

**Embassy of India
Muscat**

**Award Ceremony for Excellence in Teaching
Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir
8 February 2023**

Remarks by Ambassador Amit Narang

**Chairman and Members of Board of Directors,
President Indian School Wadi Kabir,
Members of the Indian School Management Committee,
Principal,
Sponsor of the Award Shri Kiran bhai Asher and family,
Dear Teachers and students,**

I am honoured to be invited to today's function honouring the best teachers in the Indian schooling system in Oman.

At the outset my felicitations to all the distinguished teachers short-listed for the awards and congratulations in advance to the teachers who will be recognized today for their accomplishments.

Teachers are at the heart of any teaching ecosystem. No matter how good or bad the physical infrastructure, the success or the lack of it of any schooling system ultimately depends upon the quality of its teachers. It is befitting therefore that the Board of Directors has continued with this annual tradition of recognizing excellence in teaching.

Towards this end, I also put on record my sincere appreciation for the contribution of Shri Kiran bhai Asher whose family has very kindly sponsored the awards.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

There are only two professions with which we customarily associate the word 'noble'. These two noble professions are medicine and teaching.

Doctors save lives but teachers make lives.

In the Indian tradition therefore, the role of a teacher or a Guru occupies a very high place, perhaps the next only to God. From time immemorial, Indian philosophical thinkers, writers, sages and poets have expressed the importance of teachers in various ways. What is common across the history of Indian philosophical thought is how central the role of a teacher is.

As one of the oft-recited shlokas says गुरुः साक्षात् परं ब्रह्म।

The Guru is no other than the Almighty himself.

One of the greatest poet philosophers of India was saint Kabir and in his humongous anthology there are not one, not two but tens of dohas or couplets in which he has exhorted the qualities of a true Guru.

In one of his dohas, Kabir compares the Guru to a potter and describes quiet vividly how the teacher shapes the student just like a potter carves a shapeless piece of a clay into a beautiful work of art by a combination of loving support and tough discipline.

He says:

गुरु कुम्हार शिष कंभ है, गढि-गढि काढै खोट।
अन्तर हाथ सहार दै, बाहर बाहै चोट

A beautiful description of what a good teacher is and how he or she should work with his students.

Dear teachers,

In Indian philosophy and in our ancient texts, there are numerous examples of Gurus who are well-known to every Indian. In the Mahabharat for example, there are gurus Vashishtha, Parshurama, Kripacharya and Dronacharya.

Today I wish to talk about another character in the Mahabharata whose example of what a good teacher should be is quite salutary.

This is no other than Shri Krishna.

While his importance and centrality to the story and to Indian mythology need not be explained to this audience, his role as a teacher does not always get the attention it deserves.

What qualities of a good teacher can Krishna show us by his actions?

I can see 5 tributes of what constitutes a good teacher from the actions of Krishna.

First and foremost, a teacher is always a good listener.

In the entire first chapter of the Bhagawat Gita, it is Arjuna who speaks. Krishna only listens. He does not interject and is in no hurry to teach. He merely listens and allows Arjuna to articulate his thoughts, his disillusion and his dilemmas in great detail.

A good teacher doesn't just listen to the student but in a wider sense seeks to understand the needs and requirements of every student. Because each student like Arjuna is different and unique.

Secondly, even though Krishna is attributed to be God himself, he does not intervene when his disciples the Pandavas are doing, what can be clearly seen in hindsight, to be mistakes. The entire gambling incident is a case in point. Krishna does not stop the Pandavas from gambling themselves, their

wives and their Kingdom out of their lack of good judgement. He interjects only when Draupadi calls him to save her.

This does not imply that teachers should allow children to do wrong. What it shows us is the despite showing them the right paths, sometimes you have to let children walk on it themselves, experience life, make mistakes and thereby get to the correct pathway. A teacher's job is to guide and teach but not to impose a certain way on the young minds.

Thirdly, Krishna is also remarkably non-judgemental and shows us that even during their worst times, a teacher must appeal to the best in every child.

Despite Arjuna's doubts and abject resignation on the eve of battle, Krishna never once doubts his competence. On the other hand, he keeps reminding Arjuna how he is the greatest warrior in the world and must therefore rise and fulfil his Karma.

A teacher's job likewise is to see the best in every child, always encourage his/her unique talents to come to fore and channelise his/her inner energy so that he or she can rise to their fullest potential.

Fourth, the greatest teaching of Krishna and arguably the most famous Indian philosophical thought is that of 'Nishkam Karma' and most Indians know the Shloka कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन by heart.

But how does this thought apply to teaching? Can a teacher tell a student that he/she should merely study and not worry about exam results?

I guess that will be very difficult.

Of course, a teacher's mandate is to lead a student to success and that inevitably means succeeding in examinations. However, what this really shows us is that a teacher's true task is not just to prepare the student for an exam but to prepare him for life. Teacher's role transcends succeeding in exams.

A true teacher is one who is remembered for instilling love of a subject in the student. A true teacher is one who ignites the flame of intellectual curiosity and inquisitiveness in a child. A good teacher in other words prepares a *exam warrior* to also be a *knowledge warrior*.

Last but not the least, the most unusual attribute of Krishna as a teacher is found in Shloka 63 of Chapter 18, the last chapter.

After having explained all the knowledge and wisdom to Arjuna, Krishna says विमृश्य एतत् अशेषेण, यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु।

In other words, examine what I have told you completely, and then *do what you wish to do*.

A somewhat surprising exhortation by Krishna after having given what is the world's most famous exposition of Karma Yoga, Gyana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. This assertion stems not from any intellectual insecurity nor any doubt on the capability of the disciple. On the contrary, Krishna knows that he has explained everything and all facets of Yoga to Arjuna so well that he will be in a position to make the right decision. He leaves the decision making to his student, having given him the intellectual basis to do so.

This remarkable attribute of letting go depicts that while a teacher must show the path to the student, he should allow him or her to walk the path on their own, based on their own judgement. As a teacher therefore, our teaching should be strong enough to show the correct path and make sure that the student is capable enough to walk that correct path on his or her own volition. A teacher teaches the child to walk, but walk he must on his own.

To be a teacher like Shri Krishna was to Arjuna is by no means an easy task but if we can imbibe some of these attributes, we can all be better teachers to our students.

Let us find the courage to be a Charioteer or *Sarathi* for our students so that they can emerge victorious in the Mahabharatas of their lives.

I once again wish all the teachers many more years of happy teaching.

Thank you once again.

Namaskar.

Jai Shri Krishna.

Jai Hind.
