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Teachers' Day is 'just another day' in colleges ✓

By R. Anuradha

MADRAS - It is teachers' day today... the day when traditionally the entire nation honours the concept of 'imparting knowledge'. But in the land of Ekalavya who gave away his right thumb as 'Guru dakshina' to his archery teacher and, in the land of the greatest of all teachers Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, what is the value that students attach to this day?

What are the celebrations lined up for the Big Day? A question like this is met with a spate of indifferent responses - "Nothing at all" says one. Another adds, "Most of us don't even remember all these things" and yet another student seals the matter with, "Lecturers don't deserve celebrations".

When surprise is expressed

about why even on this one day of the year students should be reluctant to teachers their due, a student from Madras Medical College shoots back, "What else do you expect in a professional college? We are here to pursue a course and the professors are our course guides. They don't even know our names - we are identified by our roll numbers. So teachers' day does not mean anything to me". In Anna university however there are token celebrations. "We write Happy Teachers' Day on the black board and probably wish some of the teachers. Some of us give cards to special professors. But otherwise classes go on as usual", says Anupama, a third year student.

If colleges are a study in apathy, schools present a different scene altogether. A bouquet for the class teacher. Flowers for the

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other teachers. Organised programmes for which practice starts weeks in advance. Class gifts. Excitement, enthusiasm and a good deal of sentiment. It is because of this 'school hangover' that first year college students even bother to make an attempt to enliven things on Sept. 5. A student from a City women's college says, "In the first year we tried to celebrate - with cards, gifts, flowers, programmes. But the response from the lecturers was lukewarm.. So we gave up the attempt". Another woman student angrily demands, "Why do we have to celebrate the day,

when a professor walks into class and declares, 'We are not teachers', we are professors and lecturers. And you are not 'kids' any more. There is no need to celebrate the day'. Will we even think of wishing them after this?'

Students are students and teachers are teachers and never the twain shall meet, seems to be the attitude. Tamil Nadu MGR Medical University dean of students Dr. Kamal Sharief, who has been teaching for a quarter century now says, "Teachers are also distancing themselves from students. We hold our teachers in great esteem, but we cannot

expect the same from our students. The personal rapport is not there. Of course we would feel motivated if there is a celebration and some kind of a thanksgiving".

In a city where "classes go on as usual" on a special day, the Stella Maris College has something different to offer. The entire college congregates in the Open air auditorium. There is a special mass. The students' union arranges for a mega-programme. They also buy gifts for all departments. After that, depending on the kind of rapport that students share, there are departmental level celebrations which could range from 'just giving a rose' to 'tea with cake'.

Commenting on the declining trend of honouring teachers Professor Oscar C. Nigili who has taught at the Loyola College for

18 years and has been the dean of students for three years, says, "Externally, there appears to be grander celebrations. There is greater money power and students even host lunches for lecturers. But what is more important is whether the student makes the teacher feel wanted. To me, the most fulfilling

moments have been when students have come to me years later and told me that I have contributed not just to their marketing or micro economics knowledge, but to their personality and to their value system".

But more often than not, students "want to keep a distance" and teachers "prefer it that way". And in the growing hiatus between the teachers and the taught, the values attached to a significant tradition are given the go-by!