

A Village Teacher

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He used to live in the office of the school in a medium-sized village. A tall, stoutly built middle aged man with his own principles of life was famous among the school children, his own staff and villagers. A happy and satisfied person with the job of teaching, Guruji spent almost 15 years in the village trying to improve the conditions of school and village. He had his family at his native village but he wanted to spend more time in the village where he has been appointed. He received good response from all the villagers in this noble work.

His day begins early in the morning at 6 O'clock with complete round to the school as an exercise. After some simple exercise, he brushed his teeth with a finger-shaped stick of Neem tree and cleaned mouth with water in bucket kept by school children last night. Some school children gathered around the school. Guruji called two of them, "children, what are you doing?"

"Playing Guruji."

"Playing on the ground is a very good exercise, boys. But now, stop your game for some time and bring for me a bucket of fresh water from the hand-pump."

There was a hand-pump in the prevailing condition outside of the compound wall of the school. The two boys ran to the hand-pump holding the ring of the steel bucket in one hand of each. They brought fresh and cool water and placed before Guruji. Guruji bathed on a flat stone located on the ground in front of the office room. He summoned aloud as children were a bit on long distance.

"Come on here, any four boys."

The boys came and he continued, "Boys, take that rounded water pot, clean it well as it is meant for drinking and the bucket is for other use. Go and bring the water. Meanwhile I get ready."

The boys did as directed and kept the water carefully covering it in a corner in the office. He told them to lock the office and hand over the keys to him, "Boys I'll return from the temple by 8.30, so keep watch on the office and the school."

They enthusiastically replied, "Yes, of course, Guruji."

The children of the school got habituated with nature and manners of Guruji. He went to Hanuman temple saying "Raam, Raam" to whoever met in the way. The village people also exchanged "Raam, Raam" with the same zest. On the request of one of the villager, he took morning tea and had breakfast at his home. The villagers treated him with respect. He returned to the school on decided time and saw many children gathered around the school till now. He called a boy, who seemed sincere, gave him the key and said, "First, open the office, take other keys from the front table drawer and unlock all the classrooms."

The boy unlocked the office. Guruji asked to another boy to hit the first bell loudly i.e. of the quarter to nine so that all students would come to the school. Then he asked to hit the second

bell at 9 O'clock meant to gather for the prayer and national anthem. All teachers arrived before 9 O'clock who live out of the village at their convenient places. The school began in a cheerful atmosphere as always. All the seven classes got engaged by their respective teachers. He took over the fifth standard class which was his favourite one. He made children to recite English poems, sometime to solve math's problems and sometime to remember some facts from their science book. The first shift of the school ended at 12 O'clock at noon. Children went to their homes for lunch. He came in the office; his colleagues were washing hands for lunch. Among them, one teacher: "Guruji, clean your hands and let's have lunch." Another teacher: "Let's sit for lunch, Guruji." All teachers requested him to have lunch with them. This has been happened for last many years and he also had been sharing the lunch with them. There was a healthy atmosphere among the staff. The second shift of the school commenced at 1 O'clock with hitting forcefully on the iron bell. Children sat down into the classrooms followed by teachers. Now he was on seventh class. He used to teach them importance of good values, manners and obedience apart from the textbooks and syllabus. He advised them to keep good habit of giving respect to their elders and obey them. Many students were following the instructions given by him. At 3 O'clock all classrooms were released to play on the ground as it was an hour of playing games. He was observing the children and directing, helping them in Kabbadi, Kho-Kho, running race, etc. He had a keen interest in guiding students and inspired to other teachers and villagers to motivate children. At quarter to four, he went to a student on the ground, and pushed the bundle of keys from his own pocket, handed it over to that student and directed,

"My dear boy, take these keys and lock all the classrooms carefully. You can take your friend to help you. After locking the classrooms, return keys to me, I'm in the office."

Two-three boys locked all the classrooms and came to him. He was talking to other teachers,

"Friends, the time is over, so you can move to catch the bus. Go, hurry. Bye, bye. See you tomorrow."

Students returned the bundle of keys. He told them to hit the last bell of the day. As soon as the bell rang, all children rushed to the gate of the school. Then he walked all around the school for checking. After a while, he locked the office and walked to Vitthalbhai's small hut—it is considered as the hotel of the village where tea and some other food would be served. There, some old villagers play cards to pass time and entertainment. He exchanged greetings with them and joined the card game. Here, he gets complete information of the village. Playing cards was not his hobby or interest, he joins only to know about village matters and expresses his own opinion and solution on these matters. So he became more popular among the villagers. Spending some time in Vitthalbhai's hotel, he entered in the village. On someone's request he took dinner and returned back to the school office to sleep.

