacting with them periodically, inquiring about their progress at studies and projects, sustains their academic interest and keeps them motivated. Coordinating visiting faculty, organizing workshops and seminars, students' training programmes and internships within a limited budget at hand – were some of the other challenges – the coordinator elaborated. But, she continued, at the end of it all, when students get good job placements in media / other institutes of repute – all of ones efforts seem well rewarded; and the satisfaction of a job done well and a role enacted appropriately – upto the expectations and stature of it – though intangible at times – is something one could not describe in words. And the researcher, herself a teacher and an administrator too at one level – couldn't agree more with her!

4.4 An Overview

4.4.1 Significant Findings of Visit to Fifty Colleges

Overall, it clearly appeared to the researcher that the nature, dimensions and intensity of the problems varied depending on the subjects being taught at the

respective colleges – and the principals had to deal with the same according to the nuances of the situation presented to them.

Moreover, there were some major duties and responsibilities which created a lot of stress to college principals but which they had to shoulder in their roles as heads of institutes. These the researcher discerned from her interaction with the college principals and are as follows :

- 1) Inadequate staff and infrastructure to cope with the thousands of students seeking admission each year.
- 2) Admission time pressures, including having to cope with threats, man-handling, destruction and violence by blundering students, their leaders, and vested interest lobbyists.
- 3) Conducting annual elections for student representatives which usually whip up a lot of positive and negative emotions and passion on campus – beginning with campaigning to the time the election results are announced. And it doesn't end there, because then the problems with the Students Union and its activities would begin.
- 4) Hosting cultural events, activities, youth meets where thousands of students would gather and interact over a few days; and till all of it passed off peacefully, the principals remained under pressure.
- 5) Hosting sports events (unfortunately sports activities are usually relegated to the background) – which really need to be encouraged by college principals; but end up being a lot of work for which not all staff members extend necessary cooperation.
- 6) The main concern of all principals is the peaceful passing off of examinations – both internal and final. They said that almost every year they had to deal with delays in conducting examinations, sometimes owing to strikes by students – demanding postponement, cuts in syllabus, or full option in the question papers; and sometimes owing to disruptions in the academic routines owing to natural or manmade calamities. Conducting examinations is itself such a tedious affair – from getting papers set to organizing seating arrangements, ensuring smooth circulation of question

papers and answer books; maintaining vigilance at the time of the exams, collection of the same at the end of the exam; and later distribution of answer books for correction, and finally announcing results on time. In colleges with a semester system, all of this procedure has to be conducted twice a year.

- 7) And inextricably woven into the fabric of all of the above, in small or big measures, was the 'crime' element – and having to handle that – one of the most challenging tasks for the principals. Round the year, for different reasons; most of all for elections and examinations, the college principals have to coordinate and arrange for security with the police.

Sometimes the criminal activities of few students get out of hand, and beyond the purview of what the principals are expected to do. For example – trouble created by hostelites at the hostel (or outside), squabbles with the rector over food, admission or other matters, 'residential blocks rivalry' – which is usually prevalent since years and affects every small or big matter; theft, petty issues of harassment – specially with girls; and many such other problems. The problem of ragging encountered by new students who get admission to colleges every academic year – sometimes leads to grave consequences and is thus yet another cause of considerable worry to the principals. At a more serious level, involvement of students in incidents of stabbings or kidnappings – most of the time to vent personal vendetta are also sometimes noted. The college principals are not answerable for such behaviour of the students and consequences of the same, but their being on the college roll requires the principal to sometimes face interrogations about the attendance of the concerned students, their conduct at the college or perhaps even giving information about the people with whom they interacted on the campus.

Thus, it was often that the college principals found themselves involved with tasks which were far removed from their academic or administrative responsibilities, playing a role they would have hardly envisaged for themselves.

4.4.2 On a Positive Note

Wherever possible, the researcher had taken a look around the college premises and found that at most places general facilities for both – staff and students were (simply) functional, at some places, perhaps inadequate. There was no grandeur at any of the offices (with the exception of a few), and the basic décor and seating arrangements were simple and functional. At some colleges though, notably the private, self-financed ones, there were good library and laboratory facilities and office space; as also proper drinking water and washroom facilities.

But the heartening thing was that work was getting done at the colleges, albeit at its own pace perhaps, and the University and its colleges did provide a platform to thousands of students who passed out each year with degrees – and walked their future way. And that was ultimately the most important thing – the researcher thought.

4.5 Interaction with Retired College Principals

The researcher, in the initial phase of her study, had met five retired college principals – who gave interesting insights, provided additional information, and some detailing – which helped the researcher chisel the ‘role’ that college principal play in all its nuances.

