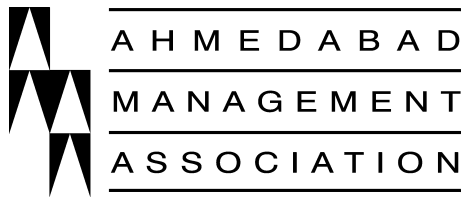


Teacher

As a Torch-Bearer of Change

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Teacher As a Torch-Bearer of Change

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Dear Mr. Joshi, Mr. Sunil Shah, teachers, students, parents and all the people who have gathered here, dear Friends,

It is always a pleasure to come to AMA and talk to the enlightened audience. The subject is very interesting and very important "Teacher As a Torch Bearer of Change". Just now we had an introduction from

Mr. Joshi who said as to how our great patriots and educationalists have worked for nation building and carried out work in the field of education which was congenial for nation building. What is the present scenario of education? What is the role of teachers in nation building? Why are they called torch-bearers? This is what we have to consider.

Types of Teachers

The word 'teacher' is an English word and the Sanskrit word for teacher is "Guru". Guru comes from two letters 'Gu' and 'Ru'. 'Gu' indicates darkness and 'Ru' indicates that which removes the darkness. Etymological meaning of the word Guru is one who removes darkness. Torch bearer is the appropriate word for guru rather than 'teacher'. One who removes ignorance is a torch bearer; one who takes the disciples from darkness to light and from ignorance to knowledge can be called a torch bearer. According to Mundaka Upanishad this knowledge is of two types namely "Apara Vidya" and the other is the "Para Vidya". Whatever we know is the Apara vidya that is, the study of physics, chemistry, history, biology etc as well as the knowledge of scriptures and Vedas. Para vidya however is the knowledge of the self i.e. the transcendental reality. Unfortunately, most part of the knowledge that we possess is the former i.e. the Apara vidya. This means that although we have the knowledge of the whole world, we do not have the knowledge of our own self. This self knowledge, the knowledge of the supreme reality which is beyond time, space and causation comprises of what is called the Para vidya.

In olden days both these Vidyas were simultaneously imparted to the disciples in educational institutions called the "Gurukulas". But these days what we find is that in the modern educational institutions only Apara Vidya is being imparted with no impetus being given to Para Vidya. Self-actualization, self-transcendence have been completely neglected. Even the true meaning of the word GURU has been forgotten and the word is used in a much cheaper sense today. Today we use this word to represent management gurus, karate gurus, music gurus, etc. which clearly is a cheap usage of the word which represents a person who removes darkness, ignorance and a person who gives the knowledge of self by bringing the light of the divine.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'Sacchidananda' only can become a Guru. So how does God impart knowledge? In two ways. At the micro level, He inspires an individual from within. At the macro level sometimes God himself comes in the form of an incarnation. Some of the prominent incarnations are Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Sri Shankracharya, Christ, Buddha, Mahavir, etc. and the most recent one is Sri Ramakrishna who incarnated in order to solve the problems of the modern world created by the demonized forces like materialism, consumerism and fundamentalism. Along with Him came the Holy Mother Sri Sarda Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

These incarnations are the greatest teachers of mankind. In the second category of teachers we find prophets and messengers like Guru Nanak, Prophet Mohammad, etc. In the third category we have saints like Kabir, Meerabai, Narsi Mehta, etc. Next we have the realized souls, human beings who have practised and realized the truth. They become gurus and they give the spiritual knowledge. Then we have the teachers who are involved in imparting secular knowledge. Mostly, when we say 'teachers', we mean persons who are working in schools or other educational institutions. The spiritual teachers mentioned above of course bring about a change; they transform the whole world. But what about ordinary teachers? Can they also become torch bearers? This is the point to be discussed.

For the time being I will confine myself to the discussions on those teachers who teach in schools, colleges, etc. Can they become the torch bearers of change? What changes do we require? Is there a necessity for change?

