

Role and responsibilities of a teacher in view of Dr. Zakir Hussain

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Ali, Jishan and Tyagi, Raj Kumar (2011). Role and responsibilities of a teacher in view of Dr. Zakir Hussain. *Asian Sci.*, 6(1 & 2):120-124.

Key Words : Mulching, Land configuration, Moisture use, Moisture use efficiency

It was Dr. Zakir Husain's conscious longings of his early childhood to be a teacher. The desire of his early boyhood to be a teacher was only a boy's homage of devotion to his teachers whom he owed the strength of his character and his faith in education.¹ Dr. Zakir Husain gave his full attention to the teacher: his concept, role and qualities; preparation and professional ethics of the teacher.

Concept, role and qualities of teacher:

Concept:

The question of the concept, role and qualities of a teacher directly dependent on what really is required or expected of him not only in the contemporary perspective of a particular social milieu but more so in the context of the cosmic purpose of human life. Apparently there can be no single answer to this question. Different philosophies of education, therefore, view it from different angle to put forth their respective understanding and role expectations. However, one thing is sure that the concept, role and qualities of a teacher are or are less inter-dependent and as such they need to be examined not in isolation from one another but as different dimensions of the same issue *viz.*, what makes one a model teacher worthy of emulation in every respects. The core of an ideal teacher's profile is that he ought to possess a multi-dimensional personality wholly dedicated and devoted to the total education of man. This is best expressed in the words of John Amos Comenius, a doyen among educational philosophers of the West, thus: "All who are born as human beings need education because they are destined to be real men, not wild beasts, dull animals, and clumps of wood. From this also follows: the better one is educated the more he excels others."² Obviously the one who excels

most can be a true teacher. Therefore, his fundamental focus would be on what Swami Vivekananda would mean by evolving the 'man' in man or what Mahatma Gandhi would do in deriving out the 'best' in man.

This is differently expressed by different schools of philosophy. For instance, the 'best' in man according to idealists, whether Eastern or Western is the divine or spiritual content which not only points to the fundamental unity among human beings but also amount different forms of life in the universe. According to them, the teacher is an excellent manifestation of the best in man which is God or a divine force. That is why they would treat the teacher not only his true image but also his very equal. To Manu, for example, "the teacher is the true image of Brahma"³ to Kabir, it is very difficult to decide who to salute first when both God and Guru are found to be standing side by side, and to the Sikh Gurus, "there is no difference between the Guru and God."⁴ The major thrust would naturally be on having teachers who could effect optimum ethico-spiritual perfection of human beings. On the other hand, the best in man, according to Realists, including the scientific and materialistic pragmatic schools of thought, is to be realized primarily with special reference to the material side of man and, therefore, their fundamental burden would be on having teachers who could be instrumental in augmenting the possibilities of affecting optimum material advancement and progress in the world. Taken together, the materialists and the idealists convey that the most desirable role and function of teacher is seeking all round development of man-his physical as well as total personal culture. And since, Dr. Zakir Husain presents a kind of synthetic view of man, his concept of teacher is equally integrative and down to truth. He believed that speaking, every man, in a small or great

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measure, has to guide or instruct others in one form or the other and at one time or the other. Therefore, everyone can be considered to be a teacher in this very broad sense. However, in the strict meaning of the term, “a teacher is one who deliberately adopts the profession of teaching and carries out his duties successfully.”⁵ He adopts the profession of teaching because he has an aptitude for it and feels a sense of satisfaction in teaching. He is not mercenary. He rather takes it as a mission that he is called upon to perform, he takes it as something without which he cannot feel satisfied, nor have a sense of fulfillment. A true teacher after the concept of Dr. Zakir Husain is he who “feels that he is performing a mission.”⁶ This cannot be possible unless the teacher has developed a positive philosophy of life. Dr. Zakir Husain, therefore, seems to be one with Dent who said that a teacher “must be utterly honest intellectually, emotionally, morally and spiritually – and he must have thrashed out for himself by his own honest efforts a working philosophy of life.”⁷ This happens to be the most fundamental consideration for being a teacher.

Dr. Zakir Husain, like other educational philosophers, also believed that the world is changing constantly and the limits of knowledge are fast expanding which require the teacher always to be alert to “find out what changes are taking place and how he would incorporate them”⁸ in his role performance as an active agent of change.⁹ Here too, DR. Zakir Husain seems to agree with Confucius who believed, “if a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge so as continually to be acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others.”¹⁰ He is equally one with Saiyidain who said, “you cannot pour out of a vessel except what you have put into it, and if a teacher is poor and shallow from within, if there is no sparkling wine in him, he cannot quicken the mind or humanize the emotions of children; if he is not a lighted candle himself, he will never be able to light up the flame in others.”¹¹ Or with Tagore who said, “if a teacher himself does not possess learning, how can he impart it to others. A lamp cannot put light into other lamps if it does not itself burn and shed light.”¹² A teacher, therefore, in order to be an agent of change must be ever-expanding his own knowledge and strategies to see how all this could be tangible for making changes and improvements in human life.

