

INDIA MUST FIX ITS OWN CLASSROOMS

Every September 5, India honours Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan - philosopher, Oxford scholar, and the Republic's first Vice-President and second President. When students proposed celebrating his birthday after he became President in 1962, he asked instead that the date be observed as Teachers' Day, insisting teachers deserved to rank among the nation's finest minds. It is a fitting origin story for a country that has long seen itself as a wellspring of learning for the world.

That reverence is not sentimental excess. Teachers do more than deliver a syllabus; they build the cognitive and moral scaffolding on which every other profession stands. The doctor who saves a life, the engineer who builds a bridge, the officer who frames policy - all once sat before a teacher who taught them to reason, question and persist. In a country of 1.4 billion, no institution shapes the future more directly than the classroom, nor any individual more than the teacher standing in it.

India's claim to Vishwa Guru status - teacher to the world - rests on genuine civilisational memory. Nalanda and Takshashila once drew scholars from Persia to China; the guru-shishya tradition treated teaching as a sacred trust, not a fallback career.

Reviving that stature is now stated national ambition, invoked from foreign-policy platforms to soft-power strategy. Ground reality is more sobering. A Parliamentary Standing Committee last year counted close to ten lakh vacant teaching posts under the Centre's Samagra Shiksha scheme - over seven lakh of them at the primary and elementary level. Vacancies for secondary and senior-secondary teachers, precisely where subject expertise matters most, nearly doubled within a single year.

Regulators have simultaneously derecognised scores of teacher-training colleges that had reduced the B.Ed degree to a paper formality. Even the good news carries a warning: the most recent ASER survey, in 2024, found barely a quarter of Class 3 government-school children could read a Class 2-level text - a real improvement on 2022, but still a low bar for an aspiring Vishwa Guru.

Two Generations, One Home: India's Promise to Its Elders



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In the light of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family), the glory of the elderly is their insight, their knowledge and their wisdom.

In Indian homes, there is always a memory everyone carries, a grandfather narrating an adventurous story from his childhood or a grandmother demonstrating knitting while sitting in the balcony on a fine winter afternoon. These ordinary afternoons are where a family's real inheritance gets passed on quietly, one small skill and one shared story at a time.

We often speak about the generation gap, about grandparents who do not understand smartphones and grandchildren who do not have the patience for long stories of golden past. But I think we speak far less about generation bridges. Almost invisible ways in which the old and the young still complete each other.

What Each Generation Is Actually Giving The Other?

A grandparent gives a child something no school can teach: time, that asks for nothing in return. With growing urbanisation and both parents often working, a child's day is usually structured around strict timetables but, a grandparent is often the one person willing to simply sit. To listen to a story being told for the fifth

time. To wait while a shoelace is tied. That unhurried attention given to children shapes a sense of being valued in ways we rarely measure.

And what do these children have for giving back? Presence, which seems something very modest, yet it is not. A grandchild's visit changes the shape of an elderly person's whole week. A video call from a grandson away at college or a granddaughter telling her grandmother how much she misses her cooking, a great-grandchild simply climbing into a lap- these moments do for an elderly what medicine alone cannot. This is the logic behind 'Ageing At Home', an idea that elderly people are happiest and healthiest not in an institution but in their own home, surrounded by the family and neighbourhood they have always known and cherished.

This is not a new discovery for us. In most parts of India, touching the feet of an elder for their blessing remains one of the first gestures a child learns, a small act that teaches something no lecture could: that age is to be honoured. The Sanskrit teaching 'Matru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava', 'Regard Your Mother And Father As You Would The Divine', remains the foundation of the values Indian families try to instil in their children. Those who raise us, deserve our reverence in return. There is another divine saying, "Paradise Lies Beneath The Feet of Your Mother", again reflects the eternal source of blessings and contentment one can earn through love, care and service to our parents and grandparents. It means that serving, respecting and lowering oneself to care for a mother is a direct path to earning God's pleasure and entering Paradise. Besides, it acknowledges the immense pain, hardship, and lifelong sacrifice a mother endures while raising her children.

This is why, when families stay close across generations, under one roof some exchange happens. Children raised close to grandparents tend to grow knowing the stories that shaped their family, the

values their elders lived by and experiencing what patience actually looks like. And elderly people who remain woven into a family's daily life are healthier, less anxious and less lonely.

When The Thread Frays?

But we would be telling only half the truth if we did not admit that this thread is fraying across cultures in many Indian homes today. Migration for work, nuclear families, the sheer pace of modern life, all of these have quietly left many of our elders spending their days in empty houses, waiting for a call that comes less often than it used to.

This is not a failure of love. It is usually a failure of time and distance. And because ageing at home remains the outcome every family and every elderly person requires, the support that steps in should be built to help a parent stay in their own home rather than moving out.

What we need to fully understand and embrace that the elderly are a source of wisdom, experience and stability in a world that is constantly changing.

Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the Central Government's ELDER LINE, a toll-free helpline (14567), is there the moment they simply need to talk to someone, day or night.

