

Teaching

September 5 is Teacher's Day, commemorating the birthday of scholar and philosopher and the second President of India, DR S. Radhakrishnan. What is the day meant to signify? Recall the importance of teachers? Show them respect, at least for the day? There is a tradition in many schools to give the teachers a day off from teaching; instead, the senior students take on the mantle of their teachers and do the rounds of the classes. It can be an enlightening experience. The juniors let the 'pretender' know in no uncertain terms the thanklessness of the job, and the seniors get to understand the tough nature of the job. Of course, there is the fun of dressing up in sarees or salwar suits in the proper grown up style- how nice to get rid of the uniform for a day!

Over the years, our perception of the teacher evolves. In the first few years at school. Teacher is the ideal. One must emulate her- in most cases it is a 'her'- and follow each and everything she says one must do. Indeed, the most undesirable things in life, such washing one's hands before eating, brushing one's teeth properly, taking a bath- and not forgetting to use the soap, mind you- eating without making those slurping one's teeth properly, taking a bath – and not forgetting to slurping noises, eating spinach and drinking milk(ugh), not making faces at people – all these actions were more readily undertaken if teacher said so. In fact, even if teacher made an error, the faith in the omniscience made one argue in her could not know better than teacher, it is an awesome power. And if the teacher is not capable enough, or has biases and prejudices, what untold harm it can do to the children under her care! It is the kindergarten and primary school teacher who has to be a truly liberal, stable and rational person, able to convey ideas that will help the child grow up with a broad mind and become a well-adjusted personality.

As one grows up, of course, there is gradual diminishing of the glowing faith and idealism. Teacher is, after all, only a human being, and like all human beings only too prone to fallibility. Form being the idol of correctness, she descends from the pedestal to have every action and word of hers questioned, dissected and firmly discarded, if possible, or at most accepted under sufferance. Indeed, if teacher told one not to do something, the prime goal is to do it at the earliest possible instant (taking care not to be caught, of course).

A little later, one learns to discriminate between the bad teacher. Strangely enough, it is not always the very lenient soft type who is considered good; the one who gets respect and affection is quite often the strict but fair type, who does not condone bad behavior but who is not harsh over it, who knows her subject

well and can communicate her knowledge, who is friendly but does not allow you to take advantage of it. Unfortunately, there are few of the type.

Perhaps it is a reflection of the society at large, but today's teachers are more interested in the income and perks that go with the job than with what they should be doing in the job. It will be said in their defense that they too have a life to live, standards to maintain, after all, they too are human, as if looking up to an ideal is not human, if they feel their pay should increase, their first resort is to go on a strike. Why teach in class, when it is so much more lucrative to take those 'extra' classes, the tuitions. Many women take up a teaching hob nowadays for the wrong reasons: it gives them enough time attend to their homes; it brings concessional education of the kids as a perk; and there are the long holidays-summer, autumn and winter. And, of course, the added monetary benefit through tuitions. Unfortunately, a love for children and an aptitude and inclination for teaching come low on the list of priorities with most of these people.

But let's face it. Unless those opting for the teaching profession treat it as a vocation, rather than as a mere hob those who are taught are going to get disillusioned with their mentors at a very early age itself.