

Editorial

It is not possible to talk facilely of values. We live in confused and turbulent times, 'at the time of the breaking of nations.' All around there is fragmentation of the human mind and, consequently, of human society. Politics and the market have become games for gaining a subtle hold over people. Religion, culture, language—domain of human ideals and dreams; poverty and natural calamities—areas of raw human suffering, have all become playthings in the hands of vested interests to emotionally arouse mobs to join their ranks. What is paraded as value often turns out false. This special issue on 'Education and Values' of *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, attempts to explore in depth the challenges before society today, and the need and the ways of fostering values through education. The contributors, spread all over the country, represent the voice also of smaller towns and suburban India.

There is another reason too, why it is not easy to talk of values. One never knows what following a value might demand. It might appear all very simple and yet demand a total overhauling of mind-structures, a complete change of direction. A little story comes to mind.

Hell and Heaven

God's Fool said to God one day, "In your kingdom, I hear, there is a Hell and a Heaven somewhere. Show me, show me." God who was ever ready to indulge his Fool took him to a huge banquet hall with large tables laden with the most delicious food. In the room was a crowd of people who had their hands tied to long spoons with which they were trying to eat the food. But the spoons were too long and wouldn't go into their mouths. The food fell all over them and on the floor. God's Fool wept, heartbroken, and asked, "Why, why have you made Hell, God?" God also wept as He led the Fool to another banquet hall. Here too were large tables laden with delicious food. And long spoons tied to people's hands. But here the feasters were merrily feasting. Here, each was feeding another. The Fool's face broke into a smile, "And this, my dear God, is Heaven?"

Hidden in this story is the Value of values, the cornerstone of every religion: "Heaven/The Kingdom of God/ Love/ Compassion/ Beauty/ Truth/Whatever, is where the self is *not*." But what has this value got to do with education?

The School of Barbiana

A book that could revolutionize our concept of what a school should be, and transform society, was written by eight children of a village school from the poorest of poor peasant homes tucked among the mountains near the Church of Barbiana in Tuscany, Italy. Earlier these children had failed their exams or left school bitterly disappointed by the way they were taught. Father Lorenzo Milani, sent to the Church of Barbiana, gathered them together along with some other school drop-outs (starting with ten the number later rose to twenty) and started teaching them eight hours a day all days of the week. Soon these children who had been branded unfit for education by the prevailing education system started learning. The school of Barbiana failed nobody. Learning was pleasure. The older children started teaching the younger. All the boys learnt to love school and work. They learnt to help each other instead of competing. The weakest child was the centre of attention of the whole school. Till he understood the class wouldn't proceed with a lesson. The boys decided what should be studied. They discussed and discovered the principles of good writing. The older boys gave a lot of time teaching the younger. Much time was spent by all in studying problems directly concerned with their lives. That is how eight students set out to write the book, *Letter to a Teacher*,¹ as a full year project, and instead of taking any credit for themselves, credited the authorship to the School of Barbiana. They wrote in the first person singular, denoting, obviously, the collective / representative "I":

Dear Miss

You won't remember me or my name. You have failed so many of us.

On the other hand I have often had thoughts about you, and the other teachers, and about that institution which you call 'school' and about the boys that you fail.

You fail us right out into the fields and factories and there you forget us....(p.17)

¹*Letter to a Teacher*. By the School of Barbiana. Trans. Nora Rossi and Tom Cole. Random House: London, 1969.

Born of poor mountain people who were all shy, "As a little boy I used to keep my eyes on the ground. I would creep along the walls in order not to be seen". (p.17) The teacher had told his family not to waste money on him: "Send him into the fields. He is not meant for books." The father did not reply. He was thinking, "If we lived in Barbiana, he *would* be made for books." (p.18)

The father bought him a torch for the dark evenings, a canteen for soup and boots for the snow. The first day the father himself took the eleven year old child to Barbiana. It took the two of them two hours to cut their way through the woods with a sickle and a billhook. Later it took the child a little more than an hour to walk to school. Sometimes he would be running because of a viper or because of a mad man who lived in the mountains and screamed at him.

Barbiana, when I arrived, did not seem like a school. No. teacher, no desk, no blackboard, no benches. Just big tables, around which we studied and also ate.

There was just one copy of each book. The boys would pile up around it. It was hard to notice that one of them was a bit older and was teaching.

