On Teacher-Student Relationship

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DURING the closing decade of the last century, perhaps on the first or second day of my graduate programme in the university of Wales, UK at the end of the lecture, an young girl student wearing short skirt and transparent T-shirt sat (to my eastern eyes the dress was provocative indeed!) on the professor's desk and started to chat with the professor. To my utmost surprise the middle aged professor did not find any wrong in it and without hesitation answered the queries of the girl. As a stranger to western classroom environment, it was a sort of cultural shock for me. In our culture we place our teachers in a respectable place as we place our parents and so perhaps most of us would not approve of such close interaction between teacher and student. On another instance, when I addressed one of my professors as 'sir', the professor interrupted me and advised, "Mr. Kabir, please don't call me 'sir'. I don't like this colonial word. My name is Moseley. You may call me Moseley." Again in the Sub-continental culture, addressing a teacher by name, no doubt, is considered an offence. From these two instances, it is evident that the post modern Western society has redefined teacher-student relationship in different ways from that of ours. In fact, the contemporary western society prefers to see both the teacher and students at the same level and emphasises the friendship in teacher-student relationship.

Many of my young colleagues are really confused to define the teacher-student relationship. What should be the salient features of such relationship? In this context, should we follow the western ethos or should we cling to our tradition? In our society, traditionally teacher-student relationship is viewed as parent-child relationship. The root of such perception originates in our religious traditions, be it Hinduism, Buddhism or Islamic one. In Hinduism *guru-shishya* (teacher-disciple) tradition is a spiritual relationship which is centered around the transmission of knowledge from a *guru* to a *shishya*. The guru-shishya relationship, in fact, is a practice which has evolved into a fundamental component of Hinduism, since the beginning of the tradition of oral teaching of the Upanishad (2000 BC), a major Hindu scripture. Knowledge, whether be it spiritual or other secular forms of knowledge, such as, warfare, music, art, is imparted through developing relationship between *guru* and *shishya*. The principle of this relationship is that knowledge, especially subtle or advanced knowledge, is best conveyed through a strong human relationship based on ideals of student's respect, commitment, devotion and obedience, and personal instruction by which the student eventually masters the knowledge that guru embodies. Like Hinduism, in Buddhism the *guru-shishya* relationship is sacred one and stresses on a strong devotional aspect on the part of the student. Rob Preece, a contemporary sociologist has observed that in the Buddhist tradition there is supposed to be a special hell where those who criticize the teacher will go.

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If there were such a hell he suggest it is the hell of guilt, fear and torment a disciple is likely to suffer for his challenge to the authority of the teacher. In Islamic tradition also teacher-student relationship is comparable to the parent-child relationship. In this context eminent Islamic Jurisprudent Professor Dr. Sano Koutoub Moustapha of International Islamic University, Malaysia, has argued that, "The relationship between teacher and student should be based on mutual love and respect. The teacher should treat the students as his or her own children, and the students should consider the teacher as their own parent." In essence, it is evident that the sub-continental religions has provided teacher with full authority over the students. This, in turn, produces power imbalance in teacher-student relationship placing the teacher in more powerful position. The power imbalance that arises in teacher-student relationship places the teacher in the more powerful position.