

5. School for hypocrisy

WHAT is a school for? To make man human. Man has in him certain specific attributes which have to be developed and fostered, so that he can rise up to his full stature. If these are ignored or allowed to lie fallow, he exists on the animal level only. Discipline alone can make him grow into his heritage. The animal can be transformed by training to behave like a man.

The teacher is the most important asset of the school. Brick and mortar do not make a school efficient and useful. Nor are books in the library or appliances in the laboratory, so essential. The teacher makes the school or mars it. He is all the books you need; he is the most desirable appliance. He shapes the manners, behaviour, attitudes and even prejudices of the pupils under his care. So he has a big responsibility. The teacher dedicates himself to a great *saadhana*, when he enters upon this profession. He has himself to be what he advises his pupils to be. The tender minds in the classroom are easily moulded by his example. If the teacher speaks against smoking, he has to give up smoking; if he insists on punctuality, he has to come to the classroom on time. He is under rigorous scrutiny, all the time. Any misdemeanour of his, becomes the talk of the town; it is discussed during dinner in a hundred homes the same day. He has to be circumspect all the hours of the day.

Obedience to discipline should come automatically

Patient effort and steady persistence are indispensable for teachers. Their work is of basic importance to the nation. Children's minds are innocent, tender and pure. The snake gourd is apt to grow crooked, if left alone. So, gardeners tie a stone to its end and the weight pulls it straight, as it grows longer and longer. The minds of children and of youth too are apt to grow crooked, under the influence of the sensuous films, the hollow hypocritical atmosphere created by the elders, the lure of glitter and glamour and of a false sense of adventure and fame. So, schools have to attach the stone of discipline and make them grow straight and true.

The stone should not be too heavy, lest it snap the gourd in two! Avoid extremes, at all times, in all cases. Disciplinary rules have to be well thought out and adapted to the age-group they wish to correct. The atmosphere must be so charged that obedience to discipline comes automatically, with full heart. Such discipline will shape good leaders for the nation. Unlike the present generation of leaders, these can inspire and guide the people along right lines. They have also to be good followers; fine soldiers make fine generals. Young apprentices of peace become pillars of peace, champions of peace. Regulate the food habits of the children; food determines to a large extent health and intelligence, emotion and impulse. Set limits to the quality and quantity of food, as well as to the number of times it is consumed and the timings. Recreation too has to be moral and elevating, in the company of the righteous and God-fearing.

The real purpose of schooling is ignored now by parents and teachers. Parents wish that their sons and daughters must secure a University Degree, by hook or crook, because it is a status symbol. Teachers wish that a high percentage of their pupils must pass the examination, without giving them any bother while teaching, or while not teaching! Each student is precious trust, so far as the teacher is concerned. He should be quite honest, in the execution of his duties, for, his example has such influence on the class.

Students should be asked to practise silence

Let me mention now one point, which though it might look small, has profound repercussion on your attitude and on the boys. When the teacher goes through the roll-call, with the attendance register before him, he does not call out the name of each boy! He uses numbers. And they respond, with 'yes.' Call out the names, for numbers hide and neglect their specific individualities; they mould them into dead uniformity. They are not prisoners or policemen who have to suppress their individuality and get known only by numbers.

Prayer is a good item to be included in the time-table. Silence is invaluable and pupils can be asked to practise it. See that they do not get too agitated or depressed. The pendulum will start to swing only when the clock is keyed up. Let them keep their desire under control; do not key them up. Elders, politicians, leaders, and teachers should not inflame their passions, and enslave them to anger and passion, as they are doing now, for every provocation and at every turn.

I love students; I pour out Love and Grace on them. They should not run out of the class rooms behind politicians, who entice them to enter the active field of agitation. When you clamour for rights you must lend your shoulders to carry the obligations too. Finish your studies; develop the skill to distinguish between what is good and what is not, and then, plan out ways and means to secure the good and avoid the evil. Instead, if you plunge into the streets behind the leaders who use you for their ends, you are harming your careers and harming politics too. And, imagine the agony of your parents who build castles of hope and live precariously, so that their children may learn and earn.

Both teachers and students deceive the public

Teachers are concerned now only with the percentage of passes; so, they teach only answers to questions, which according to their guesses will appear at the examination. It is all a gamble. Subjects in the curriculum are not taught, fully and well. The pupils forget what they have crammed for the occasion; they are none the better, even if they are declared 'passed.' Their brains become empty once they have poured out the contents on the answer papers.

Subjects of study are prescribed with adequate syllabuses, because they are useful equipment; they train processes of thought, they help in learning further. That is why they are included in the curriculum and when the degree is conferred, everyone believes that the student is the master of those subjects. So, teachers deceive the public, if they do not teach the entire subject, and students deceive the public if they do not get the subject imprinted on their minds, ever available for use.

Encourage the students to write to their parents about the school and their progress; the parents must be kept in touch with the teachers and the teaching process, and the condition of the school. This will help correct defects in time and to the full. Another suggestion! Do not keep the young idle and unoccupied. Every second is a precious gift. Time well used is like food well digested. It sustains and strengthens.

Avoid the sad feature of mass convocations

Parents must observe rules strictly, themselves. Take the case of an engineer belonging to the Scheduled Caste, whose sons are in college. The son is entitled to a scholarship only if the father has an income of less than 3,000 rupees a year. The father tries all kinds of hicks and finally gets an M.L.A. to tell the college that the rules do not apply to this case! The son may get the scholarship but what a lesson in morals!

Students have to be taught the equality of all faiths. I am arranging the staging of a play at the Sathya Sai Arts and Science College for Men at Kadugodi, a play based on the Mahaabhaaratha incident, where Aswatthaama slaughters the infant children of the Paandavas. In that play, the role of Krishna is played by a Muslim; Bheema and Arjuna are Christians. Each one of us is playing a role in this Grand Drama, some as Hindu, some as Muslim, some as Christian. Whatever the role, the individual has to appear in the appropriate costume, repeat the lines, gesticulate, and make entrances and exists as directed.

If a school has poor discipline, if its students are led away by self-seekers, into the wilderness, the fault lies on the parents, the elders and the Committee of Management.

The Committee, often is only a 'Come-for-tea' affair! I suggest that convocations be held in each college to distribute the Diplomas to the candidates who pass out of that College; this will avoid confusion at the mass convocations, a feature that saddens every one. Friends and parents can attend these mini-convocations and cheer them.

Quality and not quantity should be the goal

You know that you can draw cheques upon a bank, whenever you need money, provided you have enough current deposit therein. If the bank goes bankrupt, it will be a disaster. The educational system is the bank, on which the nation draws a cheque whenever it wants strong reliable skilled workers. If it goes bankrupt, as it has very nearly gone today, it is a national disaster. If the system is overhauled and lubricated, the next generation is assured of good leaders and, what is equally essential, good followers.

I shall tell you one incident that happened at the Sathya Sai College, so that you can picture the kind of change I welcome. At the Public Examinations held at the College, which is one of the Centres, the moment the candidates got the question papers, all the examinees stood up together. The invigilators were surprised and some of them were struck with fear, that perhaps, they were trying to create a scene and protest against the paper and the setter! But, they stood up, only for a minute of silent prayer, a very ennobling and purifying habit!

Colleges should not compete with each other in the number of students on the rolls. Quality and not quantity should be the goal. A small number ensures greater individual attention, more intense discipline, better teaching and deeper learning.

Bangarpet High School, Venkatagiri, 2-3-1970