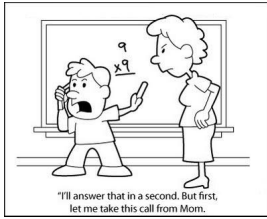


An avoidable scandal at a school

Written by Administrator
Wednesday, 29 April 2015 05:03

By Sidharth Mishra



The unsettling images of the earthquake emanating from Nepal over the past four days has pushed to the background a video clip which quickly went viral on social media. The aforementioned video depicted one of the worst ailments gripping our society. I was beyond horrified to see the pictures of a parent mercilessly beating up the director of a school in Jalandhar for merely confiscating the mobile phone of her child. What followed next was even more disgusting. The school had to move heaven and earth to get the offending parent booked under relevant sections of the law. For the people of my generation it was inconceivable that our parents would go to the extent of thrashing a teacher for the correctional measures s/he was taking. I am reminded of the letter which Abraham Lincoln wrote to his son's teacher. "Teach him to have sublime faith in himself, because then he will always have sublime faith in mankind, in God," are the best lines of a very meaningful letter, which concludes by saying, "This is a big order; but see what you can do. He is such a fine little fellow, my son."

I am still at my wits end to believe that such an incident could happen in an elite school. This made me reminisce about an incident from my boarding school days at Rashtriya Indian Military College in Dehradun. It was October 1981 and the school was reassembling after the mid-term break. During these breaks, different classes went on treks to different parts of the Garhwal Himalayas or sometimes for an excursion to nearby hill stations like Shimla or Nainital. Some classes also went on a Delhi-Agra trip. We would be given pocket money and since the scope of spending during these trips was limited, we saved the money diligently to spend in Dehradun on return.

That autumn we had come back with our pockets loaded. We were all very excited that evening to off-load all the moolah we had saved before the day break. That night, a dozen of us, soon after dinner, had sprinted to the bus stop to take the last bus to the town and had watched an Amitabh Bachchan's damp squib "

Barsaat Ki Ek Raat

". Before entering the cinema hall, we had managed to gulp down bottles of Campa Cola. (We drank Campa Cola because a few years earlier Coke had been exiled by a socialist industries minister called George Fernandes).

The film ordinarily would have been rated as a boring one but for us boisterous dozen it was a question of cutting bounds and enjoying our few moments of rebellion. We sang and howled

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along with the Big B inside the near empty hall. On the way back, we hired an auto-rickshaw and somehow all 12 of us managed to squeeze into that tiny three-wheeler.

The machine was not as mean as we were and spurted to a halt about a hundred metres before the school campus. Oblivious of what awaited us at the school gate, we moved on singing, “*Kaliram ka phat gaya dhol, ho gaya uska dubba gol, bol hari bol hari bol hari bol.*”

” As we reached the gate, we saw a group of 50 standing in attention in five rows. All of them had their heads bowed.

We too meekly went and formed the sixth file. Our school’s vice principal, a man with a rickety frame aged about 55 years was holding a group of 75-odd studs, in the age-group of 14-16, all fed on military ration with their muscles toned by burning those calories, in rapt attention. He counted the numbers and memorised the names and told all those who went “cutting bounds” that night to appear outside his office at 11 am the next day.

What was it that gave confidence to the thin old man to take on the 75 studs that night? When I recall the incident, I am reminded of the address which was delivered by Prince Edward, the Prince of Wales at the inauguration of the same school on March 13, 1922. “It is the first few blows on the anvil of life that gives the human weapon, the set and temper, which carries it through life’s battles.” The Prince in his address also made reference to the ancient Indian tradition of “Guru and Chela”. It was this relationship of mutual love and reverence that formed the basis of the ethos of my school.

Unfortunately while the heir to the British crown looked towards India to find value in education, our own systems are increasingly fraying at the edges. Opening up of the Indian economy has created a new class of the nouveau rich, who may not have the finesse to appreciate the nuances of a value education. Probably the only use they can put the word ‘value’ to is for multiplying value of their money.

The management of the new upmarket schools, which have people from the nouveau rich class as the major portion of their body of parents, often face the dilemma of whether to turn down the admission of the child for not being from too encouraging social background or to accept them as pupils for a need to keep the wheels of the school’s economy moving along smoothly. For them its not easy decision and choice in most of the cases may be between the devil and the deep blue sea.

The managements of these schools will have to take the call sooner or later to ensure that while they keep their balance sheets healthy, they should also take care of the school’s social indices. Unfortunately for Mayor World School and her director, they would be remembered for long, for this unfortunate incident rather than any other achievement.

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