



# The Teaching Profession in the Knowledge Economy

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'Arise awake and stop not till the goal is reached', says Vivekanand. The goal is a flourishing and thriving India with an educated population and teachers at the helm of it.

Every 5<sup>th</sup> September we celebrate Teacher's day, and it is therefore an appropriate occasion to reflect on our traditions of learning, their present status and contemplate on the needs, challenges and promises of the future.

So we have the greatest disciple of all times Arjun, taught by the greatest teachers like Dronacharya and Lord

Krishna, and Yudhishtira learning from the Yaksha in a question-answer format with rewards on success, a method now described in the standard literature as the Socratic method. Anecdotes relating to education in our mythology as well as traditions are replete with examples of personalization, mastery-learning, knowledge obtained by denial, experiential learning and parental role in pre-natal and neo-natal learning.

## State Control

The guru-centred and community supported educational system was working quite well until the British rulers discovered this and promptly brought in State intervention and State patronage and eventually State control. More than 57 years after independence we have not been able to achieve universal literacy and any meaningful targets in elementary, secondary, or tertiary education. As we enter the knowledge economy, we must change this situation and give up urgently the factors, methods and systems which are inadequate in the new environment and





adopt new innovative and future-oriented methods and practices.

In the immediate past three to four decades, we have seen the establishment of teaching Institutions modeled on the factory system, with emphasis on minimum performance standards, Institutional supremacy and little interest in individual excellence. So there were no special schools or teaching arrangements for specially gifted children, accelerated learning, mastery learning, personalization, etc. The very best with the highest abilities and the bottom of the class were administered exactly the same learning challenges and environment. There were a few islands of achievement which were given disproportionately high resources and there was no process of measurement.

Just as lawyers were at the forefront of the freedom movement, student union leaders were political leaders in the more recent past and now business

leaders and film stars are at the centre-stage on the national scene, and economic policies are tested against the Sensex movement. In the emerging knowledge economy it is the teachers who will be most important. This is so because it is the teachers who specialize in the creation of a learning experience and thus of knowledge. We have had reforms with relinquishment of State controls in many areas, but the most urgent of them is required in education.

#### Supremacy of Teacher

We need to re-assert and re-establish the supremacy of the teacher, and not the bureaucrat or the Institution. Not through tokenism of distribution of a few national awards once a year, but in our day to day practice, and through a series of steps seriously acknowledging the importance of education and of teachers in the construction of learning. As we enter the knowledge economy, it

is important to appreciate that education alone will create valuable knowledge products for global use, and this alone will let us flourish and thrive in the new age. We must not forget that it is India which gave the world the concept of zero, and if we could charge a royalty, or licensing fee for it, like Bill Gates charges for use of its Microsoft Software, we would be the richest country in the world.

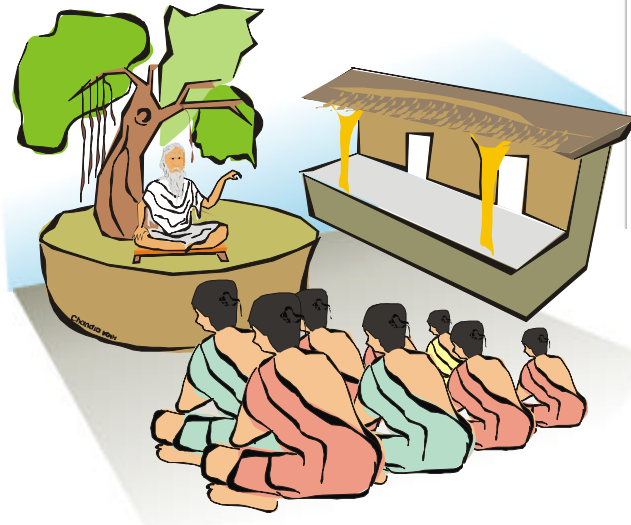
#### Innovative Society

It is generally agreed that the future economy will flourish on know-how and innovative ideas, and then it follows logically that any society that virtually writes off the majority of its population through poor quality education with indifferent teachers is throwing away its most precious assets. The goal is therefore to have an innovative and inclusive society and this cannot be achieved without putting teachers at the centre-stage.

