

Shaping Minds; Building the Future

Smt. Droupadi Murmu
President of India

Teachers shape destinies. This Teachers' Day, on behalf of all Indians, I convey my gratitude to all teachers who instil knowledge, skills, values and motivation into the lives of crores of our students.

It is well known that Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second President of India wished that his birthday be observed as Teachers' Day. He was an intellectual of international repute, a renowned author and an esteemed statesman, yet he regarded his role as a teacher as the most important of all. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, one of India's most beloved former Presidents, was once asked whether he thought people would remember him more as a scientist or as a President. Dr. Kalam replied that he would like to be remembered as a teacher.

The teachers whose competence and character make them venerable, and the students devoted to such teachers, have always been our ideal. Our ancient texts prescribe that teachers should love their students as their own children, they should treat them all equally and fairly, they should not lose their temper on students, they should remain patient, keep the well-being of their students foremost, and teach them according to their ability to learn. It is in the spirit of deep respect for such teachers that, *Shikshavalli* in *Taittiriya Upanishad*, gave the timeless message, '*Acharyadevo Bhava*', nearly three millennia ago.

It has been my greatest fortune to have been guided by many wise and affectionate teachers. Sometimes, our teachers would teach us in their homes even beyond school hours, and would look after us with great care. After completing class-VII, I was the first girl to venture out of the village to pursue further studies. Later, while studying in Bhubaneswar too, I was blessed to receive abundant love and encouragement from my teachers. I mention my teachers here with humility, because their story illustrates a profound truth: a loving and dedicated teacher can awaken limitless potential and inspiration within a student.

Strengthened by that encouragement, students develop the courage to face life's toughest challenges and the confidence to pursue the loftiest of goals. Teachers do far more than teach a curriculum. Through their own conduct and example, they also instruct their students in the art and skills needed to live a fruitful life. Besides being a mentor, a teacher is also a well-wisher, a friend and a fellow-traveller in the students' quest for learning.

The insight about what makes a good teacher, handed down through our culture and tradition since ancient times, remains entirely relevant even today. Centuries ago, in his play '*Malavikagnimitram*', Mahakavi Kalidas writes that a good teacher is one who possesses profound knowledge and also has the ability to transmit this knowledge effectively.

A well-known Sanskrit maxim tells us: '*Sarvatra vijayam icchet, shishyat icchet parajayam*' - one may wish for victory everywhere, except before one's own student, where one should wish to be defeated. To encourage independent thinking in students, to ignite their curiosity, to promote the tendency to ask questions, to sharpen their capacity for argument and judgement, and to help them grow into independent individuals – these are among the most useful and rewarding dimensions of teaching. It is only through such inspiring education that we will raise generations of successful entrepreneurs, brilliant scientists, creative artists and citizens capable of finding innovative solutions to emerging challenges.

Teaching is not merely a vocation; it is a vow. It is more than a career or a job; it is the sacred task of shaping humanity. It is the noble responsibility of illuminating the path for generations to come.

My memories associated with teaching give me a special sense of fulfilment. I taught children at the Sri Aurobindo Integral School in Rairangpur, Odisha. Apart from teaching them various subjects, I used to be fully involved in helping the children prepare for their musical performances, sports activities and plays. Even today, it is exhilarating for me to reminisce about our preparations for Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations and the joyful excitement of the children during the functions. I also found great satisfaction and meaning in taking students on picnics to beautiful natural surroundings and,

through play and exploration, introducing them to the world of animals, birds, trees and plants.

Years after leaving school, my students still invite me to their family functions. I not only distinctly recall the names of many of my students but also the nicknames we would fondly address them by. I have also learnt much from the students I taught. I believe that teachers too learn a lot from the spontaneity and curiosity of children.

On the occasion of completing the second year of my term as President, I spent time with the students at the school located in the premises around Rashtrapati Bhavan and taught them about environmental conservation. I am always keen to meet students and understand their thoughts and ideas. What they share stays on with me.

About eleven years ago, I established a residential school at my village home. Students from disadvantaged families and children who have lost their parents study in that school. I have been visiting the school from time to time to meet the children. This year, on the 20th of June, I was delighted to meet the children on my birthday. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji also visited the school with me and motivated the students. The extraordinary experience of meeting him will remain an enduring source of inspiration for them. Watching those children thrive fills me with a special sense of meaningfulness.

The task of imparting education is not the responsibility of teachers alone. Those who become role models for children through their conduct and achievements are also a valuable source of learning and inspiration.

Parents and guardians repose the highest trust in teachers when they send their children to study. They believe that the teachers will treat the children as their own and take utmost care of the child's safety and development. It is the *dharma* of every teacher to uphold this sacred trust placed in them. A teacher's attitude, conduct and behaviour should not generate fear and anxiety in the children, break their morale or allow any sense of inferiority to develop. Good teachers help their students become the best versions of themselves.

It is the sacred duty of teachers to guide their students to be good human beings. Students who achieve prosperity and glory while remaining ethical in their thoughts and actions are living embodiments of a teacher's success.

Our country is moving steadily towards the goal of becoming a developed nation with social inclusion at the core. As we advance on this journey, I want our teachers to shape generations of students who value the richness of our cultural heritage and traditions; who develop a scientific outlook and work for the welfare of humanity; who uphold the ideal of *Antyodaya*; who protect the environment and all living creatures; who strive for individual and collective excellence, and who move forward with the spirit of 'Nation First'. To every citizen, I make an appeal: always hold our committed and sincere teachers in the highest esteem. I ardently wish that with the contribution of our dedicated teachers, India continues to learn and goes on to lead.