The Present Scenario - Urgent Need of Spiritual Culture

All over the world there is a lack of peace of mind. UNESCO is very much concerned about it. They had given the mandate of "education to be" rather than "education to do" because a lot of youngsters go drug addict or commit suicide besides contacting harmful communicable diseases like AIDS. "The Final Exit" a book by writer Derek Humphrey, a bestseller in America gave guidelines on how to commit suicide. Even in Japan sometime ago the bestseller was a book named 'The Complete Manual on Committing Suicide'! 3.5 lakh copies of the book were sold in one year and many committed suicide with the book in their hands. In France also the book "Suicide- User's Manual" was a bestseller. In our nation today we have a lot of problems such as unemployment, poverty, etc. Even then the rate of suicide is not as high when compared to the suicide rate of the so called developed countries. So far we thought that 'H' is directly proportional to 'M'- where H is happiness and M is money i.e. more money means more happiness. But statistical data reveals that the opposite is true. In developed countries like America, Japan, Sweden, etc.; the per capita income is very high but they also are the toppers in the number of suicide cases. These countries even have more numbers of mentally ill people. I do not mean to say that we should stop earning more money, rather, I think, that in India economic development should be given the top priority but let us remember that money alone cannot solve all our problems. Some more statistics will help you get a clearer picture of the current state of affairs all over the world.

- 54% of the deaths of youths in America, Japan and Sweden according to UNESCO were due to suicide.
- According to the Japan Health Ministry 44% of the Japanese executives aged 42 and above suffered from mental disorders.
- Dr. R D Laing, a psychologist in UK said that an average young boy or girl in England has ten times more chances of entering a mental hospital rather than a higher education school.

Such is the present scenario. So we really have to think as to what can be the role of teachers and what can be the role of education to bring about a change. A radically different education system from the present one has to be employed; spiritual culture has to be introduced. A paradigm shift must take place. Value-education should be given the top most priority. Swami Vivekananda had warned that if spiritual culture is not followed, ours will be an extinct race in three generations. So there is an urgent need for introducing spiritual culture. A new civilization

has to emerge based on the spiritual values otherwise incidents like Columbia school will increase. If we have to have mental peace and world peace, we must have spiritual culture.

India's Gift to the World - Spiritual Culture

Swami Vivekananda said that India has got the special role of giving this spiritual culture to the world. Each and every country has got a special role to play. It is in this context, we appreciate what Swami Vivekananda said "India shall conquer the whole world by its spiritual power." Someone asked Swamiji that being a monk he should be above nationality, then why is he talking so much about India, about patriotism? To this swamiji replied that for him all nations are equal but the world has to be saved from the jaws of materialistic culture. The world cannot be saved unless and until India is saved, because India has got the special role of spreading the great spiritual culture. We have got a great Indian heritage which we will have to give to the whole world as the whole world is waiting for it. In fact, whatever swamiji predicted has come to be true. He was not an astrologer but a visionary. In 1897 he said that India shall become independent within 50 years under extraordinary circumstances. At that time Gandhiji had not yet returned to India from South Africa and nobody even thought of the non-cooperation movement. But it actually happened in 1947, and exactly after 50 years we got independence. So many other things he said also came true. In 1893, at the place of Prof. John Henry Wright, a professor at Harvard University, USA he said that after the British will leave India, there is a great danger of China attacking India. Nobody at that time ever dreamt that the British may ever leave India let alone China attacking India after that, but this did happen in 1962. Swami Vivekananda also predicted that the first proletariat movement will come from Russia or China. Karl Marx himself thought that the first movement will come from Germany since they had some organised labour there, in Russia there was no organised labour; still Swamiji's prophesy came true.

So whatever swamiji had said has come true. But one thing has yet to happen. Swamiji predicated in 1897 in his speech in Chennai that India shall conquer the world by its spiritual power. This is yet to come. But slowly even this is happening. The whole world is now turning towards the Indian spirituality, through meditation, yoga, etc. The 9th August issue of 'Time' magazine shows that Americans are now desperately seeking meditation. It has been reported that for peace of mind some ten million Americans are regularly meditating; also there were newspaper reports that Americans were going gaga over yoga. According to another report 92 out of 122 medical schools in the USA are having regular courses on alternative medicine including yoga and meditation. In a way, Indian spirituality, Indian heritage is now being adopted by other countries. Now if India has to take up the role of world teacher, to give that spirituality, one thing comes in the way and that is our 'developing nation' status. Unless our nation becomes a developed nation how can we become their teachers? That is why there is an urgent need for nation building.

