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Hema V Raghavan

To Sir/Madam, with Respect



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– **Convocation Address**

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To Sir/Madam, with Respect

Hema V Raghavan*

This article is written to commemorate Teacher's Day on the 5th of September. I look upon Teacher's Day as a Thanksgiving Day to pay respect, express gratitude, and appreciate and acknowledge the hard work of all our teachers in shaping us as human beings to make our humble contribution to society. Teachers' Day, in honour of Hon'ble Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, deserves to be an everyday celebration, though formally it is a one -day affair to express our gratitude to teachers for their lifelong guidance.

My association with Higher Education is six decades old and is deeply rooted. From my early childhood, I had the tendency to hero-worship those who had qualities and abilities better than mine. Most of those whom I admired were my teachers at different points in time. They made me love books, and this has remained a lifelong passion with me. When I started teaching, I always imagined my teachers listening and nodding in my presence as a teacher in approval as a worthy heir to their profession. It is no exaggeration that I could hear the voice of my university professors echoing their appreciation when I delivered my lectures on Eliot and Yeats and the Romantics. Two of my professors-one who taught Eliot, Yeats, and Modern literature, and the other who taught us the Romantics – opened my mind and enabled me to journey through different literary eras and literary genres that glimpsed the distinct intellectual, linguistic, religious, and artistic influences of the times. Allan Bloom famously said, "The essence of education is the opening of the human mind." Teachers give us education that helps us to expand the boundaries of the human mind- an expansion that extends beyond the classroom and allows us to continue to grow and develop throughout our lives. Michael Forbes, the American politician and the publisher of Forbes Magazine, wrote: "The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one." I followed this precept that I inherited from my teachers when I took up teaching as my profession, which for five decades remained my single focus. I dedicate this article to all the teachers who were before me, who were with me, and who have come after me.

Looking back on education from my student days, I realize Higher education today is not a continuum of the education we went through in the first decade after independence. It is different, and that is to be accepted and not frowned upon as the present ethos, values, beliefs, and priorities are vastly different from those days. Having lived through the two binary eras, I like to see education anchored to continuity with change.

Let me backspace my reflections to my university days. That was in the mid-50s of the last Century when University education

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