

Teachers' Day: The Sacrificial Goat



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Once again the nation will gather dutifully this year on the 5th of September to pay tribute to the hard work put by the teachers all year long. Once again teachers will be exhorted to show exemplary competence, dedicated hard work and unwavering commitment in their onerous task of nation building.

Indian tradition compares a teacher to God. So like any other god she is installed on a pedestal and then best forgotten. Hers is a life meant only for selfless service to others. A good teacher should be able to stand high above her students and yet be on their level; she should be able to do 101 things other than teach her subject well; she needs to be tough and soft at the same time.

And God forbid if she expects anything in return---not even the respect/goodwill of the students(as the guru-shishya parampara has given way to the student being her paymaster), not even a modestly comfortable life style (as that is not for godly beings like her).

The Kothari Commission had long recognized that there is nothing more important for a healthy educational system than having a sufficient number of highly qualified and motivated teachers. Yet education has remained the most neglected of subjects by central and state governments alike. Gone are the days when teachers commanded

respect in society.

Teaching has now become a much denigrated profession with slow upward mobility and poor financial rewards. This has resulted in a dearth of quality teachers at all levels (especially at the middle school level in the science/maths streams.. A recent survey has revealed that less than 10% of the teaching work force is there for the sheer love of it. Even premier institutes like the IITs and IIMs are facing serious faculty crunch, what to talk of the primary and secondary education level schools. The condition of private school teachers (including those of Christian missionary schools) is even more pathetic. These schools are like 'education shops'. The teachers here have no access to government scales/facilities (which have improved recently, albeit marginally).

They are supposed to survive on salaries worse than that of an unskilled labourer and yet mould the character of their pupils with uncanny precision. They do not enjoy any medical/ pension benefits. The Pay Commission bonanzas are not for them. So teaching has become the last refuge of the incompetent. Talented youngsters are distancing themselves from this noble profession. They would rather join a call centre job given a choice.

All this does not auger well for a country which is poised to become a knowledge economy. It is the teachers who are to be credited with the academic progress which India has made and it is high time they get due recognition for their valuable services. I agree that there are a few black sheep/wolves(like politicians/businessmen owners of private institutes) who have made education a 'sweat shop' commodity. But by far and large, we teachers have only sacrificial goats in our fold.

In this age of money, economy and private enterprise , it is foolish to expect that teachers alone should rise above the spirits of time. Let

there be sincere efforts to improve their dismal social status, frustrated hopes, poor salaries and deplorable working conditions, before expecting them to fulfil their noble duties. Till then, they will have to remain happy with the cards/ flowers/ prayer services and, perhaps, a lunch offered to them by children/ school authorities on this day.

A Very Happy Teachers'Day to all of us teachers.

(incidentally, Christian missionary schools have been directed not to celebrate Teachers' Day this year, in protest against the violence in Orissa against their community).

- Shobha Shukla

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editor

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