“One has to cultivate the ‘Art of Human Relations’ in order to perform the job” – a retired college principal opined. “Communication becomes a key element in all interactions cutting across all levels of hierarchy in the organization” – he continued. He said, in a college setting, while there was ‘routine’ communication on educational / academic and administrative matters; more important, though not in direct relevance to the job, was the ‘social’ communication. He elaborated on the same saying that as a principal, one had to sometimes extend conversation with peons, administrative staff, students and teachers, beyond work, and talk to them, often even counsel them about personal and family matters. This makes them feel good and positive, and creates a bond of understanding. They thus respond well to work entrusted to them. Sometimes even parents or guardians of students may have to be called and spoken to regarding their ward’s lack of application to

studies, problem behaviour, or may be even an aptitude for other subjects or talents which may need encouragement from home.

Another retired principal, on the same lines of thought expressed that the use of 'we' and not 'I' ought to be cultivated. He said it was unfortunate that when things worked out well it would be 'I did it', and when there were problems, it would be 'owing to them' – and this he said was not a fair attitude. He further stated that if college principals remained democratic in their style of functioning, rather than being autocratic or forming a 'coterie' of few selected persons – it would help resolve problems faster and enhance a congenial work atmosphere. He also enlisted as follows some of the tasks that college principals ought to bring into the purview of their functioning as administrative heads of educational institutes :

- 1) Hold meetings regularly with student leaders, and if possible even with groups of students and talk to them on relevant issues of concern.
- 2) Hold meetings regularly with administrative staff to discuss and prioritise work and resolve problems if any; as also to encourage them to always maintain all records well to enable easy retrieval of the same when necessary.
- 3) Hold meetings regularly with teaching staff, and in consultation with them, sort out pending academic or administrative matters; and always try to involve them in time-table setting, syllabus and curriculum development, as well as other concerns or issues related to their own (leave record or research matters) or students' welfare and well-being. Teachers, if necessary, may even be counselled about difficulties they may be facing in teaching their subjects.
- 4) Hold meetings from time-to-time with colleagues teaching the same subject to share and update academic information on the same. The principal needs to make sure that he is not seen in poor light as a teacher since being a good academician strengthens his image as an administrator.
- 5) Encourage teachers and students to have meetings or interactional sessions among themselves to resolve conflicts and to better academic or co curricular activities.

- 6) Invite suggestions for library orders of books and periodicals and prioritise the same to optimally utilize available funds.
- 7) Informally talk to students and elicit feedback from them about the different subject teachers, and tactfully (through someone trusted) also for himself.
- 8) Remain open and accessible (unless the situation really needs withholding some information or withdrawing oneself from something) to teachers or other staff for their comments on decisions which he takes which impact the functioning of the college as a whole.
- 9) Give sufficient time and attention towards maintenance of the premises, and providing basic facilities or amenities to staff and students.
- 10) Should maintain his own credibility, as a head of organization and never indulge in any petty, small talk (nor encourage 'back-stabbing' / negative talk about those absent), thereby sustaining the required discipline, protocol and decorum of the office and institute.
- 11) Should show consideration towards the genuine health problems of students and staff, and concede to requests for leave or less workload or a retest / reexamination for students – if a genuine need is perceived for any of the above.

While the above mentioned were some of the points that the principals were encouraged to work on, there were some grievances which principals themselves harboured, quite a few of them with the college managements. A lot of the problems would get resolved, the principal continued, if the Management Boards kept a positive and proactive approach towards the college principals – particularly on issues mentioned below :

- 1) While principals on their own worked towards procuring and accounting for grants, the managements should be open to giving a few thousand rupees extra in times of need.
- 2) Managements should remain interested in evolving / updating curriculum and providing for facilities accordingly.
- 3) They should involve principals in meetings where policy matters are to be discussed, and give them enough say on pertinent issues, since it is them (the

principals) – who have to adhere to what is laid down and implement the same without much scope of flexibility.

4.6 Summation of ‘Role Analysis’ of College Principals

The role of the college principals may be summarized into two broad categories – viz. – Academic and Administrative. The academic responsibilities include teaching, evaluation and research; and the administrative responsibilities involve – first and foremost – conceptual thinking driven by a vision – leading to policy level decision making and implementation; maintaining human relations, financial planning, and of course, attending to all the routine managerial functioning. (The college principals are also responsible for shouldering few other responsibilities which may not directly fall in the purview of the above two categories).

Ultimately, concluded the researcher, it is the college principal who is the buffer between the students (the main beneficiaries of the educational institutes) and the management / university authorities; and in his role as such an important functionary, a college principal constantly seems to be performing a delicate balancing act. Thus, while he needs to keep his conscience and commitment, he also needs the total support of all those around him too – to fulfill all that is expected of him.

After all, the principal is responsible for developing a college climate that encourages and supports the very best instructional and assessment practices, and doing this for adolescent / young students who differ in intelligence, emotion, learning styles, gender and culture – is really no easy task.

Thus, in the final analysis, the role of a college principal is indeed a ‘multi-dimensional’ one; seeking to ensure that ‘education’ does not become a mere ritualistic practice, but a meaningful learning process – taking all those involved in it towards betterment. And given the nature of their job, college principals as education administrators would certainly benefit from an exercise in self-learning for the enhancement of their communication skills.