The oldest of these teachers was sixteen. The youngest was twelve and filled me with admiration. I made up my mind from the start that I, too, was going to teach.

The favourite : Life was hard up there too. Discipline and squabbles until you didn't feel like coming back.

But there a boy who had no background, who was slow or lazy was made to feel like *the favourite*. He would be treated the way you teachers treat the best student in the class. It seemed as if the school was meant just for him. Until he could be made to understand, the others would not continue. (p.19)

How did the adolescent teachers manage to teach and keep discipline?—

Children as teachers : The next year I was a teacher; that is, three half-days a week. I taught geography, mathematics and French to the first intermediate year.

You don't need a degree to look through an atlas or explain fractions.

If I made some mistakes that wasn't so bad. It was a relief for the boys. We would work them out together. The hours would go by quietly, without worry and without fear. You don't know how to run a class the way I do.

Politics or stinginess : Then, too I was learning so many things while I taught. For instance, that others' problems are like mine.

To come out of them together is good politics to come out alone is stinginess.

I was not vaccinated against stinginess myself. During exams I felt like

sending the little ones to hell and studying on my own.

I was a boy like your boys, but up at Barbiana I wouldn't admit it to myself or to others. I had to be generous even when I didn't feel it.... (p.20)

But your students....Day in and day out they study for marks, for reports and diplomas.

Meanwhile they lose interest in all the fine things they are studying: Languages, science, history everything becomes purely pass marks.....

To be a happy student in your schools you have to be a social climber at the age of twelve. (p. 27)

Father Lorenzo Milani died, but the School of Barbiana, moved to Calenzano, continued. About the book, Edward Blishen wrote, "This marvel of a book...a masterpiece of protest...an original work of literature...I have read no book on education that has left me so uncomfortably aware of the injustice done daily in our schools to great masses of our fellow human beings."

Barbiana was Barbiana because there, as in God's banquet hall in Heaven, each was taking care of the other. In that caring the children learnt, and learnt much more than books could teach.

Campus atmosphere

A school imparts both a formal and an informal education. The formal education is the curricula taught in classrooms culminating in the award of degrees. The informal education is what is imbibed from the atmosphere. It is the learning that takes place from the experience of living on the campus. It is the internalization of the values and attitudes inherent in the network of relationships that brings together the people pursuing their studies in a place within a climate of ideas. This education which subtly influences the shaping of the mind or sensibility and brings about an intrinsic change in the individual is of far greater relevance than the knowledge a student gathers to pass an examination. A School/College/University must first and foremost be that atmosphere from which its students will come away with worthy attitudes. Therefore, a great deal of care, attention and thinking should go into the creation and nurturing of this atmosphere which is the only educational medium for the communication of values. This medium which is subtle and powerful is, at the same time, fragile and vulnerable, and, if damaged, liable to cause extensive harm. The content of this atmosphere is nothing mysterious but the aroma/energy of all human interactions, with everything, that take place on the campus.

All too often in public pronouncements and broadcasts to the nation, political leaders speak of the erosion of values, the failure of the education system, and the disappearance of the great teacher who could inspire the youth of the country, little realizing that we have driven away the great teacher, smothered him to death, little realizing that the great teacher can be sustained only by the campus atmosphere and can impart values only by nurturing it and placing it above himself. The education policies which our political leaders have foisted on universities over the last few decades have befouled the campus atmosphere. Today a teacher can only decry the state of affairs and step out. In most universities no value survives to inspire and be imbibed.

The political leaders and their Education Commissions never seem to have pondered, except superficially, upon the connection linking campus atmosphere, education and values.

How are values generated and imparted?

How are they made a mockery of, traduced and trashed?

Do some values get outdated?

What was the function the university was required to perform earlier?

What is the dream it is today called upon to actualize?

Are there any absolute value/values?

Have we, faced with a different challenge, invited the right values to be at the fountain head of all our actions, to inform the spirit of how we teach, how we study, how we look after our buildings and libraries and trees and fields, how we recruit new members into our community of teachers, students and administrative staff, how we set about to take academic and executive decisions, how we abide by a code of conduct, how we relate to the knowledge we pursue and to the human, intellectual and physical environment?

The network of relationships that in the microcosm constitutes the university, in the macrocosm constitutes the world. Establishing order in the microcosm is the way to establishing order in the macrocosm.

