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THE TEACHER'S TUTELAGE OF MAYA ANGELOU'S SELECTED POEMS AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Teachers are the pillars of the educative society that helps the young students to know and understand themselves better. They defy all the odds at situations and curry favour with the reality to bring an element of understanding, knowledge and values for the young minds. Their appetite for showing the right path for the students' welfare is brought to test by the genuine and nonchalance effort they perform for the students' welfare. Their altruistic nature for students' welfare is brought to test when they perform their honest and dedicated duties for the young minds. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the teacher's workload increased at a tremendous pace much in comparison with their previous phase. However, they are not properly treated with the due care and respect that they should be truly deserved. Despite their excruciating pain, they suffer internally, their true devotion to work is brought to test when they perform their work selflessly for the betterment of their students' prospects. Through the selected poems of Maya Angelou, the individual researcher could decipher some lines that could uplift the hidden morale of the teacher's spirit and to face the present situation and the effects of COVID-19 with grit, determination and power.

Keywords: - teachers, students, understand, welfare and COVID-19

Teachers play an enormous role in the welfare of the student's future through all ages and hopefully for the coming ages in the long run. They are the young role models for their students' welfare and support. They nurture the

students' growth with hopes and aspiration for the students' well-being and health. Due to COVID-19, unfortunately there aroused a huge gap between the students and the teachers and online education took its birth from this

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time. However, there are endless problems and difficulties in the coming era and sometimes the morale of the teachers gets diminished. Through the selected poems of American writer Maya Angelou, the teachers can get back their old wisdom, the inner strength of peace and the ability to combat the crisis with open arms.

Marguerite Annie Johnson famously known as Maya Angelou (1928-2014) is a popular American English poetess and civil right activist whose works remain popular in all the ages of English literature. She stressed the “depictions of Black beauty” and women liberation and portrays the grim reality in most of her poems. Barring her personal mishap, she kept on writing only to bring forward the harsh reality in front of multifaceted readers of the ages to come.

In the poem, ‘Alone’, Maya Angelou continuously brood about her experience every night as to how could she discover her inner true soul where there is the thirst of her excruciating pain in the world. She could not locate her inner fortitude and firmness of purpose that made her find some reason to face the naked shackles of the harsh reality. She could never be able to face and live the life of others. Her pang of exasperation and pique is brought through the lines below: -

“How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone”

In the COVID-19, teachers do face a huge penalty in this similar aspect. They have to complete multiple assignments for the students, organising and working with the online class platforms, composing notes for the students

and maintaining the classroom decorum all matters are been brought to the teachers only. In addition to it, those teachers who balance their personal home life along with the work-life bring a lot of efforts and win laurels for themselves in the lockdown amidst COVID-19 pandemic. These unsung heroes and heroines defy all odds and bring the core element of life through facing the crests and troughs of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the upcoming stanzas, Angelou brings her emotions out in comparison with the rich people along with the poor. There are some rich stalwarts who can use money according to their respective whims. Their children spend their time lavishly forgetting their present time which could turn out to be a huge profit if they invest in their life.

In the COVID-19, there are some rich students who could afford the online classes, who could study innumerable books either from their syllabus prescribed or find it from the internet sources or they could consult the teachers prescribed but unfortunately, they do not use the quality time in grooming themselves for the future scenario, rather they spend time on excessive use of cell phones performing unproductive tasks which may not ever turn out to be profitable in the long run. The teacher, as a guide, inspires the students to focus and develop more on themselves by finding their true potential but unfortunately, some students turn a deaf ear at the teacher’s advice and thus they ruin their respective lives purposefully or unwillingly. In comparison to their devilish time and energy, there are some students from the lower strata of the society who would be duty-bound towards their respective teachers provided if they get a golden opportunity like this.

“Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering”

People are suffering from the destructive influence of COVID-19 pandemic. The human economy has been brought down, things are absolutely at a mess, there is a scarcity of job opportunities. In the aspect of online education, teachers have a shift towards online education to combat the shrill melancholy of loneliness among the students. In the case of teachers, some teachers do not receive the salary at their regular intervals but still, they teach not for themselves but for enlightening the minds of the young students for their future endeavours. The teacher’s pain and its plethora to face the hidden realities of their lives are brought to similar lines from the poem: -

“Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.”

Teachers do sometimes get tired and exhausted on completing their lessons due to this pandemic COVID-19 lockdown. We need to understand they are also human beings with respect to other people. They have their respective strengths and weakness that would deter them to take their decisions in their life. This particular theme is related to a poem ‘A Conceit’ by Maya Angelou when Angelou in an obscure way ask her readers to “lead and follow” her beyond the mental agony and temper of her poetry.