Nation-Building through Character-Building

How can this be done? Dr. Radhakrishnan said beautifully, "You cannot make or build the nation by just bricks; you have to establish the minds of the young people. Then alone can the nation-building take place." Swami Vivekananda also said that the nation building or national reconstruction must be preceded by the character-building of the citizens. We cannot change the scenario of the nation by any parliamentary laws. We may have new acts in the parliament but by that alone our nation will not develop fully. The day the new act passes, ways to defy them legally as well as illegally will be found out.

So, national reconstruction cannot be done unless character-building of citizens takes place and until and unless corruption goes away. There was a naughty boy and once in order to keep him busy while he was working, his father tore a map of India into a number of pieces and giving them

to him asked him to put the map of India together. The father thought that the boy having limited knowledge of geography will take the whole day to do so and thus will not prove a hindrance in his work. To the father's surprise the boy came back within only a few minutes with the whole map perfectly pasted together. When queried, the boy told the father that while he was struggling to put the map together, he suddenly saw a man's picture on the back of the map. Then he put the pieces together to make the complete picture of the man. As soon as the picture of the man became perfect, the map of India too simultaneously got perfectly formed. Similarly Swami Vivekananda also told to make the man perfect first; the nation then automatically will become perfect. So nation-building must be preceded by character-building of citizens, otherwise the country cannot get united. That is why Swami Vivekananda repeatedly said that what we need is man-making and character-building education. But after independence, in spite of so many reports of Dr. Kothari commission, Dr. Radhakrishnan commission, Prakash committee etc. recommending the importance of value education, these have not been implemented. What I sometimes jokingly say is that it seems as if our education now is not man-making but demon-making! Bhatrihari in his famous book 'Niti Shatakam' says that there are four types of people in this society, -- firstly the 'Satpurusha' who serve others unselfishly; secondly the ordinary beings who try to do good first to themselves and then to others; thirdly the 'Rakshasas' who look like humans but who have demonical qualities since whatever they do, they do for their own selfish interest caring less about the harm they may cause to others. They are available widely in our society today. For example, an engineer during the construction of a dam, bridge or any house takes bribes and allows the contractor to mix excess quantities of sand in the cement mixture. In doing so the engineer has served his selfish interest in money but when the rains come and the dam bursts or the bridge collapses, hundreds are killed and thousands are rendered homeless. But the engineer is happy now since he has a nice bungalow.

His selfishness has cost many lives and precious money of the nation. Similarly there are some doctors who are not at all interested in curing the patient but only in the amount of money they receive. Then there is the fourth type. About them Bhatrihari says that they are such that he cannot even name them since they are still worse than the Rakshasas. These are the people who like to harm others even if it does not benefit them. Bhatrihari narrates about only the four types. Now we can add one more type to this and these are those people who feel such a great joy in hurting others that they do it even if it harms themselves e.g. the modern day terrorists. At present we have got majority of the third and fourth and fifth type of people. The second type is really less and the first type rare. That is why Swamiji's ideas of man-making education are so relevant today.

Crisis of the Nation - Crisis of Character

Today the crisis of the nation is the crisis of character. On the 16th of April I was with Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, our honorable president of India at Rashtrapati Bhavan. I told him that even if he brings the wealth of the World Bank to our nation our poverty is not going to go away due to the prevailing corruption. He agreed and asked me as to what is the possible solution. I said that the only possible solution is the implementation of the messages of swami Vivekananda of imparting man-making and character-building education to the young students. I then congratulated him for showing a keen interest in inspiring the students and told him about the special projects of Ramakrishna Mission concerning value-education. He was really happy to know all this and said, "Swamiji let us work together for this cause".

How to Develop Character?

