



ROLE OF TEACHERS TO TAKE ON THE CHALLENGES OF EMERGING INDIAN SOCIETY

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Introduction

Since the last decade of the 20th century, the world has been undergoing revolutionary changes in social, economic and political fields. New changes sometimes are giving birth to conflicts and tension in people's mind. The all-devouring tsunami of globalization is out to sweep people off their age-old tradition, custom and way of life. Along with the rest of the world, India has also been experiencing this change. For preparing the future citizens of our land either to negotiate or accommodate with these changes, teachers' role and responsibility must change. As the single-most important deliverer of education, teachers are responsible for shaping the pupils' whole being towards the desired end. Teacher is a person who creates, preserves and transmits knowledge. He creates ideas and ideals. He preserves the sense of truth and whatever is good for humanity. He is the light-house that guides the wandering barks and helps them reach the destination safely. Teacher carries out the arduous task of preparing the children and the youth to shoulder the responsibility of the nation. Indeed, no one is more responsible for taking a country forward in the race of progress, and at the same time, imparting character to the personalities of the young ones than teachers. Teacher is the main pillar of a sound and progressive society. The ultimate test of a nation's greatness is the quality of her citizens. If a nation possesses men of sterling character and devoted patriotism, she is bound to make rapid progress on all fronts. Such men are moulded in the factory of teachers.

With the passage of time, the image and role of teacher has changed. From the role of the active-giver of knowledge to the passive pupils, a teacher is now considered one who facilitates learning, stimulates growth and development of values, attitudes and right belief in

the taught. Thus he is the architect of the whole personality of the individual. In order to keep up pace with the rest of the world, Indian teachers have to shoulder the mission of turning the billion-plus population of India into strong human-resource that may contribute to build a productive and powerful nation.

Teacher in the Indian society

Ancient India revered teachers as figures by whose holy touch a child is born into light from darkness. In the Vedic and the Buddhist period, Guru or teacher's role was that of knowledge-giver and sole-custodian of pupils' moral upliftment. Until the first half of the twentieth century, the image of an Indian teacher could not rise above the level of a pulpit-preacher. When the British left India in 1947, the nation's hopes and aspirations took a new turn towards building a strong country that would thrive on fertile human resource. The main responsibility to fulfill this goal was set on the teaching community. In this new perspective, teacher's role became facilitator to pupils' overall development of personality which might, in turn, contribute towards nation-building. It was not an exaggeration when the Education Commission (1964-66) commented, "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms".

Education, teacher and societal development

Education is one of the fundamental needs of human beings. Through development of attitudes, values and capabilities – both of knowledge and skills – education enables persons to respond to changing situation and contribute towards societal development. Education has the dual function of transmitting to the new generation the heritage of the past with its accumulated wisdom and preparing it for the present and the future emergent needs of society and the individual. Education is the indispensable instrument for the propagation of science and technology which is fundamental to the success of any country's progressive endeavours. Society relies heavily on the teaching community to prepare the pupils to grapple or accommodate with the changes that the new age brings. Teachers can be catalysts for change, the visionaries who are "never content with the status quo but rather always looking for a better way" (Larner, 2004, p. 32). They actively share the responsibility of reconstructing a social order, with all the cherished values and traditional beliefs, which are out to be displaced by the surge of new ideals and practices.

Expectations from teachers to shape the future society

According to the Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century submitted to the UNESCO (1996), "much will be expected, and much demanded of teachers". "Teachers", the Commission declared, "have crucial roles to play in preparing

young people not only to face the future with confidence but to build it with purpose and responsibility”. The Commission added that the importance of the role of teachers as agents of change, promoting understanding and tolerance, has never been more obvious than today. The need for change from narrow nationalism to universalism, from ethnic and cultural prejudice to tolerance, understanding and pluralism, from autocracy to democracy in its various manifestations, and from a technologically divided world where high technology is the privilege of the few to a technologically united world, places enormous responsibilities on teachers who shape the characters and minds of the new generation.

Indian society under transformation

The world today is changing fast. Ideas and concepts are soon getting backdated. New goals are being set up and new techniques are being devised in order to achieve readjustment of society to new situations. Human societies around the globe have become more dynamic though the pace of change is not always the same everywhere. Even in the same country, different societies show different patterns of change which are unique in themselves. Some societies are still more tradition-bound, convention-stricken and less prone to change while some are willing to accept the changes that the gradual course of time brings with it.

It may be said that the Indian society is dichotomously stratified: the ‘elite’ and the ‘folk’. Both of them have people of different religions, moral and socio-cultural norms and values. They are further divided into sub-cultures of castes, occupations, groups, and regional communities. As a result of education, social mobility of people is increasing. From traditional closed society, we are moving towards modern and dynamic one. Different Indian societies –rural, semi-rural, urban, elites, urban middle class, lower middle class, agricultural society, industrial society intellectual society – with their unique philosophies of life and socio-political-economic view – have been experiencing changes in different fields of life. These changes have been giving birth to new trends in our society, such as the following, that may pose challenges, especially for the teaching community:

- i) Development in science and technology and change in the process of production; from agriculture-based society, we are gradually moving towards industry-based society;
- ii) Ever-widening gap in socio-economic conditions of the elite classes and that of the masses;
- iii) Cultural-imperialism as a by-product of globalization and majority of the under-privileged finding their language, culture, values and life-style eroded by this invasion;
- iv) Increasing usage of information and technological gadgets to widen the horizon of understanding, knowledge and skill;

