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Is society creating future responsible citizens?

: An overview

WHAT IS A SOCIETY?

Man is a social animal. From time immemorial, man has been living in groups. In the earliest days, humans used to be nomads, moving from one place to another in search of food, water and better living conditions. As time went by, these groups discovered the art of agriculture and started settling down in river banks in large numbers. This led to the birth of civilizations and society. Society has evolved in a number of ways ever since.

When a large group of people started living together, it became imperative to have a set of rules to govern how the people would live and interact with each other to ensure a smooth and peaceful environment in this group. For the group of people to live without any problem, with maximum comfort and security, it also became necessary that various responsibilities be shared among the people of this group. This system of a group of people living together, with a set of rules to govern them and a set of responsibilities taken up by them is collectively called a society. Over the course of time, these set of rules and responsibilities have been continuously changing to see the society that we have today.

It is an undeniable fact that a child's upbringing is influenced a lot by the society he is brought up in. More often than not, a person's character and behaviour, his reactions to different situations can be directly traced to what he has learned during his childhood. In such a scenario, it is very necessary to study the effects of present day society to assess the quality of future citizens of our country.

MORALITY IN PRESENT DAY SOCIETY

One of the most basic quality of a good person, and hence a good citizen, is having good moral values and ethics. It cannot be understated how important moral values are in a society. Every human civilization has always attempted to eulogise people of excellent moral values. The concept of God, good and bad deeds, good and bad behaviour, good and bad characters were all an exercise by our elders to try and instill good moral values and ethics among people. All religious texts, almost all old literary texts and stories passed down from generation to generation are based on morality and ethics. Telling such stories to a child, educating him/her on such texts was considered important as such a child would learn to give importance to morality, ethics and would always strive to do good deeds in his/her life. Making a child an adherent of strong moral values was also considered as an important part of a child's education.

The society, even until our previous generation, always respected and honoured people with high moral values. A simple but honest school teacher was always respected and loved by the people as against a selfish and cruel but wealthy zamindar. But nowadays, the society has stopped paying respect to the honest,

humble, righteous person. The people who are praised and idolized are the ones who are rich, the ones who are glamorous, the ones who are at the top of their profession without caring whether that has been achieved by hook or by crook. The society no longer looks at how the success was achieved. As long as a person is successful, even if he achieves success through dubious, fraudulent or even harmful and violent means, the society continues to sing paeans about him/her. Morality and ethical values have ceased to be a factor while judging a person. It is only the wealth and success of the person which matters the most. From being an ethics based society, we have quickly become a glamour and money based society, which should be a cause of great worry.

In such an environment, it is obvious that a child would aspire to be the next big filmstar, the next big industrialist, the next big cricketer, or even the next big realtor in order to gain bucket loads of money, and glamour through it. Nobody wants to grow up to be a teacher, a soldier or a farmer, though they are the most essential cogs of a society.

"Son murders father to acquire his property", "Husband kills wife for not bringing dowry", and such other headlines describing inhuman acts made for money are frequent sights in everyday newspapers. This clearly reflects the changing mentality of present generation which has become more money minded. It has started believing that money is the cure for everything, money is the only thing required in the world and the rest can be bought. It has ended up believing that even God can be bribed by lavish gifts!!

In such a society of degrading moral values and ethics, it is difficult for a child to grow up to be a morally upright citizen, which is one of the most basic qualities of a responsible citizen.

ROLE OF SCHOOLS

"Guruh Brahma, Guruh Vishnu, Guruh Devo Maheshwarah, Guruh saakshaat Parabrahmah, Tasmai shri gurave namah" is an age old, popular Sanskrit shloka eulogizing Guru (teacher). This aptly captures the importance of a teacher, and therefore, the school, in a person's life.

A school is the second home for a child. The influence of school on a person's life is immense. It is quite a common occurrence for many famous and successful people to reminisce about their schooldays and talk about the influence of certain teachers when they get an opportunity to address the general public. For many, one of the first role models in their life happen to be teachers. The experiences of a child in their school leaves a lasting impression in his/her lifetime. The education imparted, the examples impressed upon them, the values taught in school stay with the person throughout his life.