There is a saying —‘sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character’. According to Swami Vivekananda character is nothing but a bundle of habits formed through repeated acts. It comes through ‘samskaras’ or past impressions. Four factors play an important role in developing one’s samskaras. Number one is the samskaras the person has inherited from past birth. Second, the samskaras or the impressions gathered through the genes gathered from the parents and through their training. Third, the samskaras from the society — the environment around the person. Fourth and the most important factor is the ‘teacher’. That is why teachers are the torch-bearers of change. The only way we can change the nation is by character-building of the citizens and for this character building we require a strong foundation just as a strong foundation is required for a strong building. The foundation for character-building has to be laid at a young age. It is easier to build the character of a person when he/she is a student. Thus the most important agent for building the character of a person is the teacher.

Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, our honorable president in his book ‘India 2020:A Vision of The New Millennium’ writes, “If you are a teacher in whatever capacity, you have a very special role to play because more than anybody else it is you who are shaping the future generation.” So here comes the role of the teacher as a torch-bearer. If you want a change at the macro level, it is to be preceded by a change at the micro level. If we want to save the nation we must have the development of the character of the people of the nation. Otherwise the nation cannot prosper. There was a case in the Supreme Court in which the Supreme Court Judge Shri Hansaria gave the judgment against CBSE and ruled that Sanskrit language should continue to be an optional subject and cannot be dropped altogether from the syllabus as it is the very foundation of the Indian culture. While giving an example as to how important it is to protect the culture of the nation he cited an example. There was a war going on between UK and Germany. A Cambridge university professor was engrossed in reading something in his study room when a soldier entered the room and charged him saying that the soldiers were fighting for the nation while he was there, sitting and doing nothing. The professor asked the soldier what he meant by protecting the nation. The soldier said that it meant protecting the geographical boundary of the nation. The professor asked whether it was that only. The soldier thought for a while and said that it also meant the protection of the nation’s people and the culture. The professor said that he was protecting the culture of the nation. Hearing this, the soldier saluted the professor and went away.

Examples of Teachers as Torch Bearers

Here are a few examples of how ordinary teachers can bring about extraordinary transformation in the society. Shri Mahendra Nath Gupta was an ordinary teacher. Once, he went to Dakshineswar in Kolkata by chance where Sri Ramakrishna used to live. At that time he was having a lot of problems in his family and he was thinking of committing suicide. Incidentally he entered Sri Ramakrishna’s room. He met Sri Ramakrishna and got so much peace of mind that he dropped the idea of suicide. He started going to him regularly and noted all the conversations Sri Ramakrishna had with the devotees in his diary. When Swami Vivekananda came to know about it, he was very happy and said that this diary had important conversations and should be printed in book form. Later this diary was published in book form first in Bengali with the name ‘Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita’ and was then translated into English and was published as ‘The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna’. After this it got translated to Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Kannad, Malayalam, Oriya, Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Dutch, Greek, and French and in so many other languages of the world. Millions of copies have been sold and millions of people are getting peace of mind and the spiritual light for the last hundred years. Many have also been saved thereby from committing suicide. Swami Vivekananda in a letter dated 24th November 1897 congratulated the writer who modestly styled himself as ‘M’ and wrote, “Socratic dialogues are

Plato all over. You are entirely hidden. Moreover the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it, here or in the West.” The great Savant Aldous Huxley, in the foreword of this book wrote, “Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, ‘M’ produced a book unique so far as my knowledge goes in the literature of hagiography.” Today this book is serving as a great medium of value education to the society.

