



The Role and Challenges of School Teachers in Contemporary India

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Introduction:

Today social transformation is fast as evident in many parts of the world. It has triggered changes in functional dynamics of many professions. Teaching is one such profession. Teachers are assuming greater responsibilities with changing time and carving their niche once again to face challenges of present time. In our country such changes have been primarily driven by economic growth and technological advances especially in post 1990s. With liberal economic policy Indian society has witnessed increased upward social mobility. It has impacted the young generation in different ways. Teachers not only perceive their role changing, but have developed mechanisms to cope with this situation. It is against this background that an effort has been made through this article to get a brief understanding of role and challenges of teachers in contemporary Indian society.

We know that teaching is a complex activity, a process by which a controlled environment is provided so that teachers can develop predetermined learning among students. Its objective is to bring about desirable changes in the

students. In conventional term the word teaching implies that it is a teacher -centred activity, a terminology which identifies the teacher as the source of knowledge and students as passive receivers of that knowledge. Consequently it resulted in stereotyping a teacher as authoritative and unassailable.

Over the years the traditional role of teachers has been redefined. As per National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE), 2009 the role of teachers is considered to view learners as active participants in their learning and not as mere recipients of knowledge. Teachers are also envisioned to organise learner- centred, activity based, participatory learning experiences, such as play, projects, discussions, dialogues, observation, visits, integrating academic learning with productive work. Therefore it supports the idea of knowledge construction, rather than knowledge instruction, as suggested by Dwyer, et al (1991) in his classroom approaches of knowledge. In this model the key word is collaboration for both teacher and student. The diagram below shows the difference in the two approaches:

	Knowledge Instruction	Knowledge Construction
Classroom Activity	Teacher centered (didactic)	Learner centered (Interactive)
Teacher Role	Fact teller (always expert)	Collaborator (sometimes learner)
Student Role	Listener (always learner)	Collaborator (sometimes expert)
Instructional Emphasis	Facts (memorization)	Relationships (inquiry and invention)
Concept of Knowledge	Accumulation of facts	Transformation of facts

	Knowledge Instruction	Knowledge Construction
Demonstration of Success	Quantity	Quality of understanding
Assessment	Norm referenced (multiple choice items)	Criterion referenced (portfolios and performances)
Technology Use	Drill and practice	Communication (collaboration, information access, expression)

Dwyer et al, 1991

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 expects a teacher to be a facilitator of children's learning in a manner that helps children to construct knowledge and meaning. On the one hand a teacher is seen as co-creator of knowledge and on the other as a participant in the construction of syllabi, textbooks and teaching- learning materials.

But such multifaceted roles requires comprehensive understanding of curriculum, subject- content and pedagogy as well as community, school structure and management. Apart from instructional roles as collaborator and facilitator, a teacher functions today as a learner, counsellor, manager, assessor and innovator.

Teacher as a learner

A teacher is considered to be a lifelong learner. In India and elsewhere teachers in schools are appointed after earning a professional degree in teaching. After appointment teachers get different training most of which is mandatory in government schools and optional in private schools. But the question is whether such pre and in -service training inculcates in the teachers a spirit of lifelong learning. P. C. Chandola, a senior faculty member at District Institute of Educational Training (DIET), Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand said that this year PINDICS, (the acronym of Performance Indicators of Elementary School Teachers) has been made a compulsory component of in- service teachers' training. He says out of four indicators provisioned in the training module one is self-development which focuses on self- learning by teachers and quoted Steve Jobs' famous words 'Stay hungry, stay foolish'. With time, syllabi, content and beliefs change so there is always a need for readiness to learn, he added.

In contrast, many students equipped with tools of information technology are posing great challenges to teachers in the classrooms. Salahuddin Ahmad, a geography teacher in one of the largest private school chains in India based at Patna, Bihar says that the present easy access to internet , is a challenge students are posing to their teachers. As a consequence teachers lacking in content knowledge and multiple pedagogical tools are losing control over their classes. If a student's query is handled properly students take interest in class and there will be no chaos, he added. Michael Fullan, emeritus professor at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto had predicted this situation many years before and had

advocated the formation of Professional Learning Community (PLC) of teachers as a powerful tool for their professional learning.

Teacher as counsellor

The position paper of National Focus Group on curriculum, syllabus and textbooks says that a close study of adolescence in contemporary India poses several new challenges emerging from personal as well as social turmoil as characteristics of societies in transition. It further adds that it is important for teachers to engage with social constructs of childhood and adolescence. Looking at these concerns, what role of a teacher can be envisaged? With easy access to technology , the vulnerability of students is at its peak. Mulla Adam, a teacher at a municipal school near Mankhurd railway station in Mumbai, says that today students have easy access to sexually explicit videos easily and cheaply available in cybercafes. Earlier there was a restriction on children below age 18 on watching adult movies in cinema halls. But these limitations have now been broken due to misuse of technology. He said as a teacher it has become compulsory in schools today to have open dialogue and counsel students on such issues . According to him, there is a great need to sensitise school students on how to use technology which may help in reducing juvenile crime rates.