Moral education was an important part of the curriculum of any school before. But slowly, it is being removed from the curriculum in many schools nowadays. Even when it is present, it is accorded a step-motherly treatment. It is given the least importance, and just "passing" the subject is considered sufficient.

One of the most important reasons for this is the lack of realization that morals and ethics are equally important as the sciences and languages taught in school for the overall development of the child. "Vidya

Vinayena Shobhate", which means "Education without humility is useless" is a popular saying coined by our experienced ancestors. It is a shame that such an attitude is absent today among many academicians.

When one looks at the crime rates in the country, and the alarming rate at which it is increasing, it is clear that moral education has to be emphasized and taught well at every school. Children must be made aware of the importance of moral and ethical values right from a very young age. Various stories glorifying morality and admonishing immorality must be eloquently imparted to young students. Biographies of great people must be taught. The various moral dilemmas they faced, their courage to take the right path and the subsequent fruits borne because of being morally strong must be discussed in detail. No stone must be left unturned to make a child realize the importance of morality.

In spite of these measures, there would still be children who go astray. Such children must be supervised closely, and should be encouraged to do good deeds and avoid bad ones. They must be counseled and made to realize their mistakes. A few words of inspiration may be all they need to change.

A school's responsibility does not stop at imparting science and morals to the children. They must also be encouraged to take up social responsibility in their own little ways. Civic responsibility must be inculcated in the students right from an early age. Maintaining cleanliness in public places, putting waste paper and plastic only in dustbins, not urinating in the roadside, no spitting on the streets and many such good social habits must be taught.

It should also be the responsibility of teachers to properly teach the features of our constitution. The reason for existence of various features and their side effects must be taught and whether the alternatives to those features would help or hamper the society must also be openly discussed so that the children find interest in the basic structure of the nation and also get a clear picture of the constitution. Many examples from current affair topics, many policies undertaken by the Government can also be discussed to make the students more aware socially. The duties of a citizen which is a part of the constitution must also be properly emphasized and a feeling of love and care towards the society and country in general must be fostered among students.

But the scenario today presents a very different picture. The education system has become more of a "marks" and "grade" oriented system. Marks and grades are obtained by hook or by crook. The students do not study for educating themselves, but for the sole purpose of obtaining more marks. They are not interested in knowing and questioning various things taught at school, but are more curious to know "which question will appear in the examination", or "which part of the chapter is very important for examinations". Such a culture will definitely hamper the quality of citizens India produces in future.

ROLE OF PARENTS

It is a universally accepted fact that parents are the biggest influence on children's lives. The Indian culture elevates parents to the standing of God. When the children look up at them with such worshipping eyes, it

becomes the responsibility of the parents to act and guide their children along the right path and make them excellent citizens of the future.

The basic moral character of a child is built at home. The role of the parents starts right with educating a child as to what is wrong and what is right. A child must be taught to never say lies, always respect elders, never to judge others, be unselfish and helpful, never laugh at others' sorrows and be empathetic towards them - as they could as well find themselves in a worse situation than them, the importance of having patience, and many other moral values right from its early days. Just teaching them shall not suffice, and it is the responsibility of parents to also act accordingly. The parents must behave and deal with the society with high morality and ethics. Such an environment will naturally encourage children to grow into a righteous, morally upright and a mature human being.

The responsibility of parents does not stop at that. They must also keep an eye on their children's activities so that if they go astray, they can correct them before it is too late. They must constantly consult teachers about their children's behaviour in the school premises and must be in touch with their children's close friends. The parents can also ask their neighbours to get an idea of their children's activities and behaviour when they are not around.

The environment at home is the most major influence of a child's life, and it is the most important contributing factor of how the child grows up to be. Hence, for a child to grow up to be a good future citizen, it is very essential that the parents create an ideal atmosphere for that. The parents must lead by example. They have to be socially active, must constantly strive to contribute something meaningful to the society always. They must involve themselves in community service. They must also make the child aware of its social responsibility and its responsibility towards the community. Creating such a good and healthy environment at home goes a long way in making the children better citizens of tomorrow.