De-controlling education is the most important step towards full freedom and fulfillment of the nation's ambitions. The Constitution guarantees us the fundamental right to practice the occupation of 'education'. Of course it is subject to reasonable restrictions in the overall interests of society. But the current restrictions on the right to carry out the occupation is itself coming in the way of the constitutional obligation of education for all. While the qualifications, training and preparation to qualify for the

profession have been defined and could be refined quite easily, the next step of actual practice is curtailed by the inadequacy of opportunities because the Government does not have the will or the wherewithal to create enough schools, colleges or Universities. And when some State Governments following the spirit of 'may a thousand flowers bloom', went on to create innovative models, numerous regulatory bodies have created stumbling blocks rather than facilitating pathways.

The reality is of course clear. Like post 1942, when it was clear that the British have to leave in a fairly short time, it is clear that thanks to its inability and insincerity in performing its tasks, the traditional regulatory bodies have to give way to more independent professional bodies



profession at home without the need for Institutional intermediaries, and with access to training in modern ICT tools for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions with

within commodities, products and services which can be traded across the airwaves. This economy is therefore fuelled by innovation, which itself is a result of increased communication (and

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for facilitating adherence to quality standards and fostering a movement of inclusive education.

#### Independent Practitioners

This is a call for a re-establishment of the teaching profession, which meets International standards in keeping with the call of Globalisation, permits independent practitioners to move about under mode 4 of GATS as well as practice their

learners across the globe. If we do this fast enough we will witness a multiple of what the IT segment did for this country.

So let us consider what is new about the knowledge economy. The point is that knowledge is about judgement, ways of thinking and discernment.

In this new economy the majority of all growth will be

the speed of communication).

The use of email and the internet, and now of instant messaging has had a profound effect on the world, particularly with regard to time. What once took days or even months can be achieved in seconds.

In turn this is changing lives and the workplace. Consider that now businesses must think hard about how to manage their

workforce, ie Life Long Learning and Personal Development.

Organisations must therefore be more creative and innovative. The way to compete has changed. Competition is now largely about the brand since that brand holds a degree of promise with the customer.

This new economy can be viewed more in terms of intangible assets. Such as Trust.

#### So where does education fit in?

If jobs are no longer for life and employment demands Life Long Learning then schools, colleges and Universities must create a culture for self development / responsibility for learning. Schools must aim to nurture creativity and innovation. Pupils must learn generic skills through the structure of subjects.

The National Education machine as it exists will not deliver quickly. Therefore it comes down to exploring newer models that encourage individuals, whether they be schools, colleges or Institutions to co-operate with individual teachers to respond.

#### The New Challenges

The new challenges, whether of access, equity, adopting technology, becoming more relevant will have to be addressed by newer methods. And they will give rise to the emergence of the independent educator and the re-emergence of teaching and education as a new profession that can be practiced in numerous ways. Just as it is legitimately possible for any lawyer, doctor, engineer, architect, chartered accountant to work for a State Government, the Central

Government, a large corporation, a small business or to work independently on his own, (and the brand perception is independent of the context in which he or she is working) it should be possible for qualified educators to work outside Institutional frameworks on their own. And of course the Gurukul system was about this. If we decouple the responsibilities for laying down of standards, conduct of examinations, the teaching-learning processes, and maintaining databases of educational qualifications, we can see lots of opportunities for educationists, unconstrained by creators of Institutions whether Government or the businessman. Collective, co-operative networking arrangements with branded teachers working together under a brand which communicates a commitment to a shared vision would remove many ills of the existing systems and unlock the large potential that we have in retired accomplished teachers or unemployed younger people. Teachers need not ever retire and continue imparting education till they can do so (incidentally there is no retirement age for politicians, lawyers and many other professionals).

Some people will view these thoughts with varying degrees of skepticism. But it is indeed a very straightforward solution to the twin problems of educated unemployment and not enough access to education to the needy. One can't but help thinking of the exhortation from Vivekananda..... 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached', and the goal is a flourishing and thriving India with an educated population and teachers at the helm of it.