Be that as it may, Dr. Zakir Husain wanted the teacher to develop in himself a committed personality – committed not only to the fundamental purpose of human life but also to the profession of teaching as such. He wanted him to be, among other things, what Radhakrishnan expected in words like these:

A teacher must be committed man, committed to

the future of man, to the future of humanity and to the future of his country and the world. He must work with the implicit confidence in the power of humanity, in the recuperative power which it has and with it can cleanse and purify itself.¹³

Evidently, agreeing with Spranger’s classification of men¹⁴, Dr. Zakir Husain put the teacher into ‘the social type’, which is dominantly reared and geared up through ‘love for living and moving men, a sense of oneness with them, of readiness to help them and the joy of giving his best to them.’¹⁵ The highest principle of the teacher, being a social type, is love.¹⁶ A good teacher, through his educative activities, attempts to build a kind of value-system among his educands and also wholeheartedly helps them to realize these values in their lives. He understands their needs and gifts and tries to develop in them a ‘morally autonomous personality’, through his loving care and sympathy.

Role:

To Dr. Zakir Husain, the basic role of the teacher is to guide, to help and to serve; to understand to love and to shape the personality of every child through faith, and reverence and other essential democratic values. Besides, he ought to be a model for his students in every respect in order to give a positive and wholesome direction to their proper growth and development into worthy men and citizens.

Dr. Zakir Husain, in that, assigns a very vital role to the teacher, the role of developing the individuality of the educand.¹⁷ He should help the educand become honest and truthful and a socially cooperative individual. His function is to reshape the totality of the child.¹⁸ In this, Dr. Zakir Husain agrees with Pestalozzi who believed in the organic unity of the educative activity and in its concern for the intellectual, moral, physical and other basic powers of the child. He must strive to “cultivate a ‘passion for excellence’ and to as chew the second rate and the third rate in life.”¹⁹ This he can do only and effectively through providing direct experience through work and activities because according to Dr. Zakir Husain, “man did not begin to philosophies first; he began to work and in the working he began to philosophies.”²⁰ Naturally, it is teacher’s important task to understand the underlying philosophy of every educational activity and to provide work opportunities to students and to see that by doing work, students learn to think and find, select and choose.”²¹

A cynic can never be a good teacher however knowledgeable he is. This is the core and strength of Dr. Zakir Husain’s concept of teacher. A true teacher loves

human beings as also the community in which he lives. He loves children and hopes to make them the vehicle of good life. He treats every child as an individual in his own right and, as if, in the words of Tagore that “every child who comes into the world brings the message that God is not yet disappointed in man.”²²

That being so, Dr. Zakir Husain conceptualized a good teacher as one whose book of life does not bear the legend to mee ‘knowledge’ but of deep and sincere ‘Love’.²³ Even when the whole world has given up hope in the child’s future, only two persons still cling to it; one is the child’s mother and the other is his teacher. In that, a teacher of Dr. Zakir Husain’s concept is always hopeful and optimistic in his view of life, more particularly in his concern for the pupils put to his charge. Here, Dr. Zakir Husain is quite close to Ignatius who firmly believed that a teacher “should be earnest and diligent in all his duties; he shall not appear more friendly to one pupil than another.”²⁴ Nor shall he be ‘venal’ as Rousseau always felt.

However, what is most important for the teacher according to Dr. Zakir Husain is to instill among students an urge to imbibe, evolve and realize the ‘goods of culture’ and cherish ‘desirable values’ in life. He emphasized correspondence between the growing mind of the child and the totality of the cultural goods. In other words, the teacher should exploit the use of cultural goods to develop the personality of the student, and in turn to ‘harness his inclinations to the goods of culture.’²⁵ Therefore, Dr. Zakir Husain’s most basic advice to the teacher has always been:

Apply your mind to understanding the personality of the students and apply your mind to the structure of the cultural goods which are the instrument of education and try to find out the correspondence between the two and bring him together. Only then you can educate.²⁶

The teacher, therefore, must work to “reshape the totality the being of the child,²⁷ and specially strive to strike a wholesome balance between different sets of values-material *viz.*, spiritual-which he imbibes during the course of education. He cautions the teacher, however, against over emphasizing material values thus:

In the changing world in which we are placed, the foundations of most of the systems have been severely damaged by an all-pervading lust for the material which, with its terrible gravitational force, tends to pull down all that is specifically human to the level of the sheer animal.²⁸

In other words, the teacher has first to decide these things at his own level, then he will inculcate these values in his students and after it, he will develop in them an ability to decide the limits of each value and to harmonize

the successfully in order to develop quality character worthy of human species. He must work to inculcate in them “the right ideals and attitudes and to reclaim them from the cynicism or apathy into which they are likely to fall”²⁹ besides helping them to learn to “serve some value, higher than our selfish ends.”³⁰ The teacher should, therefore, make students sensitive and responsible to society as such. To achieve it, he must also build and atmosphere of understanding, freedom and love, of good will and voluntary mutual cooperation. In short, it is incumbent on the teacher to develop the child into an autonomous moral personality; to develop the child in such a way that he can build up, in turn, a just, peaceful and cooperative social order besides himself becoming a very useful member of his society.