- v) New technologies helping people to share common ideas and overcome physical distance. At the same time, these technologies accentuating divisions both within and between societies, between those who are able to utilize them for the enrichment of their cultural, social, economic and political lives and those who are unable to do so because of poverty or lack of the necessary expertise;
- vi) The 'knowledge-based' society has cropped up in the new millennium. The status of education is changing: once seen as a factor of unity and integration within societies, capable of overcoming social and economic differences and distinctions, it is increasingly becoming a source of such differences and distinctions between societies in a global economy which rewards those who possess more advanced skills and limits the opportunities of those who do not (UNESCO,1998);
- vii) Emergence of a globalized world underscoring a framework of competition and coupled with the pressures of an exploding knowledge-base has given birth to new challenges for schools as social institutions all over the world. New demands are placed on the school, often in addition to the existing ones, to be equipped with current knowledge and modern methods of acquiring new knowledge (UNESCO,1998);
- viii) Surging students with varied nature in educational institutions though nearly one-fourth of the Indian population is still reeling under the darkness of illiteracy;
- ix) Increasing urge of the first generation learners (FGL) from socio-economically backward communities to get education;
- x) Besides formal system of education, the introduction of parallel channels like open schooling, distance education, community college, e-learning etc. to meet up this growing demand for education;
- xi) Erosion of traditional Indian norms and values like non-violence, cooperation, joint-family system, fellow-feeling, tolerance and respect for lingual-religious diversity;
- xii) Unprecedented development of information and communication technology has lopsided our concept of the source of knowledge. At present, the student may be more informed than the teacher. There is likely to be confusion in the teacher's mind about his new role in relation to the use of these technologies. In the new phase of the knowledge-revolution, the source of knowledge has shifted from a one source to multiple sources.

Ability areas of teachers to take on these emerging issues

Considering the Indian perspective in the changing world, a teacher must have attitude and ability to:

- i) Shift between short-term and long term goals of education; to respond to the immediate problems without forgetting the long-term goals;
- ii) Approach to universal and global citizenship without losing own cultural identity;
- iii) Reconciliation of the tradition and modernity in respect of knowledge, concept and values;
- iv) Expert-handling of the needs for competition through cooperation and concern for equality of opportunities of the learners;
- v) Respond to the tension between extra-ordinary expansion of knowledge and capacity of human beings to assimilate it;
- vi) Guide students to negotiate the tension between material and spiritual pursuits;
- vii) Making them ready to accept and respect pluralistic Indian culture;
- viii) Harnessing information and communication technology to meet basic learning needs;
- ix) Teachers should keep in mind that, to ensure economic development of the nation, it is important that the population as a whole should have a minimum level of understanding of science, technology and logic;
- x) While progress is being made towards the goal of Education for All, renewed efforts are needed to ensure that the education provided is of high quality and relevant to social needs. This is essential if the young are to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to lead active and productive lives in the knowledge-based societies of the future (UNESCO, 1998).

Function of a teacher in the emerging Indian society

Naturally, the responsibility goes to teachers to make the society capable of grappling or accommodating with the challenges of the new age. A teacher has to respond to the needs of the society and counteract with certain challenges that have cropped up in the new millennium in the following way:

- i) The school has to be regarded and conceived as a microcosm of society where the teacher has to act as a mediator between school and community.
- ii) He has to keep himself abreast of the fast-changing academic, social and economic realities of the society.
- iii) He has to ensure community support for the academic institution for the reciprocal development of the both.
- iv) He has to act as a transformer, dispenser and disseminator of knowledge, information and skill and cater to the needs of the school and society.

- v) Beyond his academic role of a subject-specialist, he has to be oriented in educational technology. He has to be a media-expert and an instructional-designer.
- vi) The teacher should be more than a mere skilled performer in a branch of his profession. When the frontiers of knowledge change, the importance and even the validity of what has been learnt may not survive. So he has to cherish the desire to learn, unlearn and relearn continuously.
- vii) Education from the earliest school years should be directed to the all-round development of the human personality and to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and economic progress of the community, as well as to the inculcation of deep respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; within the framework of these values the utmost importance should be attached to the contribution to be made by education to peace and to understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and among racial or religious groups (UNESCO, 1966). By his full knowledge of the values of life and by his imperceptible authority, the teacher is to implant in the minds of the pupils the ideals of democratic life, of conjoint tolerant living.
- viii) He has to be aware of the problems of the first generation learners (FLG), their cognitive and emotional behaviour.
- ix) He has to promote competencies in students so as to enable them to learn how to learn and think critically.
- x) The universally subscribed goal that “ by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality” (UNESCO, 2000) can only be achieved if children can have access to motivated and knowledgeable teachers.

Conclusion

Once Dr. Radhakrishnan said that the teacher’s place in the society is of vital importance. He acts as the pivot for the transmission of intellectual traditions and technical skill from generation to generation and helps to keep the lamp of civilization burning. Society is changing fast, students’ need and aspirations and thirst for knowledge is growing fast; social, emotional and learning behaviour-patterns are changing accordingly. Responsibilities of the schools are also changing with a view to deliver the maximum good for the students to cope with the needs and expectations of the community. Teachers must be wakeful to the changing needs of the society; else they would fail in accomplishing their holy mission.

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