And under the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY), elderly citizens receive walking sticks, hearing aids, spectacles and other assistive devices free-of-cost, so that independence is never out of reach for want of means. These quiet supports exist precisely so that distance does not have to mean disconnection. When a grandchild does finally visit, they find a grandparent who is well, engaged and still at home, full of stories, not one who has simply been waiting.

Even when a family genuinely cannot be present every day, ageing at home need not mean ageing without care. The SHATAYU (Senior Holistic Care Assistance and Training For Your Utility) dashboard is helping build something India has long needed, a trained, trackable

network of geriatric caregivers available district-by-district, so that a qualified pair of hands can step in for the hours a working son or a distant daughter simply cannot. It is care that comes to the home, rather than care that requires leaving it.

For a smaller number of elders who have no family close by, this idea of home simply takes a different shape and government-supported old age homes, run under the Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY), step in to become exactly the family they need. Residents share meals together, celebrate festivals as a household would, take part in Yoga and health check-ups and have someone to talk to over tea. It is a family, rebuilt in a different form, so that no elder ever has to grow old entirely alone.

A Small Practice Worth Reviving

If there is one thing every family could do, it is to let the generations sit together. Just an evening where a grandparent tells a grandchild about their own childhood, or a teenager teaching their grandmother to send a voice note. Teaching her to use the JEEVAN (Joint Elderly Empowerment & Virtual Assistance Network) App on her phone, where she can check which welfare schemes she is eligible for or simply have an emergency help button within her reach. These moments cost nothing and require no grand gesture. They only require intention.

Because in the end, inter-generational bonding is not really about the old teaching the young or the young energising the old. It is about both generations reminding each other of something the middle years of life tend to make us forget.

Somewhere in India today, a grandparent is folding a paper boat with a child who will not remember why that afternoon mattered. It mattered anyway. Let us make sure there are many more such afternoons and with the quiet support of schemes built exactly for this purpose, no grandparent has to spend theirs alone.

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WHEN STRANGERS BECOME OUR OWN

Sanjay Chandra

I recently moderated a conversation with a friend about his book *On Angels' Wings*. He was only seventeen when he lost his entire family in the bombing of Air India Flight 182, Kanishka. The book is a moving account of the tragedy and the long quest of the families for justice.

The aircraft went down off the coast of Ireland. As we spoke about the events that followed, one aspect stayed with me-the compassion shown by the local people towards the families who had travelled there after losing their loved ones. They were complete strangers, arriving in another country in circumstances nobody should ever have to face. Yet people opened not merely their doors but also their hearts to them. Their grief somehow became a shared grief.

A few weeks later, I was watching a series about another aviation tragedy-the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988. Debris was scattered over a vast area, with Lockerbie itself suffering deaths on the ground. And once again, what struck me was the response of ordinary people. The residents of Lockerbie reached out to families they had never met. They offered comfort and



companionship of a kind that official systems, however well-intentioned, could seldom provide.

These accounts reminded me of experiences from my own years in the Railways. Railway accidents sometimes occurred in remote locations accessible only through narrow village roads. By the time railway teams could reach the site, the nearby villagers were invariably already there. Many had very little to spare themselves. Yet that seldom seemed to matter. They helped the injured, brought whatever food and water they could arrange, and stayed around to assist those involved in rescue and restora-

tion. I remember being deeply moved by such gestures. Nobody had instructed them to help. Someone was in distress, and helping seemed the most natural thing to do.

Years later, I find myself wondering about the apparent contradiction in human behaviour.

The same human beings who can display extraordinary compassion towards complete strangers can also become divided over matters that, viewed from a distance, sometimes appear insignificant. Communities that come together during an accident, flood or other tragedy can, at another time,

find themselves confronting one another over differences of identity, belief or ideology. Why? Perhaps suffering does something that ordinary life does not. When we encounter someone who has lost a child, a parent or an entire family, the labels with which we normally identify people temporarily disappear. We do not first see nationality, religion, language, social standing or political belief. We see another human being in pain. A stranger ceases, for that moment, to be a stranger.

Our everyday lives are different. We have the time and space to notice what distinguishes us from others. Differences get emphasised, grievances acquire histories and opinions gradually become positions we feel compelled to defend.

Yet the responses I have witnessed in times of tragedy make me believe that compassion lies closer to our natural instincts than many of those divisions. Perhaps tragedy does not suddenly make people kinder. It merely strips away, for a while, the layers that prevent that kindness from expressing itself.

The question that remains with me is a simple one. If we can so easily recognise our shared humanity when confronted with another person's suffering, why must we wait for tragedy to remind us that strangers can also be our own?

Teachers as architects of a Viksit Bharat

Abhishek Anand

A nation that reveres its educators progresses on the path of growth and development. As we cruise towards the centenary of independence and our lofty goal of becoming Viksit Bharat@2047, it is worth pondering and exploring how ancient Indian wisdom and civilisational ethos, encapsulated in the Taittiriya Upanisad's injunction "Acharya devo bhava" (regard the teacher as divine), on the teacher being supremely esteemed, who was looked upon not only as an instructor but as a spiritual and moral guide, remain profoundly and significantly relevant even today.

