

## The Role of the Teacher in Rural Reconstruction Work.

BY

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*Village life-Existing conditions.*—South Indian village life is noted for its simplicity and unruffled nature. Changes of Governors or Viceroy's, a civil war in Afghanistan, or even flood havoc in other parts of the country, do not have any effect on the calm atmosphere of the village. The old routine is followed in its never changing rigidity and sequence. The wants are few, necessities little, and the village folk are never in a perturbed or busy state over anything except the problems affecting their own time-honoured customs or regulations. The arrival of a Government official in the village is an event of some importance and except for this and festival days when the village deity may be propitiated, the primitive calm and serenity of the village is rarely disturbed.

Ignorance is no more bliss. The rural population is steeped in utter ignorance of conditions obtaining outside their own taluks. They do not know and are not in a position to realise fully when told how matters are remarkably different in other countries which are marching with the times. When a villager is told about the greatly advanced condition of rural life in the Western countries, he simply wonders and leaves it at that. In fact he is himself unable to explain clearly why he is living in the same old ways and following the same crude methods in his work. It is not at all a question of wealth, but the fact is that proper modernising influences have not been at work in rural areas. The man in the village often minds his own business and does not seem to know what it will be to live and act for the community, apart for himself. There may be exceptions, but really the move towards better sanitation, better dwellings, better health, better organisation for thrift and credit, and a better realisation of the Village Unit in the Province, in short the move towards progress in all lines, is so poor and slow as to be

almost imperceptible. The villages are as it were, in deep slumber compared to those in modern countries. It will be decades before they emerge out of the old groove, shake off the chaff in their old ways and adopt methods and manners that will make them prosperous and powerful in days to come.

*The Teacher in the Village.*—In keeping with the quiet atmosphere of the village, the village school-master is often un-assuming and obscure though in fact he is practically the only literate man, and whose help the village-folk constantly seek for obvious reasons. He is therefore in the most advantageous position in the village to effect any improvement and change in the life and organisation of the village. But we find that all teachers are not capable of utilising their situations to the best advantage, since there are only a few of the right type with the requisite qualifications and outlook, and when there are such men available, the facilities and encouragement given are far from satisfactory. With his low pay he is never up to the mark in any aspect of his life,— dress, mode of living and in having any enthusiasm for organising the society for common good. The majority of them have not been able to realise fully the potential position they occupy in the community of the village, and they are not imbued with that spirit of patriotism to be of greater use outside the four walls of their schools. Nor we find in them commonly the eagerness to train their students to the best of their abilities. It is then a case of dull routine of teaching in the class-rooms and outside the teacher's presence is rarely felt except when he is called upon to decipher a letter or write petitions to the authorities.

*How a Teacher can assist.*—Broadly we can classify the teachers into the following three divisions, so that it may be easier and clearer to consider how best they are placed in their respective positions and environments to be of use in rural reconstruction. There are firstly the teachers in towns and cities, secondly those in the villages and thirdly those on inspection work touring in rural areas.

1. Teachers in towns and cities. At the present day all these teachers, at least the majority of them, devote their

attention entirely to teaching work in their colleges or schools. But they have enough leisure at their command by way of vacations and holidays. When proper incentive is given in the shape of ample facilities and adequate remuneration, selected teachers may be prepared to go out to the villages during these holidays, and have persistent talks with the villagers, with a view to dispel their ignorance and infuse in them the requisite enthusiasm and enterprise for an attempt to improve themselves. This sort of work, may as it were, pave the way for an effective reconstruction work. Necessary impetus may also be given to make sets of teachers specialise in one or other of the lines of reconstruction work. The Association of teachers in towns and cities can take the lead in this matter. Such teachers may arrange to halt in each village for some days and see that a start is made in any one of the lines of improvement. They should visit the same villages repeatedly to see that the attempt at progress does not slacken. As is the case in many of the schools in France an attempt can be made to induce the students in towns to adopt cooperative methods in the purchase of their necessaries, and by this means they will be put in the right direction to form ideas about co-operation and its advantages in their early impressionable age. When some of these students return to the village after their education they will be in a better position to practice co-operation. Dr. Sudhindra Bose writing about education of young America remarks that, 'they (the teachers) strive to stir into action the full energy of the boy. They are intent to look upon each pupil as a human individual and not as a machine. The attitude of the teacher towards the student is of helpfulness and good comradeship. This friendly 'democratic spirit on the part of the instructor fascinates, stimulates and utilises the energy of youth. The two together begin to taste the joys of an intellectual life.'