Qualities:

But truly effective teachers are, indeed, all time rare in any part of the world.³¹ Dr. Zakir Husain knew it well and, therefore, consoled himself believing that all valuable things are rare in this world. Yet, he asserted that even the common teachers must possess certain traits, qualities and characteristics. He divided them into essential and desirable qualities. Though most of these are common with those prescribed by other educational philosophers, yet he gave his own priorities. Among the top priorities, according to Dr. Zakir Husain, as already alluded to earlier, are genuine ‘love’, ‘faith’ and ‘reverence’ for every child. This love is an objective one transcending the person of the loved. The teacher loves the child irrespective of the latter’s qualities, status and parentage. He loves an obedient child as much as he loves a less obedient one; he cares for a dullard as much as for an intelligent one. He does not allow his love for the child diminish on account of any extraneous factors. For him, a poor child is as dear to him as a rich one. In the words of Ignatius, ‘he shall attend to the studies of the poor the same as those of the rich.’³² It is selfless, self-sacrificing love which knows only giving out – giving out to the child whatever the teacher can give – without any expectation of taking back in return. In fact, the teacher loves every human being who comes into his contact to learn something, to be developed into something worthwhile. The love of the teachers transcends the school premises. This objective, selfless and transcending love is his great force which makes him hopeful about every child and helpful to pursue his job faithfully and with a missionary zeal and spirit, as if he was doing a work ordained by God. It makes his profession almost an act of worship. Dr. Zakir Husain compared a good teacher with the mother of the child. The teacher should have all those

qualities of head and heart which a mother has. Love affection, understanding, magnanimity, sole and selfless concern for the child, readiness to sacrifice for the child, all these qualities he should possess in abundance.

Besides, the teacher must possess a sterling character in order to leave its imprint on children. He should have great respect for those values which he wants to inculcate in the child. He should have maturity, magnanimity and enthusiasm in his nature. In the American parlance, "he has to give off sparks",³³ he has to make children catch his enthusiasm. Above all he should have a free moral personality, as "the growth of the morally autonomous personality, is the aim and end of his endeavour."³⁴ Put in the words of Plutarch, "If you dwell with a lame man, you will learn to limp." Therefore, "teachers must be sought for the children, who are free from scandal in their lives who are unimpeachable in their manners, and inexperienced the very best that may be found."³⁵ This strength of character is considered to be an essential trait of a teacher by all educational thinkers without any exception.

However, among the desirable qualities of a teacher, according to Dr. Zakir Husain, are such things as 'social leadership', 'knowledge', 'ability', 'communication skills' etc. which, in a way, facilitate learning and teaching. Dr. Zakir Husain, agreeing with Spranger, believed that the teacher should have respect for society and a thorough knowledge of the community in which he lives as also of the cultural heritage and goods. Only then he can bring social element into child's education. Dr. Zakir Husain agreed that a good teacher must have some capacity to assume leadership.³⁶ He emphasized over and over again that "at the school level, the teachers social and moral qualities and attitudes are perhaps even more important than scholarship and intellectual competence."³⁷ But, without certain professional skills, the teacher may find it difficult to exploit his own moral and personal qualities for the child's education. He should, therefore, have "some vision that he may assess the impact of education on the child's total personality."³⁸ Professional training, pedagogy and professional sensitiveness are desirable to make this vision possible. For this, knowledge of the subject is also very desirable.

The rate of explosion in every field of knowledge requires the teacher to cultivate the habit of regular reading. He should always be alert to observe new phenomena emerging on the horizon of knowledge. He must keep his knowledge up to date. If he does not have a desire to keep himself up to date, the teacher "become a fossilized being who lives in the world that is gone."³⁹ Therefore, the teacher should always keep abreast of

the latest developments in his subject as also in the teaching technology. Besides, he needs to possess a sound professional opinion of his own. That is, he should have an ability to think about his profession objectively and independently and discuss his professional problems with his colleagues and other fellow-teachers to do his work more confidently. He must also develop faith in himself as also in the profession.

A good teacher, as envisaged by Dr. Zakir Husain, stands on the hard soil of reality but possesses spiritual qualities of an oriental 'guru' as well. He is thus an idealist, a naturalist and a pragmatist, all rolled in one with the needs of India in mind.

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Received: August, 2011; Accepted : November,