Another example is Sister Nivedita (1867-1911). Her real name was Miss Margaret Noble and she was working in England as an ordinary teacher. She got greatly impressed by the speeches of swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda could see the talent behind her and told her to sacrifice her life for India because he felt that our country cannot develop unless and until the condition of the women is improved and the condition of the women cannot improve until they are educated. At that time only one percent of the women were educated. He wanted to start a school exclusively for women. Nobody came forward. So he wrote in an inspiring letter on 7/6/1896 to her ‘.....Awake, awake, great ones! The world is burning with misery. Can you sleep? Let us call and call till the sleeping Gods awake, till the God within answers to the call.....Who will give the world light? Sacrifice, in the past has been the law; it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth’s bravest and the best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all.....’ Miss Noble came, dedicated and sacrificed her whole life in the service of India. That is why swami Vivekananda gave her Brahmacharya Diksha and gave her the name ‘Nivedita’ – meaning the one who has dedicated oneself. Her biography is worth a read. She started a school in Kolkata. Now it has become a famous school and has been renamed Sister Nivedita Girls School. Recently the centenary celebrations of this school took place when Shri Narayanan, the former President of India was also present. But the school also has seen days of severe struggle. Initially due to the prevailing social customs, people hesitated in sending the girls to the school. Sister Nivedita had to go from door to door and promise that the girls will be taken to school and brought back safely by her. The food was supplied free and there was no fee. She took personal care of each child and knew each student by her name. She used to write in her diary about each student. At that time Shri Rabindra Nath Tagore and Shri Aurobindo used to call her ‘Lokmata Nivedita’. She was the inspirer of many revolutionaries. In spite of her busy schedule she was always there for the girls and was an ideal teacher. Just imagine how an ordinary teacher inspired everyone. Inspired by Sister Nivedita and others the whole revolutionary movement started in Bengal culminating in the independence of India. How strange that a teacher of UK played such an important part in the struggle against the British rule! Once she had gone for a dinner at Jagdish Chandra Bose’s place. Suddenly she remembered that Prafullamayi, one of the students who was a widow was fasting that day, that day being Ekadashi and she had to give her fruits. She excused herself from that place immediately and went back to the school and gave her the fruits and apologized. Such was her dedication.

Swami Premeshanandji (1884-1967) was also an ordinary teacher. He inspired so many students, many of whom later became great writers, poets etc; many have become monks too and are heading the centers of Ramakrishna Order in Hollywood, Delhi and other important places.

An ordinary teacher can perform great deeds, that is why the teachers should be given the utmost respect. Unfortunately these days we have a trend reversal. Somehow or the other a vicious circle has been created; since teachers are not behaving in a dignified way, utmost respect is not given to them and since respect is not given to them, they think that they are like ordinary people. They think that if the other people in the society are after money why should they be left behind. They forget that they are not supposed to follow the society; they are here to lead the society being the torch-bearers. If this vicious circle has to be broken, the teachers will have to sacrifice. So sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice in the past has been the law and will be for ages to come.

Urgent Need of Electric Shock

I have said nothing new as yet. All of us already know this. The difficulty lies in practicing what we preach. Our condition is like that of the drunkard who was feigning as dead. There is an interesting story. Once in Kolkata five drunkards got together. It was late night and they were drunk a little more than usual. They thought of a funny plan of taking out a fake funeral procession. So one of the drunkards slept on a cot and pretended to be a dead person. The other four lifted the cot on their shoulders and started walking towards the cremation ground while chanting the slogans at dead night. When this procession reached the crossroad the drunkards in the front started pulling the cot in one direction while those at the back started pulling the cot in the opposite direction. Because of all this higgledy-tygledy the drunkard sleeping in the cot got up and asked why they were doing so. The carriers replied that some are saying that the cremation ground is in one direction and the others are saying that it is in the opposite one, and due to this confusion they have this higgledy-tygledy. The man on the cot then said to the other four that they all were fools since they didn't know such a simple route even. He then added that he knew the way to the Kevadatale cremation ground as well as the Neemtala cremation ground but he couldn't tell them the way because he was acting as a dead man! This exactly is our problem. We know the solution of all our problems but we cannot practice what we preach. You know, it is easy to awaken a person if he/she is asleep but how to awaken the one who pretends to be asleep? The only way is to give an electric shock. And we will get this shock by reading the books of Swami Vivekananda. The French Savant, Romain Rolland- a noble laureate wrote about the impact of Swamiji's books, ".....His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven... I cannot touch these sayings of his, scattered as they are through the pages at a thirty years distance without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock....."