There are few senior teachers who are not properly acquainted with the technology. It is quite understandable as they were not taught exquisitely in that platform and now due to the influx of COVID-19, things have automatically

changed for all of a sudden that they are sometimes forced to learn the technical skills for the welfare of the students. They fail miserably at the first blush and one must not at all laugh at their weakness because their hard work and fearless struggles made them what they are today still they learn these skills for the betterment of all the students concerned. They did not give up and yearn for their ultimate goal of enlightening the students with inspirational thoughts and wisdom. In Maya Angelou’s poem, ‘The Lesson’, the poetess voices out her old age and her experience on facing the hardcore reality of life. Even at the threshold of her old age, the poetess has an eagerness to live her life to the wholeheartedly:

“They dull my eyes, yet
I keep on dying,
Because I love to live.”

The senior teachers are harshly poked and are brought to severe criticisms by some students due to their less techno-savvy skills but in reality, this criticism helps them a lot as they become stronger and better internally. This made them focus more on their new skills and they do come up with flying colours with the help of those genuine people who support them on and off. A newspaper clipping from America describes the President of America Mr. Donald Trump message for the senior teachers.

“I do worry about teachers at a certain age,” Trump said. “Students are going to be fine. ... But if you have a teacher that’s 65 or 70 years old and has diabetes, that one, I think, they’re going to have to sit

it out for a little while unless we come up with the vaccine sooner.”

- A newspaper article on Education Week dated May 7, 2020.

In the poem, ‘I know why the caged bird sings’, Maya Angelou talks about two states of the birds, the first state is the birds experience when he is liberated and another state is the time when the bird is inside a cage and is craving for liberation. A free bird has the ability to wander to different places according to his/her choice.

The caged bird could not get the opportunity and could stand continuously “on the grave of dreams” pining with “nightmare scream” most of the times. Both the wings are clipped together under a cage and both her feet were extremely tied together, thus could not liberate herself completely and could sing only for her freedom.

In this poem, if we take into account the caged bird as a teacher in this respect, there can be a new interpretation of this poem. The bird before the freedom of COVID-19 could get the opportunity to perform innumerable thoughts like the free teacher before the lockdown. Before the COVID-19 lockdown phase, a teacher could take classes in schools, colleges and universities. This made the teacher cope with the reality during that phase and offline classes turned a new direction for the teachers.

Now, amidst the lockdown, the teacher is like a ‘caged bird’ who cannot move out from their respective homes. They could not reach to their particular institution as all the schools, colleges and universities are closed by the government authorities. There is no chance of a

large gathering between students and teachers as the government is extremely strict about the concept of social distancing. The teacher has to stay inside close quarters to save himself/herself from all the outside surroundings. Like a ‘caged bird’, the teacher has to work from home for a few days so that amidst the lockdown education can be properly be maintained.

“The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.”

Maya Angelou’s poem ‘Still I rise’ stimulate the minds of the teachers with knowledge and experience that can break all the shackles of negativity and allow the genuine feeling of warmth, hope and grit within themselves. At times, teachers are ill-treated by some society for their small wages. They see what they see within their naked eyes and could not get into the depth of certain realities in life. They judge according to their own doctorate degree they receive from their minds which most of the times stand par against reality. These sorts of individuals can put the teachers down but like the golden lamp of faith and through the words of Angelou,

“You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.”

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, online learning has been taken its particular role that drifts and takes a new direction within a few days. Unfortunately, some students could not cope up as are not keen on the rise of technology. Nowadays lots of study apps are brought into focus for the welfare of the students. As a result, stu-

dents get time to stay at their particular home and could study for the courses prescribed. During online classes, multiple problems stimulate all of a sudden. Internet pack gets exhausted per day, the internet link does not work at times, sometimes there is a problem relating to communication and the problem goes on endless. The students at times get the upper hand "to complain" and burst out their frustrations towards themselves and over the particular teacher concerned. However, the teacher has to face such endless complaints but they face it strongly much like the lines of Maya Angelou in the words: -

"You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise."

The teacher had to bear the harsh material world and the COVID-19 impacted a huge blow on the minds of their innocuous souls. Some teachers work smartly but they do never get the amount of respect and admiration for their genuine work. They do not strive for fame but they bring out their inner wealth of energy and spirit in enlightening the ambience of the classroom and for the welfare of the students. Their

only gift is to sparkle the innocent souls of the young minds who would outshine in the long run with their knowledge and wisdom. Even if the teacher fails and could not cope up with their self-willed expectations, they would follow the words of Maya Angelou to uplift their inner strength of mind and energy with the following lines: -

"I rise
I rise
I rise."

Thus, through the selected poems of Maya Angelou, the teachers strive invincible energy that releases each and every time when they focus on the naked reality. Amidst the pandemic, COVID-19, the teachers get an enormous and a golden opportunity to work for themselves and channelize their emotions towards a particular direction so that they could utilize the full implications of this phase. Their inner struggles to conquer their inner mind stems through the sparkling rays of the selected poems of Maya Angelou. The inspiring words of Angelou's poems may shine forever in all aspects of its times and thus help the readers, listeners and writers a new message of hope that amidst the harmful effects of COVID-19, the teachers do find the opportunity to keep teaching and raise the banner of the learning curve in the long run.

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