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Concept of Freedom at 70

Hema Raghavan*

Every year 20 days after Independence Day, we celebrate Teachers' Day. This year Teachers' Day is in its 55th year (it started in 1962) and it is time to take stock of what we as teachers have contributed to preserving the freedom of our nation, now on its seventieth year of Independence. Teaching in today's world has gone beyond turning out graduates and post graduates, research scholars and academic professionals and is directed at developing ethical, integrated and responsible citizens, committed to the preservation of the freedom of the nation as well as freedom of the mind and spirit of every individual. The Greek writer, Plutarch (46 AD-120 AD) wrote: Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. "For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth".

Hence this article which at the outset, may seem to be out of place in a journal primarily devoted to academic issues. Yet I have boldly ventured to write this article for the University News on the occasion of Teachers' Day because only university scholars and faculty members have the opportunity to translate these ideas into reality through an engagement and dialogue with their students. Paulo Freire, in *Education for Critical Consciousness* writes: "Teacher preparation should go beyond the technical preparation of teachers and be rooted in the ethical formation both of selves and of history." The ideas in this article relate to the Concept of Freedom exhorting the teaching faculty to work out a methodology whereby academic studies can incorporate the Concept of Freedom within its ambit. Whether in practice or not, the idea of University apart from its focus on academic studies, is that it should serve as a platform for creating opinions, for debates and discussions, for germination of new ideas and theories that will focus on development of the society and its people and freedom of the mind and the spirit. While academic learning is towards understanding and specializing in different branches of knowledge, the ultimate goal of higher education is to turn out enlightened citizens with intelligent and independent thinking, imbued with a sense of responsibility towards themselves and also towards their less fortunate fellow beings in the society. Hence this article is more of an appeal to the professors and scholars in our universities and colleges to introduce the concept of freedom, its worth and value to the students that has united all the people and made India at once "singular and plural" to quote Dilip Padgaonkar, a one nation with multiple identities.

When we talk about "Freedom" the first speech that the mind recalls is Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg speech with the opening sentence: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that 'all men are created equal'". This year is special for us in India as we celebrate the birthday of our independence that we got three score and ten years ago.

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