When Swami Vivekananda came back from his tour of America and other countries after four years of preaching of Vedanta, wherever he went, there was a grand reception and in response to the receptions, he gave fiery speeches, the gist which was compiled in the form of a book "The Lectures from Colombo to Almora". In another beautiful book "My India, the India eternal" also, we find those inspiring speeches. A boy studying in the ninth standard in Cuttack read the book of Swami Vivekananda and decided to sacrifice his life for serving the nation and later was known as Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. Dr. Radhakrishnan used to say that when he wrote letters to his friends he used to quote letters of Swami Vivekananda, because during that time the British Government used to look with suspicious eyes towards the people who were reading those books. In almost every revolutionary's house, the Intelligence department after a long search for bombs used to get something more dangerous than bombs— the books of Swami Vivekananda. So intelligence department had recommended to British Government that Swami Vivekananda's books should be banned. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said that, in their times, hardly any young person was there who did not get inspiration from the books of Swami Vivekananda. Mahatma Gandhi had come to Belur Math (our headquarters) on 30th January 1921. When Gandhiji was asked to give lecture, he said "I have not come here to give lecture; I have come here only to pay my respect to Swami Vivekananda. I will tell only one thing to the youths present here, please don't go empty handed. Take some inspiration from this great place. Read the books of Swami Vivekananda. I myself have gone through his books. After going through his books my patriotism has become thousand- fold". So there is a great power in the books of Swami Vivekananda. They will act like an electric shock and awaken the teachers, and remind them that they are torch bearers. They do not have to follow the rut. The officers, businessmen, ministers, etc. can afford

to go for money; they may be forgiven but the teachers cannot be forgiven because through their bad example thousands of students may be affected. Swami Vivekananda gave the mantra “be and make” that is first we have to build our own character and then help others to build their character. The students may become great or demon-like by the influence of teachers. It all depends upon how they get inspired. In case of the students what we tell them is not important but what we are is more important. Values are never taught, but they are caught. Now-a-days, the students are intelligent. They know the teachers well; what they do after class, etc. If you tell them to speak only the truth and not practice it yourself, it will not have any effect.

You might have heard this story. Some children were playing. A teacher, who was passing by, asked them what they were doing. They told that they are playing a game in which whoever tells the greatest lie will be awarded a prize. The teacher asked them not to play such a game and always speak the truth. He also added that in his whole life he had never spoken a lie. Hearing this all the students clapped and shouted together, “Sir, you get the first prize”. Therefore what we say is not important but what we do is more important.

Success Mantra for Teachers

During my talks with teachers I give the following formula for success:

$$S = 3D + 3Q$$

Where S = Success in teaching life

D = Dignity, Dedication and Devotion

Q = IQ (Intelligence Quotient)

EQ (Emotional Quotient)

SQ (Spiritual Quotient)

Wherever I go I give the following mantra while talking to the teachers which should be repeated ten times daily. The mantra is-‘I am a teacher’; it may sound simple but how it is chanted makes all the difference. Whenever I ask teachers, “what do you do?” they say, “I am a teacher” with such a morose face as if they have become teachers by compulsion. Instead one should be proud of being a teacher and say “I am a teacher, I am a nation builder, I am a torch bearer, how great I am, how responsible I am”. I feel that the best and the greatest profession in this world is that of a teacher, because the future of the nation primarily does not depend on the type of ministers, IAS officers, scientists, etc. but on the teachers who shape the future ministers, IAS officers, scientists, etc. Moreover, this profession is best suited for practicing ‘Karma Yoga’ for manifesting the divinity within. Every teacher has to chant the mantra ‘I am a teacher, how great I am and what great responsibility I have’.

So, the equation is like this. A=B, B=C, C=D, so D=A. Teachers are the torch bearers of change because the whole world can be saved if India can be saved; because India’s role is to give spiritual culture. If the world has to be saved, India must be saved; if India has to be saved, India must prepare the students as enlightened citizens, and teachers play the most important role in shaping the students as enlightened citizen. As Nani Palkhiwala says, “Enlightened citizens cannot be produced in the factory; it has to come through education.” Thus teachers are the torch-bearers of change, change for the whole nation, for the whole world.

I thank the AMA for giving me this opportunity to meet all of you. Let us always remember the powerful words of Swami Vivekananda - “Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is achieved!”