

'Garlands cannot replace clarity': Acharya Prashant on Teachers' Day



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New Delhi, Sep 5 (IANS) On Teachers' Day, philosopher and author Acharya Prashant paid tributes to the nation's teachers, calling them the true custodians of society's future. He urged that the day must rise above rituals and greetings, and instead awaken reflection on education's real purpose -- nurturing clarity, enquiry, and inner strength.

"Human beings are born twice," he said. "The first is biological. The second, truly human, is the birth of clarity. Schools and teachers exist for this second birth. Without it, we may create skilled professionals but leave them unclear and insecure as human beings."

He noted that nations which respected teachers flourished, while those that neglected them decayed, regardless of wealth or size.

"India has no shortage of talent," he remarked, adding, "but what it lacks is a system where real teachers can thrive and young minds are free to think."

Pointing to current challenges, he said that teaching has come to be seen as a safe career rather than a calling.

"In a conscious society, teaching is the highest vocation, not a refuge for mediocrity. Yet posts lie vacant, many teachers remain underprepared, and classrooms are left untended as teachers are diverted to election and survey duty. We have reduced teachers to clerks of the state, cheap labour for errands while young minds go untended. This is not negligence --- it is betrayal. When the role of teaching is treated with such contempt, how can the young feel inspired?"

He warned that beyond administrative failures lies a deeper rot --- education reduced to rote learning, exam scores, and job placements.

"Students are told that life has value only if they meet impossible targets, while being denied the freedom to ask who they really are. This suffocates the mind, and in many tragic cases, even leads to self-harm. The fault is not in the student but in a system that withholds the education that matters most: Education of the self," he said.

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Acharya Prashant stressed the need for two streams of learning.

"We need knowledge of the world -- science, language, history, technology -- to keep life functional. But equally essential is knowledge of the self: To know where knowledge serves and where it cannot. Without this, we produce cleverness without wisdom, achievement without fulfillment," he added.

Quoting Vedanta, he described these as 'avidya' and 'vidya': One keeps life workable, the other makes life worth living.

For teachers, he urged focus not only on lesson plans but on personal clarity.

"Who you are speaks before what you teach. Students first sense the teacher's being, only then their words. The true bond is not of control but of care, not of marks but of seeing."

He added that genuine teachers often meet resistance because they unsettle the ego instead of consoling it.

"The real teacher frees the student to such an extent that she no longer depends on the teacher. To reduce such a one to garlands on a single day is self-deception. The real teacher is not a person or a date on the calendar, but the call of truth that refuses to let us live narrowly," he said.

Concluding with a message for Teachers' Day, he said: "The real tribute is courage: Courage to ensure qualified and supported teachers, courage to restore enquiry at the heart of classrooms, and courage to give our children both aspects of education -- external and internal. Without teachers of clarity, no nation can survive its own cleverness. We may produce engineers, doctors, and executives, but without wisdom, they only build higher prisons for themselves. Teachers' Day is not about flowers on a desk. It is about freeing the next generation from ignorance and fear. If that does not happen, then every day becomes a funeral of education."

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