2. Teachers in Villages. These are in fact best placed for doing something substantial in the reconstruction of the village. If every teacher or teachers in every village make up his or their minds to bring about certain improvements in the village little by little then there will be progress in all the villages at the same time. The teacher can attempt to become the teacher of

the village itself. He should try to gain knowledge of rural conditions in other countries, particularly the progress made in such lines as sanitation, agriculture and co-operation, so that during his leisure time and at nights he can gather the villagers at a common place and tell them about these, thus creating an interest in them to compare their present position in their country with those in others. The teacher can arrange to get vernacular leaf-lets that are supplied free by the Departments and read them out to the ryots now and then to infuse in them the desire to get the help of such Departments. By constant effort on the part of the teacher, the school in the village can become a sort of library and information-bureau, where the villagers can obtain through the help of the teacher, information on prevention of epidemics, control of diseases and pests upon their crops, price fluctuations of the market and such other general and important facts. The teacher ought to be diligent and painstaking, so that he can get the help of the Government Departments to supply him with their leaflets, bulletins and other publications. But here again, an incentive is required so that a large number of teachers in rural areas may willingly take up this work as a subsidiary avocation. The incentive may be given by the Taluk or the District Boards which control the schools, in the shape of increased pay and recognition of merit, judging by the improvement the teacher has been able to bring about in the life and condition of the village. Of course, there may be a few who are doing and may do such sort of ameliorative work in the villages in their own way without expecting any sort of reward for their efforts, but such ideal teachers are so few as to be negligible.

There are teachers' Associations for groups of villages and teachers of these villages meet at a particular village once in the month for discussions and exchange of ideas. In these meetings the teachers may chalk out a programme of work suited to their conveniences and conditions in their villages and watch the improvements they are able to effect. If they are enthusiastic in this way the officers of the several Government Departments will only be too glad to help them and even lead them. The development of the village on modern lines can take place only when the spirit, energy and eagerness evolve from the village folk them-

selves, and not when outsiders and officers visit the village now and then for preaching or otherwise. As the teacher is a resident of the village and can feel one with the others, he can by slow degrees kindle the national feeling in them and rouse them up to activity. First of all, the teacher can get himself acquainted with the modern ideas of better dwellings, sanitation, prevention of diseases and such other essentials for a healthy life, though in an elementary practical way, and then constantly dip into the ears of the rural population, so that in course of time he is able to show some improvement in the life and health of the village. After this he can possibly take up co-operative work and make the people realise the great necessity for co-operation in every sort of work whether in their village or outside it. Thus he can prepare the soil, as it were, for the experts of the several Government Departments to carry on the work in those lines successfully and completely. If there are more than one teacher in the village, they can join and do the work more easily or each can take up different lines of work.

To achieve a uniform success in this way, sets of teachers can be selected to undergo short training in the particular branches of reconstruction work, and then sound encouragement given for energetic work. The Government should liberally aid the managements of the schools, Boards and private bodies, so that they may have in turn ample finance to enable them to utilise the services of those teachers to the best advantage. In this connection, what Mr. T. V. Apparsundara Mudaliar suggests is worthy of consideration,—“The first need is to establish schools for training of industrial instructors in the various language areas. What is needed next is a school in connection with a boarding house with a few acres attached for cultivation, a carpenters’ shop and a weaving shed. The farm would pay some part of its own cost, the carpenter would make the school furniture and some of the pupils’ clothes might be woven in the shed. The Superintendent of the Boarding house would be a specially qualified industrial instructor. The school would be half-time school, one part of the day devoted to ordinary school subjects and the other half to industries. From the boarding house as centre an advance might be to extend this system to village schools.”

3. Teachers on Inspection work.—As these are officers constantly touring in rural areas, they are also placed in a very advantageous position to do something in this line. If they are given a little more latitude in their sphere of work by the Department, they will be able to devote some attention to this problem of rural development. These teachers can not only study and work out the preliminary lines of rural reconstruction themselves with reference to the tract in which they work, but they can also influence the teachers under them in the several villages to actively co-operate in making a united front. During their visits to schools on inspection work, these teachers can make it a point to meet all the inhabitants of the village at least on one day, to talk to them forcibly on any one topic of developing the village on modern lines. Of course the teacher may not have sound knowledge in these lines, but however he can try to open the eyes of the people to possibilities yet un-thought of, and thus slowly change the outlook and activity of the rustics. For example he can concentrate his attention towards advising the villagers in the matter of keeping their houses clean, village roads and cattle-sheds as clean as possible and not allow children to play upon filth and dirt. When something has been done in this direction he can next devote his attention to the rebuilding of old dirty houses at inconvenient places in the village, by the efforts of the villagers themselves, for the benefit of the poorer lot. Thirdly he can attempt at influencing the more well-to-do ryots to join together for their purchase of seeds or manures or even in selling of their produce, and thus a beginning in cooperative work may be made.