But, in today's world, finding such parents has become a little difficult. The young parents of today, due to the difficult financial climate and rising inflation of the country, and also because they are ambitious about their careers, tend to work harder at their workplaces. This, more often than not affects the relationship with their children. The children often feel lonely and do not get enough attention that they need from their parents as a result. It is not because the present day parents do not love their children, it is in fact the opposite, but the circumstances and the current social and financial climate rarely permits them to spend much time in their children's upbringing. Sometimes, in order to demonstrate the love for their children some parents end up doing more harm than good. When their children have done something wrong, instead of correcting them and making them realize their mistakes, some parents start supporting their children and try to deflect the blame of their misdoings on something/somebody else. This not only encourages the child to indulge in such misdoings again in future rest assured that their parents shall always be there to take up their case even when they are wrong, but also lays seeds for child to turn out to be harmful citizen to the society in future.

The responsibility in bringing up their children well is a small responsibility for the parents. But the failure to do so could have far reaching repercussions on the future society. The parents of today must take a good hard look at themselves and see whether they are creating a new anti-social of the future.

ROLE OF MEDIA

The child of every generation is always enamored by the popular mass media of its time. We had our previous generation going gaga over radio, and the present generation is smitten by television. Right from a 6 month old toddler to a septuagenarian, every person is hooked to television nowadays.

A child, right from before the time it can even start walking, is largely influenced from what it sees on television. It tries to sing along the jingle of advertisements it watches on television, and tries to imitate the acting and dancing moves of various actors on television and films. With such a potentially profound bearing on a child's mind, it is the responsibility of the media not only to show entertaining stuff, but also educational stuff. And most importantly, the onus is on media to not show and glorify things which can negatively affect a child's growth into a good future citizen of the nation.

But what we see today on television is a far cry from what is ideal. We see warped morality being shown on the television. Advertisements which show children beating and slapping elders, children speaking disrespectfully to elders are a common sight. We also have advertisements which glorify children and people telling "smart" lies to escape from getting the blame of the wrong things they do. These sort of things not only send a message across to young minds that doing wrong is acceptable, but also tell them that coming out clean after telling lies about these wrong activities is heroic!! Gone are the days when accepting one's mistakes was supposed to be one of the bravest things to do!!

To add to this, one of the most important effect that media is bringing about in young minds is objectification of women. The omnipresence of item songs, which are vulgar both in lyrics and picturisation are achieving record breaking popularities - which show how degraded our society has become. Such portrayal of women also adds fire to the already bad and insecure atmosphere present for women in the society today. The increasing number of crimes against women are not at all helped by such activities of media.

The above examples are only a few of the many immoral and undesirable activities being glorified by the media. Many other examples can also be quoted - like the main characters of almost all television serials at one point or another engaging in cheating of their spouses, only for them to be portrayed as the victims rather than perpetrators, the regular portrayal of a drinking habit to be something "cool", etc.

When the mainstream media is pandering to such base instincts of human beings without caring about their responsibility towards human society, can news media be left far behind? In their attempts to capture high TRPs, the news media is resorting to every tactic possible to pander to the populist feelings of the general public rather than impartially analyzing and dissecting news. The birth of "Sensational Breaking News" is one such measure. News and information are never neutrally presented, and are never properly analyzed.

The short-termism of riding the public feeling and enticing them further is practiced by almost all news media outlets. The necessary hard work to logically analyze the news is sacrificed at the altar of TRPs.

"Trial by media" is a very common term we find today. Whenever there is a crime or a scam, the media often accuses the most likely wrongdoer and hounds him/her or the related organization. The news is reported on such a person/organization as though he/she/it is the one who has committed the crime without giving a second thought that they could be wrong. News defaming him/her/it is aired throughout the day for many days, thus putting the people close to the accused in much mental agony and pain. Such demonizing of a person/organization well before the verdict of the court is out is called "trial by media". More often than not, when it is proved that the person/organization is innocent, the media, far from apologizing, rarely even airs this news. The image of the person/organization is thus tarnished forever due to the irresponsible behaviour of the media, thus causing pain forever to the innocents who have been subjected to "trial by media".