This was the one side of the story.

Kisan and Mukund, middle-aged village farmers were not agreed with the ways of Guruji and they opposed him on one or the other matter. According to them, he was diverting children from the real path of learning by telling them other futile works. Once, they encountered him on the way to Hanuman temple and taunted:

"Raam, Raam Guruji! You are rendering a great service to children and village."

He could not capture the tone and intention of Kisan and replied: "It is not a great service but my duty and doing duty is to serving God."

Mukund intertwined, “Guruji, we heard that you are exploiting school children by forcing them to do your own works. You are here to teach them and not to tell your personal works. Why don’t you keep a servant for you?”

With this comment, he realized that there was some misunderstanding in the mind of Kisan and Mukund. He tried to clear out the fact by saying: “See, what you have heard about me, I don’t know. But I tried to teach them the significance of being obedient and giving respect to elders. I asked them to do only easy and small works like lock up...”

Kisan interrupted, “This is not fair, Guruji! And you peep into the matters of villagers. Do your appointed job only. We are able to solve our own issues.”

Guruji continued, “But I did for the good of villagers and all they treat me with respect.”

Both of them in mingled tone: “Don’t tell us about your respect. Ok. See you.”

They moved to their way and Guruji to Hanuman temple. He felt as if his self-respect has been hurt and an inherent pain in the heart. The thought pertained for the whole day in his mind. He tried to search what wrong he did to children or villagers? He seemed tense. While taking lunch, a teacher inquired, “Guruji, you are looking somewhat disturbed!”

He answered in a low voice, “No! No! Not a serious reason. Just, I am not feeling well today. There is a little pain in my head. But nothing to worry about it.”

On the next morning, a villager came to him and informed about the conspiracy made against him by Kisan and Mukund that they are going to complain against him at Taluka Education Officer. He felt helpless and could not understand what to do at the moment. But he was the man of firm belief and full of confidence because he never did anything which would harm children and villagers. Even, he never spoke in a harsh or loud voice to anyone. It was nothing but prejudice and misunderstanding of Kisan and Mukund. He was thinking of how to remove this misunderstanding from the mind of Kisan and Mukund. He continued his routine and duty as sincerely as he did render it before.

It was an Independence Day and he personally invited the villagers for programme to hoist national flag and the prize distribution function organized for children. He started this tradition for last ten years and villagers responded it at their best. The flag has been hoisted and function began. All were present—the Sarpanch, Gramsevak, education committee members of the village, and others. Kisan and Mukund also were present over there. Guruji began to announce the names of winners in different competitions, first being the debate competition:

“The first prize goes to Manjunath for his excellent debate on the importance of good values and obedience. Then the first prize in story telling goes to Meenakshi for her excellent story selection and its presentation. Now the first prize in sport....”

He announced all the names of winners. The prizes have been distributed by the hands of Sarpach, Gramsevak and other members and villagers. Then he asked to the children if someone wish to speak a few words on this occasion. Two hands were raised—Manjunath and Meenakshi. First stood Manjunath by the corner of the main table and spoke:

“This is not my prize but my Guruji’s. He taught me everything that now I possess. He taught me to respect my mother and father and elders. He taught me the benefits of being obedient. He taught me to do my own work and be independent. He helped me a lot and I too sought his guidance. He is so nice to me. And hence, I express my deep gratitude to him. And I offer my prize to him. Thank you.”

Then Meenakshi came forward and said: “I totally agreed to Manjunath’s view. Guruji did a lot for us and only because of his guidance, we could win the prizes. But the prizes are not

much important for us; what we have learnt is more significant because it will help us to build our future when we go out of this school and enter to a new territory. We all are very proud to have such a devoted teacher. I also express my deep gratitude and sincere thanks to him and stop here. Thank you very much.”

Manjunath and Meenakshi were students of the seventh standard which was their last year of the school. At the end, Guruji asked to a teacher to express vote of thanks and declare the function is over. The teacher did his job and declared that the function is over with the permission of chairperson. Guruji became very happy with the function and affection and love expressed by children and villagers. The joy rolled down through his eyes. But soon his face changed to serious as he saw Kisan and Mukund approaching towards him. He stood up from the chair with no expression on the face. Kisan and Mukund bowed down tightly holding the feet of Guruji and was sobbing, “Guruji, we did a great mistake. Beg us pardon. We doubted you and your intentions for no reason. But now our prejudice and misunderstanding has been removed. We beg your pardon for that. Beg us pardon, Guruji.”

Kisan muttered, “Manjunath is my son.”

Mukund added, “And Meenakshi is my daughter.”

He raised them up from the feet and said, “Humans make mistakes.”