

The Teachers are the Key to Education  
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Recently on the occasion of India's 58th Independence Day a fortnightly from Chennai, THE NEW LEADER, published a cover story on 'Suggestions to Manmohan Singh'. The New Leader asked some eminent persons of different walks of life for 'Ten Suggestions to the Prime Minister.' The cover story published the suggestions of 7 people. All the 7 persons representing different professions without exception have mentioned education as one of their suggestions as top priority for Dr Manmohan Singh's government.

Let me mention as examples the suggestions of three persons. Swami Sachidananda Bharathi, the founder of the Dharma Bharathi National Institute of Peace and Value Education has two suggestions. First, "Introduce urgently 'Citizenship Training' and 'Value Education' in all schools and make them an integral part of Teachers' Training Courses and Programmes in the country in order to lay a strong foundation for national integration and moral regeneration." Second, "Make school education a national priority and make primary education compulsory and free for all children. Set apart at least 5 per cent of the total national income specifically for this purpose."

An eminent journalist and former editor of Bombay Mid-day and Free Press Journal, Mr Michael Gonsalves suggests: "Make primary education compulsory for all children and entrust the responsibility to a government agency."

A professor of religions, Sr Shalini suggests: "Revamp our education system. Promote co-education of boys and girls in schools and colleges. Include sex education and psychology in the school syllabus."

The suggestions of all the 7 eminent respondents can be reduced to two appeals: First, work for total literacy and second provide total quality education.

In both the cases of total literacy and quality education, one person stands out. She or he is the teacher. His/her contribution and his/her training to impart proper total quality education is paramount. But the naked fact is that in India the role of a teacher is not recognized and appreciated in terms of their social standing and their remuneration, especially in private institutions.

However, we continue celebrating Teacher's Day on September 5 every year on the birthday of a great educationalist and philosopher, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. As a life-long teacher Dr Radhakrishnan has set an example of extensive reading and reflection for all teachers.

The teachers may not produce books like Dr Radhakrishnan who wrote on a wide range of topics as a result of their reading and reflection. But the teachers without exemption are certainly expected to read and reflect especially on their profession to be competent not only in the subject of teaching but also in dealing with the pupils with love.

Education is an on-going process. The teachers who do not read, reflect and update themselves are out-dated people. They are to be discarded from teaching like out-dated machinery. Only those who read, reflect and go prepared to their class rooms to impart the latest knowledge and insights should be teachers. Only those who inspire their pupils through their lives and teaching should be called teachers.

I would like to emphasis here both the aspects of a teacher's personal life and his/her teaching. Both are inter-related and are very important because true education, they say, is not taught but caught.

Teacher's Day gives us the occassion and opportunity to look at our teachers. Are they happy and contented people so that they are able to do their best for their pupils? A basic need of a teacher is that he/she should be adequately paid. What can the people do to see that the teachers are not exploited by private educational institutions? What can we do to see that the teachers do a good job?

When I look at my school days, I realize one thing: I did very well in studies often standing first in a subject or even in the whole class when a teacher of a particular subject or a class teacher was very loving and competent. The loving teachers were also better teachers as they came to the class well prepared.

I remember one particular instant. Thomas Sir was teaching us English in the 7th standard. He always came prepared with text book and notes to the class. He taught us also very well. Still some boys must have found English difficult. So they went to the principal and complained that Thomas Sir was not teaching well in the class.

In the next class Thomas Sir told us frankly that the Principal has told him about the complaint: Then, without naming anybody he said that any student who does not follow this his teaching, should please let him know, he would be prepared to explain the lesson again and again in the class and if need be, even outside the class. By the way he communicated with us, we felt that he was more sad because some boys did not understand his lessons than because they complained to the principal.

The ones who had complained must have felt bad. Anyway, almost everybody said, "Sir, we did not complaint against you. You are teaching us very well. We follow the lessons well."

For me a good teacher imparts much more that the knowledge of the text book lessons. He/she prepares the students according to their age for life. Through both his/her life's message and through lessons taught a teacher communicates human values and ideals.

I believe that all teachers, whatever lessons they teach, should teach only in the Elite School of Love. In the elite school of love, the teacher is the most loved and respected person not only by the students on the school campus but also by people in the society at large. People accept him/her as a respected and loving person. These types of teachers and their students feel proud of each other.

Let all teachers remember that by their calling they are not just teaching a few pupils but through their profession they are contributing to nation building. And we all need to remember that the teachers are the key to education and support them. Let us pledge that support on this Teachers' Day.