Promoting such a culture of demonizing the most likely perpetrator and labeling him/her as a criminal bears a profound impact on a child's mindset. The child fails to even contemplate that there could be some other people or some other motive for some crime or mistake which has occurred. The child thus becomes very narrow minded and extremely prejudiced. If such a thing is allowed to grow in a society, there would be more non-deliverances of justice, as these children of today are the ones who would occupy the important judicial chairs of tomorrow.

Another feature of news channels today are the programs which show "discussions" on various topics. These discussion shows are less of a discussion and more of "who shouts wins" matches. Instead of carrying out meaningful discussions, we see the panelists shouting at each other, cutting one's speech without allowing him to completely present his point of views. "Witty" (read populist) one liners are accorded much fanfare in such a discussion than sound logical reasoning. Such glorification of the wrong aspects of discussion also hampers a child's mental development. His capacity to think restricts to populist one liners and honing of his vocal chords rather than look at a problem with a holistic view and thinking rationally. Such a narrow minded citizen can never contribute to future societies.

The media today is a very powerful medium which affects the thinking and opinion of millions and millions of citizens today. There are many good things and activities brought forward by the media today, which has positively affected our society. But, the irresponsible and arrogant way in which news is presented has also percolated down to the millions of citizens watching, and has greatly affected the thinking of an Indian citizen in a negative way.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Government is always directly responsible for the well being of the citizens. The quality of life a citizen leads is dependent on the type of policies Government makes and the way it is implemented. In India, which is the world's largest democracy, the Government is more responsible towards its citizens as they are elected by mandate of the people.

A clean and corruption-free Government is needed to guide the people and retain the faith of the people. It must be sensitive to the problems faced by the common man and try to solve them. The Government's role also is to meet the continuously growing aspirations of the people. Proper infrastructure and economic climate must be provided so that the people get jobs, or are allowed to become entrepreneurs without much difficulty. Such a Government inspires awe among the youth and teenagers and helps them take up community service in large numbers. The youth and teenagers would participate more in governance if they feel that the Government is responsive and sensitive to their problems, and is proactive in meeting their aspirations.

A Government must also be accountable to the people for its actions. There must be transparency in the way a Government functions. From the smallest application to the biggest policy decisions, the people must be made aware of what is happening and why. With the advent of technology and internet, it is all the more easier to put up the status of different services and applications submitted by the people, and the reasoning and logic behind policy decisions on their website. In this way, they can reach out to a large number of people and can be extremely transparent at the same time, thus reducing the scope of corruption.

For a peaceful and happy society to exist, it is also necessary that the Government provide security to its citizens. Anti-social elements must be harshly dealt with and laws must be enacted to that effect. In the same vein, atrocities by Government machinery must also be discouraged and strict actions must be taken against such officers who do so. The Government must also reward people who contribute to the society, and thus encourage people to take up community service.

But what we see today is the exact opposite of many of the things said above. The Government is apathetic to the problem of the common man, and indecisive when it comes to developmental activities. The focus on infrastructure development and economic growth is very poor. The growing rate of inflation, indecision regarding policies to stimulate economic growth etc. have led to low job creation and unfavorable climate for entrepreneurship.

Corruption has seeped into our administration and has grown into a humungous problem. The people running the Government are hand in glove with such corrupt elements, and hence lack the will to root out this problem. The aspirations of people are not met and their problems are not solved. The lack of transparency in the running of Government which still relies on age old cumbersome practices and which has acted as a catalyst for corrupt practices has become the source of anguish among citizens as witnessed by the India Against Corruption campaign led by Anna Hazare. The Government and political parties have become a symbol of corruption and this affects the children of today negatively. They end up feeling that there is no hope for a good future in this country. They either end up settling abroad or blend into the corrupt system, thus becoming corrupt themselves. The present day Governments are thus hampering the creation of good future citizens.