In this way other lines of work may be taken up and much achieved if only the inspecting teacher takes interest, and is enthusiastic and painstaking. Of course the village school-master has to be often instructed in the subject to get the greatest help out of him. There ought to be facilities for the inspecting teacher to equip himself with a working knowledge of the several aspects of the rural reconstruction work. The aid of the officers of the respective Government Departments may also be sought as often as possible, and later the actual carrying on of such work to a success shall be greatly shouldered by these officers.

*Rural 'Extension Work'.*—The carrying on of rural reconstruction work on the lines of the Extension Departments organised long ago in the United States of America, is also most desirable. The idea underlying Extension work is given in the following, which is taken from an American Bulletin, 'Extension work is a system of instruction which is to be modified, reorganised and developed until it proves an effectual medium for disseminating knowledge, correlating and concentrating the efforts of the farmer along certain lines, and bringing him to a proper appreciation of the relationships of intelligent effort to success in a given environment. Extension teaching can and should be the means of awakening an interest on conservation and the economic and social problems which lie at the basis of any movement which proposes to rejuvenate country life.' The formation of rural extension work departments attached to some Colleges in the presidency would mean the utilisation of the services of some of the able teachers of these institutions in rural service. These teachers may carry on the work as pioneers, until a batch of men specially trained for this purpose is available to form a sort of a small department by themselves. For example, the staffs of the Agricultural, Veterinary and Medical colleges may make a beginning in extension work, until graduates of these colleges have been trained for this purpose, appointed and made available to take up the work as whole-time workers. It is stated that in America, in order that experienced men may be available, the college employs additional instructors to take the regular class-room work, while heads of departments are engaged in extension work. This system is also well worth trying here in our country.

*Itinerant Schools.*—The organisation of itinerant schools, for placing in a practical manner before the people of a given locality the more important scientific facts and principles involved in the development of improved agriculture, cooperation, health etc., of the village, may also be looked into. This will be one of the most successful means for disarming the suspicions of the people. 'The travelling school will also place both knowledge and method within the reach of the teachers of the villages in a form which will result in the introduction of such instruction in

rural subjects as is desirable in village schools.' These schools may stop in a locality for one or two seasons according to necessity with reference to availability of enough number of adults and teachers to attend the school and also the nature of instruction to be given. Teachers for these schools shall be drawn from the staffs of the Technical colleges and Government departments which are connected with activities in rural areas. Mr. Arthur Mayhew writing about the Imperial Education Conference says that India has peculiar difficulties unlike other countries in the matter of the solution of the problem of rural education. He continues, "that in South Australia, where large areas are sparsely populated, the State provides a trained teacher for an attendance of six children provided that the parents furnish a school room and a living room for him. There are more than 500 such full time schools in the State and the annual cost per pupil reaches £ 40. Where six children cannot be gathered, education is carried on by correspondence, the classes being conducted by a trained staff at headquarters."

Attached to the itinerant schools, there may also be a travelling Library and Exhibit, which can be left in each village for some time and the teachers there trained to help the people, with practical hints from the library and illustrated by the exhibits, on all points of rural development.

*Conclusion.*—Agricultural training may be introduced in training schools for teachers who are to work in rural areas. Or the training of such teachers should be so modified as to befit them in their work in villages most eminently and to the greatest advantage. For, the need of the present is not so much for a special kind of education for the rural schools, as it is to apply that education to rural conditions.' The departments mainly concerned in rural improvement work should classify their *leaflets* and bulletins for the use of teachers who may be expected to be guided largely in their work by these publications. The teachers in villages can then be made to cooperate actively in the extension or reconstruction work that may be organised. The idea is to make the teacher not only a better teacher of the pupils but also one of the public on



matters of common interest and improvement. Thus according to one American authority, 'If we are to make extension work useful in the highest degree in the betterment of country-life, we must create a sentiment for ideal rural citizen-ship, not for the man with the largest farm or the biggest bank account or the most influential in political circles, but for the prosperous well-to-do farmer who has built up his farm and will leave it better than he found it; for the man to whom his farm is his home where he expects to live and die and not to move into town.' This is exactly the ideal we should also follow in this country.

The success of the movement mainly depends upon the proper selection and training of teachers best fitted for the work. It is interesting to examine what Dr. Sudhindira Bose gives regarding the system by which teachers are employed in America. 'Great care is exercised in the selection of teachers who are hired by the year and when employed they have to sign an ironclad contract with the school authorities. It contains stipulations in regard to faithful service and spotless private life. Should the teacher fail to live up to his pledge he would lose his job with the forfeiture of all salary. ....I adduce it to urge that some such system which draws the school closer to the life of community would be a long step forward in the Indian world of education. 'The products of such a system will become the centre of civilisation in our waste places.' Thus the great aim will be to make the teacher a real power in the village, an outstanding figure in the social and economic life. The attempt to achieve this end will mean the creation of facilities and launching forth of schemes to make the teacher in the village, town and city, take active and abiding interest in the improvement, prosperity and progress of the village and its peoples.

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