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## AIFRTE Condemns Attempts by Modi Sarkar to Reduce Teachers Day to a *Tamasha*

Teachers Day has been celebrated for decades on 5<sup>th</sup> September, the birthday of President S. Radhakrishnan, a renowned academician, teacher, and Chairman of the University Education Commission 1948-49. It honours teachers across the country and is a day for students and teachers to renew their bond through local institutional programmes and personally expressed acts of gratitude. In some institutions students take over faculty responsibilities to better appreciate the teachers contribution to education.

However, Teachers Day was never seen as an official **governmental** intrusion in the calendar of educational institutions. Unfortunately that is what it is becoming now. Ever since the Prime Minister decided that he, and not the teaching community, should be the focus of children's attention on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has swung into over-drive. Circulars, memos, and office orders are being sent to state governments and CBSE schools, to government schools, aided and unaided schools, to ensure that all children hear the PM's address 'live' - all technological equipment required for the purpose is being 'generously' funded! Unfortunately, the PM's two-hour address begins only at 3 p.m. So students and teachers will not only be deprived of 'their' day; they will also have to be in school till after 5 pm! This will cause serious inconvenience in some states, but everywhere it will force the students to have a tediously long day at school. Attendance information from all schools will be sent to local administration, state governments and the MHRD!!

Misfortunes as they say never come alone! Now Chief Ministers are also joining the race to politically indoctrinate the students/ teachers on Teachers Day. From Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh Haryana and elsewhere, CM's are claiming their right to pontificate along with the PM! The overdose of official sermons will therefore carry on for hours. **So much for Teachers Day! For 2014 at least it will be observed by marginalizing the teachers and the students.**

However, the problem does not end here. There is a deeper target. Teachers Day, the MHRD ordered, would now be celebrated as 'Guru Utsav'. Despite MHRD Minister's denials after strong protests erupted in some states, the issue cannot be ignored. For this is a classic example of the BJP's attempts when in control of government to embark on a process of 'Sanskritization' of movements, public projects and campaigns, irrespective of the preferences and linguistic usages of different sections of the people. Recall how Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, names used by the popular movements that led to the creation of these states, were sought to be called 'Vananchal' and 'Uttaranchal'. Recall also that one of the Minister's first pronouncements threatened introduction of 'vedic values' in primary schools. And MHRD has already ensured that schools all over the country recently observed a 'Sanskrit Week'.

These are not merely cases of what nomenclature or language you chose to promote. **It is part of a conception and programme to privilege the language and content of Brahmanical texts in an attempt to consolidate and confirm the hegemony of upper castes over the country's many languages, cultures and belief systems even today.** The term 'guru' may be uncritically employed in common usage, but that cannot alter the fact that it still stands for a pre-modern pedagogy that extols conformism and subordination to the exclusion of developing the habit of critical reasoning in students. This, and its connotations of caste exclusivity, makes it unacceptable in many parts of the country and to large sections of our population.

In a democratic nation it is incumbent upon us not only to oppose such usages but also to resist the 'Sanskritization' process in society at large. If allowed to proceed unchecked, the latter would falsify the truth of the complex and multiple linguistic, cultural and ritual histories of the Indian peoples. We celebrate our plurality and strongly resist attempts to conceal oppressive and exploitative systems and practices behind empty phrases like 'ancient culture' and 'foundational language'. **Bombastic terms like 'guru' and 'acharya' can hardly conceal the real status of teachers in the government school system where the practice of overloading them with non-academic and official tasks, and the threatening use of contract and para-teachers, is daily reducing them to little more than cheap labour.**

The AIFRTE therefore demands that the Central and state governments immediately cease to use administrative authority

- 1) to promote the spurious agenda of 'Sanskritization' of the country's pluralist history and culture;
- 2) to politicize and bureaucratize Teachers Day.

**If the central and state governments wish to honour teachers on this day, they should immediately announce that**

- 1) all vacant posts of teachers will be rapidly filled with trained teachers, including in-service training for contract and para-teachers, in the appropriate grade;
- 2) separate staff will be appointed for mid-day meal programme and sufficient office staff for managing the school records, etc. so that teachers can attend to curricular and co-curricular needs of students;
- 3) teachers will not be burdened with the responsibility of census and election duties or carrying out administrative tasks for governments.

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**शिक्षा नहीं कोई कारोबार, है यह जनता का अधिकार**

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