The lack of security for common people is also a big grouse against the present Governments. The day to day reporting of crimes against women and senior citizens has created an atmosphere of panic amongst

citizens. Such types of Government do not inspire confidence among people and make them act in a selfish manner. "Let us first take care of ourselves. There is no future for this country and working towards the development of the society is pointless" is the general perception of today's population. In such a scenario, envisaging the creation of high quality citizens in future is just a pipe dream.

CONCLUSION

The various important factors which influence a person's childhood and play an important role in the creation of future citizens are mostly flawed. But they are not beyond rescue. There is still hope that these things can get corrected as time goes by and as people realize their importance. The mass awakening of national consciousness against corruption during the recent India Against Corruption movement, the rise of a clean political party in Delhi all point towards a society trying to come out of the vicious cycle of irresponsibility and immorality.

The positive role of media in the above mentioned movement was highly influential. Such social causes ought to be taken up and encouraged by media more often. The media has to be in touch with the local opinions and feelings, and must make it a point to constantly interact with the common people as well as with some sociological experts. Civil discussions must be conducted on TV and everybody must be given ample opportunity to air his opinions logically without cutting him off, and claims made by people in such talks must be followed up with proof. The media has a very significant role in a democracy like India. Particularly, after the Right To Information legislation, media can use this powerful tool and play a very active role in keeping the Government from lethargy and misuse of power and make it more responsible towards people. People can be made aware of the wrongdoings happening at the Government offices and by powerful people of the Government.

The legislators and elected representatives of people must be made more responsible towards the problems faced by the people he is representing. Ministers as well as local elected representatives must answer the concerns of common man, and must not stop at assuring people of action. They must follow up with a proper action to address these problems, or must face repercussions for the failure to do their jobs. An introduction of "Right to recall elected representatives" is one of the steps in this direction, which must be implemented.

Moral education in schools, which is based on just rote learning as of today, must be revised and more practicality has to be introduced. Some situations can be artificially created secretly to test the children's response in such a situation. For example, a child can be artificially enticed to cheat in a test, or a situation can be created where a person acts as though he is in need of urgent medical attention and see how children respond to such situations - whether they take the morally right route, whether they take up social responsibility or not. Children can be taken to orphanages, slum areas, old age homes etc. and made to understand the suffering which is prevalent in society and be made sensitive to such underprivileged and neglected sections of society. Such training goes a long way in building a child's character.

As evidenced during the India Against Corruption movement, people must realize the importance of their power. Whenever the system fails to do the right things, they must unite and voice their opinions against

the powers that be and put pressure on them to take the right steps. They must be made aware that taking the public for granted is not acceptable. Though initially, the general public may feel it is impossible, we must not give up this struggle and must strive hard relentlessly to change the system and change the society. By doing this, we shall also be setting a glowing example to our future generations who would be made more aware of the social issues at large and the power that a united population possesses. Hard work always bears fruits. And if we achieve the goal of creating a better India, the fruit obtained would be the sweetest of all!!

The media should try and find the good prevalent in the society and try to highlight them in their shows. By showing good things done by people and praising them, one gets encouraged to do something good for the society. Giving ample recognition for good people and people who do service to the society in whatever small way possible is a very good incentive to encourage the children of the next generation to be more socially active and contribute immensely to the betterment of the society.

As mentioned before, the role of schools is very important in creating the future India. As the eminent Indian scientist Dr. D S Kothari rightly said "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms". The teachers can inspire students to not only reach their potential in the fields of their interest and become future world leaders, but also shape them to be honest hard-working people who always put society before self. They can train the ideal future role models who the future generations can look up to.

The fact that we have a responsibility towards our children, towards the future generations must be made aware among the people. The responsibilities of the parents, schools and society do not stop at securing the economic future of the children. They should include social and character development of the children too. Investment of time and resources to this effect can help a long way in securing a peaceful, just, prosperous and a happy future society. A quote from our popular and beloved former President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam aptly captures the key essence of creating a better future society - "If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel there are three key societal members who can make a difference. They are the father, the mother and the teacher".