Ancient Indian education and the Guru-Shishya Parampara

The ancient Indian education system was a disciplined process of intellectual, moral and spiritual formation; not merely of inculcating the ability to read, write and calculate. It was anchored in the Guru-Shishya Parampara. Centres of learning assumed and developed different institutional forms, such as Taxila and Nalanda, over many centuries. At these, the acharya/guru was often more than a disseminator of information and

knowledge. They mediated an intellectual inheritance and shaped the character, conduct and judgement of their pupils. Radha Kumud Mookerji's classic study, *Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist* (1947), remains the landmark scholarly account of how this teacher-centred model carried the essence of "Indianness" for over a millennium. Similarly, Hartmut Scharfe's *Education in Ancient India* (2002) illuminates the centrality of oral transmission, memorisation, debate, apprenticeship and the close teacher-student bond in this long history.

The Upanishads express this relationship with unusual clarity. The Chhandogya Upanishad compares an ignorant person to someone left blindfolded in an unfamiliar land; once shown the direction, they can ask their way and reach their destination. The tutor does not walk every step for the tutee; they remove the blindfold, give direction and enable intelligent inquiry. Its conclusion (6.14.2) is striking:

"A person who has a teacher comes to know."

The Taittiriya Upanisad goes further by presenting education as a moral compass. In the celebrated in-

struction to a departing student, the pedagogue says:

"Speak the truth. Practise Dharma. Do not neglect self-study."

These simple words carry substantial weight during an individual's formative years: the most crucial stage of their life's journey. Bharat's young population must be cognisant of the Indian education model's enduring trajectory, which was not restricted to textual learning. The Gurukulas, where students and their guru lived together, influenced and moulded it. The former observed the latter's daily living and learned from his conduct. Teachers can help cultivate in students the enduring values of patience, perseverance, tolerance, wisdom, compassion, empathy, truthfulness, honesty, sincerity and righteousness.

Guru as the fourth deity

The Taittiriya Upanisad's Shikshavali, in its convocation address to graduating students, articulates (1.11.2):

"Let your mother be a God to you. Let your father be a God to you. Let your teacher be a God to you. Let your guest be a God to you."

This matters for Teachers' Day because, in Indian tradition, respect for teachers was tied to the gravity of

their responsibility. Reverence was not merely ceremonial status; the teacher was considered an epitome of knowledge because education concerned truth, duty, self-control, perseverance and respect for his guru.

Teachers as the cultivators of civil order

Educators can infuse civic discipline and compliance by making the classroom a living school of responsible citizenship. Through their own punctuality, fairness, honesty, respectful conduct and adherence to rules, they can show that discipline is not blind obedience but the voluntary exercise of self-control in the interest of the common good. Like a potter's hands create shapely vessels from shapeless clay, they can effectively make students frame and follow norms of punctuality in life, respectful speech, integrity, cleanliness, digital conduct, regard for elders and care for public property. At the same time, classroom discussions, debates and service activities can teach pupils to respect differences, accept accountability and translate constitutional values into daily action. In this way, they can nurture young citizens who are lawful without being unthinking, patriotic without being intolerant and

free without being irresponsible; citizens whose honesty, civic-mindedness, environmental consciousness, respect for institutions and commitment to excellence will strengthen Bharat's social fabric and advance the building of a strong, robust, Atma-Nirbhar and Viksit Bharat.

The guru-shishya legacy in NEP 2020 StudyHindu Texts

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 redefines education not only as literacy, numeracy and professional competence, but also as critical thinking, constitutional values, ethical responsibility, scientific temper and a commitment to fundamental duties. In doing so, it seeks to revive the timeless Indian ideal of Vidya Dana, where education is a sacred trust that nurtures both individual excellence and collective welfare. By rooting learning in civilisational continuity while embracing modern innovation, it positions educators as the moral and intellectual anchors of this enhanced vision. It states, "The teacher must be at the centre of the fundamental reforms" and calls for the restoration of teachers' "respect, dignity and autonomy". It envisions them not merely as disseminators of subject knowledge but as facilitators of holistic learning,

imparting life skills and socio-cultural-emotional intelligence. Hence, their roles and functions acquire a new dimension in reimagining Bharat's advancement.

Conclusion

Beyond other determinants, a Viksit Bharat will also be ascertained and measured by the quality of its human resources and civic culture. Teachers are uniquely placed to make this transition real and transformative. They can encourage young Indians to move away from the question, "What can the country give me?" to a more meaningful and equally pressing question: "What can I contribute to the country?" This self-introspection and self-reflection are not merely rhetoric. When instilled successfully, they will be seen in the collective endeavour of Indian citizens working towards nation-building by voluntarily practising responsibility, restraint, lawfulness, rule-following and concern for the greater good. In this way, our respected teachers can help achieve a Viksit Bharat by enabling millions of Indians to perform civic responsibilities towards the nation with a profound sense of purpose and sincerity.