

SECOND THOUGHTS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THOUGHTS, DREAMS AND MEMOIRS



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Teaching, Temporal and Timeless: Phenomenal Paths Beyond Traditions

Aswathi M.P.

A ubiquitous yet eternal designation, 'teacher', puts you in a class from which retirement is impossible. Especially in the context of the region where once you embrace the teaching career, irrespective of the avenues that you opt after this monumental choice, you would be addressed phenomenally, both in formal and informal contexts, as 'teacher'. The climate that offered this singular recognition is the one that has its own expectations, mostly cultural. The teacher is a cultural category from which the public demands a certain ethico-political-ideological credentials; so the validity of the notion that the teachers build society is in a flux where this construction, sometimes, is arbitrary. To a great extent, a whimsical paradox prevents the teacher, students and people except them, to remind themselves of the possible exercise of liberty and necessitates a convenient betrayal of individuality at the altar of this ideal territory of being or becoming a teacher. Thus, generations of teachers struggle to locate them in a flawless tribe, epitomes of sacrifice, magnanimity, essence, knowledge and ethics. However, some spirited individuals among them, amidst this curious epistemological discourse, dealing with three

generations, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z, identify unique as well as significant paradigms for their individual teacherly existence. It was these teachers, who cultivated the habits of professionalism to plant themselves perfectly in the complex realm of teaching, in favour of curing the temporal ailments of teaching.

Probably a teacher may live two lives, the one as a new entrant into the field with apprehensions, models and half baked theoretical convictions or speculations, with the enthusiasm to grab the orbits of wisdom to grow and sustain, and the other as a veteran academician who reached the far end of hypothesis, unlearned the outdated convictions, expanded the horizons of perspectives, grabbed and cultivated a different set of ethics and become more empathetic to the philosophical issues of the times, not only of the direct learner, but also of a fellow participant in the exercise, sometimes of a subaltern, or of a citizen globally. Interestingly these two lives may occur in two planes: a conscious, invited and ambitiously followed plane of transformation and an unconscious realm of shift that occurred during the journey as a teacher. Though preoccupied with the times, the teacher may indulge in deliberations with the intervening period that shape selection and modification of policies.

Flexibility and integrity are two formidable determiners that form the magnitude of this not so linear pattern of evolution of a teacher. These controlling factors as well as their variant contours that the academic environment solicits produce some fissures in the erstwhile celebrated perceptions of teacher. This juncture, of being

a teacher, assimilating the new symmetries, adapting oneself to the new learning scenarios and creatively instilling the spirit of experience into the field for further growth, of oneself and of the coming generations pose innumerable challenges, particularly to the educational experts who are the participants of and catalysts for change. For the generations of millennial teachers who were a part of Generation X, born between 1960s and 1980s, stepped into the arena of higher education in 1990s, and attained the status as post-millennial educators, the landscape of academia offered a not so banal space; indeed the space they occupy demanded specialized kind of knowledge, not only in the realm of teaching, but in the way of adapting themselves to the surge of technology and the incorporation of it in the transactions opening new vistas of learning opportunities in due course of time. Along with this, the constant pulls of updating the strategies and content for the learner whose experience and exposure vary from Generation Y, born between 1981 and 1996, whom the teacher met in the end of 1990s as learners, the intricacies of socio-political-ethical and ideological terrains expect an entirely different self of the teacher to come out. The practical concerns urge a fine balance between the occupation and profession that belittle these expectations entirely, to excel and succeed by limiting his/her operations to teaching and research. This is the biggest challenge and occasionally a matter of dispute among the teaching community comprises of these two generations of teachers.

Amidst the complimentary status of these two generations, there existed a fundamental difference; while

the Generation X teachers renovate the perspectives of the learner by providing themselves as models, both ethical, philosophical and academic, the millennial teachers leave the growth of the student as something independent. When the new generation of teachers abstain themselves from becoming projected as role models, providing different set of plural priorities from which the learner can opt, or opt out, the generation of teachers of 1990s in addition to suggesting plural possibilities, set and insist on a certain benchmarks for excellence.

How and where the focus of teaching is laid is another point of divergence: when the veteran group focus on the aesthetic mode of perception, the generation of novice would emphasize the transaction part. Obviously, this contrast becomes instrumental in forming different kind of relationships between the learner and these two generation of teachers. The distinct result and outcome would depend on the priority of the class of teachers of 90s, for which they do not hesitate to adopt didactic methods, of correcting and logically checking the validity of the learners' actions. The teachers of 90s consider the teaching and learning as more or less a selfless activity and are moved by principled prerogatives than success stories. The limited number of available resources for learning is also instrumental in perceiving the teacher as a necessary element in the academic realm. The current generation of teachers, as they stepped into the career with a lot of complexities due to the method of distribution of syllabus through semesters than in year pattern and owing to the new breed of excellence that the pattern of placement and

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promotion exact, are compelled to be in a laborious task which leave them with a more self centered value system where the relationship between the teacher and student will mostly remain only at the intellectual level. Even in the times of this detached but self conscious scholarship, the new teachers could not help but be in competition with the world to prove their excellence in a short span of time. Ultimately this will leave them in a traumatic obsession with setting short term goal for the learners and for themselves. The intelligent learner who could recognize this shift would not allow himself/herself to be trapped in the old mode of teacher-learner relationship. The learner, with the reduction of retention span of knowledge due to multiple exposures, could not find the necessity to retain the traditional image of the relationship between him/her and the teacher too. So the Generation Z learner, recognizing this contrast between the Generation X and Y categories of teachers, would be in a seemingly lighthearted relationship with the Generation Y teacher, and demand the same from the Generation X teacher who grew up among a different value system. So the current times could see the teacher occupying marginal terrains with students, where at some point one could see a student may replace the teacher. This reallocation would invite difficult discussions as people from and outside academia mostly expected the conventions to be maintained without shifts, though shifts are inevitable as the time demands.

The students, whose exposures vary from that of their previous generation, live the life carrying plethora of information that may produce problems and provide

solutions. So they would not subscribe to the old concept that the teaching is an activity of knowledge providing. Their dexterity over technology would enable them to find solutions to their concerns independently, that made them think about the teacher as a problem solver as unnecessary. Again the exposure of knowledge and the availability and accessibility of resources made the new learner skeptical about the information that the teacher provides, that in turn situate the teacher in a not so elevated position of worship of consideration. Instead they demand the teachers to realize their worth, value their opinions, respect their priorities and consider their needs than the generally stated objectives of education. Amidst this demanding categories of students, Generation Y teachers would survive better than Generation X teachers. So the Generation X teachers, unless they train themselves otherwise, would remain aloof in the crowd of detached set of students, with undecipherable demands.

Still irrespective of the fluidity of scenarios, intelligent teachers may continue their dynamic stride of excellence; one has to invent new scales beyond this binary of X and Y to discuss about teachers like them. The rare insight, leadership skills and strategies, and the subjective aesthetics that these teachers display are making the young generation of learners, including teachers of Generation Y and the students both of of Generation Y and Z, to think out of the box. Rather than leaving the teacher unnecessary, teachers like them envisage a generation of educators who are necessary participants in the game to continue, be it in the form of remembrance of the students along with their respective batches, or be it in the form of

building a different set of values among colleagues. A certain teachers are phenomenal. You cannot keep them in the proposed or expected way. They may mark dissent. The aesthetics of that dissent may prevent people to see immediately the revolutions their actions carry, until they recognize they are changed. The transformation that the action of these teachers bring are slow but steady, The ideal teachers are always timeless, with the grasp over the temporal demands. They learn, motivate and excel and remain suitable for the eternal designation.

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