Let us consider the availability of opportunity for counselling by teachers in other schools. Unlike in government schools, private schools face some limitations in this area. Salahuddin says private schools are now focussed on mechanisation of processes. With the advent of smart classes, the student - teacher relation has been negatively impacted. Interactions with students have become reduced. Earlier, teachers had opportunities to talk and counsel students facing personal and social turmoil. Today, these are rare as some schools operate like multinational corporations.

Teacher as manager

A manager can be defined as one who takes decisions, and is resourceful enough to assess how to change according to the demands of a situation. Where this was limited to three phases of teaching namely pre-teaching, teaching and post- teaching but today the scope has widened to include many non- teaching activities. NCF-2005 laments about this reality which says school teachers are asked to do a range of non-teaching work such as collection of data for rural development schemes, national

census, election work and other campaigns assigned to them by the district officials taking them away from the classrooms. This indirectly legitimises the non-performance of the school teacher undermining him/her as a professional.

Echoing similar concerns, Shiv Dutt Tiwari a Head Teacher in village Chaurikali Khan at Almora district of Uttarakhand sympathises with students who walk to school through steep hills to learn but find their teachers busy filling in more than two dozen registers. He says non-teaching activities of teachers are stealing the time of students and jeopardising their futures. Other activities include buying provisions for the midday meals, providing health tablets, withdrawal and deposit of students' scholarship amount, textbooks collection from cluster resource centres, aadhar card enrolment of students, construction and election work, attending training courses, etc. The main reason of deterioration of quality in school education is persistent distractions due to non-teaching activities by teachers which has increased enormously after advent of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, he said.

Teacher as assessor

After the implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RtE) 2009, teachers in many states have stated that the 'no detention' and 'no corporal punishment' policies are intrusion on their professional rights and have made their task more difficult. Unfortunately the interpretation of the 'no detention' policy and CCE have been left to teachers' imagination. Many teachers equate no detention with non-assessment of learning outcomes. There is a widespread belief that these provisions have weakened the learning outcomes of students.

Salahuddin says that the 'no detention policy' has reduced accountability of teachers and learners both. Earlier there was pressure on students to pass examinations, but today grading in scholastic and non-scholastic areas are subject to scrutiny. School-based grading is 70 per cent, which finds favours of teachers because both school management and parents want 10 CGPA for candidates. Many students with such high grades lack basic understanding of subject matter when they reach senior secondary classes, making this form of assessment fictitious. Parents try to offset this gap by admitting their wards to coaching institutes, paying hefty fees and even after this huge expense,

the success rate in IIT examination is just about 5 per cent.

Teacher as a innovator

Traditionally, teachers gained content knowledge obtained through their college education and textbooks used in schools. Textbooks, the blackboard, chalk and a few charts and models used to be teaching-learning material (TLMs). Today, technology-savvy teachers are innovating TLMs. NCF-2005 says that technology must be integrated with larger goals and processes of educational program. Suresh Chandra, a middle school teacher at village Mahatgaon near Almora, recently created an animation of solar and lunar eclipse on power point to explain the concept to his students on a school computer. This animation not only helped students to see causal relationship of eclipse with sun, earth and moon but also to understand the abstract concept. Motivated by the positive learning outcomes, made a model with rags and sticks to show the Himalayan range to explain mountains, valleys, glaciers, rivers, tributaries, delta, estuary.

Mitigation of challenges

- The teacher as envisioned in the NCFTE-2009 calls for overhauling of pre-service training. Limited understanding of school and certificate based examination are detrimental to the teacher education which is rightly criticised for lack of depth and duration. As a nation, we must commit ourselves to bring in the best people to join this profession.
- The time and life of a child must be understood with empathy and great deal of care. It requires both perseverance and passion. A solid understanding of childhood and adolescence may help a teacher to address challenges which a student face in personal and social lives.
- The race for competitive examination is attributed to lack of awareness and opportunities for livelihood. Schools certify a child's education but it fails in ensuring a respectable and decent life for her which constitution of our country guarantees. There is need to open up possibilities to develop skills among school students.
- In spite of economic and technological advances a large number of students are dropping out of school. NCF- 2005 has shown

concern at the insidious pattern of social exclusion of children coming from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minority and other communities, girls and children with diverse learning needs. Teachers must ensure education of every child in school irrespective of social, cultural or religious identities.

- The performance appraisal of teachers can be based on time given in teaching in the school. Non-teaching activities should be systematically brought down to zero. So that passion to teach and transform lives of children remain a single point objective of teachers.
- The development of the teacher as reflective practitioner can be considered the pinnacle of their professional success. However, this can be achieved when their autonomy is not challenged. NCF-2005 states that teacher autonomy is essential for ensuring a learning environment that addresses children's diverse needs. As much as the learner requires space, freedom, flexibility, and respect, the teacher also requires the same.

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