Education during British rule

When colleges/universities were first transplanted by colonial fiat upon Indian soil, they aimed at training Indian students for minor bureaucratic posts through a style of curriculum which was very English. The rewards of the examination system and campus life sought to

inculcate elitist values: the competitive spirit, cultivation of individual competence and merit, and a rather superficial sense of justice and fairplay among the socially privileged. The accent was on classroom teaching, life on campus, pride in the alma mater, manners, decorum and style; and not on research; not on the cultivation of that intellectual discipline which could, with meticulous care and attention to detail, tackle the real problems of the Indian people. In the later days of colonial rule there might have been a commitment to Swaraj, but it was a romantic, emotional commitment unable to dedicate itself to the task of building a new society in the postcolonial period. For sometime after independence the University of Allahabad, for instance, continued to churn out a sizable crop of bureaucrats every year. Even today the highest dream its products seem to cherish is to qualify for the civil services. The downfall was inevitable.

Chaos as inarticulate criticism

In earlier days, called upon to perform the small task of producing petty bureaucrats, universities had set about the task fairly efficiently, with values that were trite but adequate for the purpose. The section of society which sent its youth to the university and to which the university then catered, accepted its norms and the university scenario, in what was called its golden period, buzzed with a superficial euphoria and sense of importance. Today, in free India, when the university is called upon to perform the far greater task of imparting an education that is meaningful for all, it requires to build its edifice upon values that are far more universal, uncompromisingly demanding and ruthlessly austere. These may well be values that will demand the destruction of the very base upon which the earlier values stood. Today there is deep-seated indiscipline and chaos in the student community. But chaos could have a positive face. Chaos could be an inarticulate criticism and irreverent rejection of superficial order, and an expression of anguish for a deeper order.

The climate of our university today is fraught with corruption, intrigue, anger, animosity, ambition, jealousy, cynicism, suspicion, favouritism, bias, injustice, despair, indifference, and all other emotions that breed in a competitive, acquisitive society run amok, a society that motivates people only through gross and subtle forms of reward and punishment. The compassion and loving-kindness of a caring, fraternal community do not inform the atmosphere of our universities. Do we not need to enquire, why? While skill, competence, information

can be transferred through an overt, formal education, attitudes and values of concern, caring, sensitivity, vulnerability, reverence, authenticity, honest doubt, austerity and all that makes human life worthwhile can only be acquired subtly and slowly through exposure to the right atmosphere.

Motivation

Our education policy makers have unquestioningly accepted the necessity of 'healthy' competition, of some kind of reward and punishment for inducing motivation for work in teachers and students. May be we need to question that very postulate. May be one could begin by asking whether all motivations are the same in quality or whether there are different kinds of motivation.

A beautiful distinction was drawn by Sinyavsky between motivations prompted by 'a desire to seem' and motivations prompted by 'an urge to be'. When I am prompted by a desire to seem, I perhaps wish to appear superior to others in the eyes of the world or of the appraisers who hold the rewards in their hands. Rewards and punishment induce me to be a performer. But when I am prompted by an urge to be, I cannot be up for sale. It is not my performance before my appraisers that bothers me then but what I am in the eyes of God, if I have a God, or, more austere, in my own eyes, if I have no God. When I study physics, economics, law or literature, do I do so to be rewarded with a higher designation or a higher scale of pay, or do I do so for the joy of understanding and of sharing that understanding? It is important that in a free country the university atmosphere should arouse in the teacher and the student alike the urge to be and not the desire to seem. For it is the motivation of the urge to be that ignites creativity and concern and love and joy and perceptivity. And it is the motivation of the desire to seem that corrupts the mind with deceit, jealousy, intrigue, sycophancy, cowardice and all the emotions of petty mediocre lives. We need to think how the whole learning process can bring this about.

Ramifications

The ramifications of extending such a goal into the practical details of running a university are extensive and challenging, but necessary if we are honest in wishing that education should impart values and not merely information, competence, skill and stylish manners.

If our commitment is to values, no motivation must be induced on the campus through rewards. Recruitment of teachers could be made by the fraternity of his would be colleagues and students and not by a selection committee more often than not amenable to influence exercised by social and political big wigs. All authority and hierarchy must be set aside from the campus. No motivation must be induced through promotion to higher posts. All teachers, like Judges in a High Court, must be equal; the chief, a first among equals Appointment of Vice-Chancellors and Executive Counsellors must not be vested in the hands of the Government in power for that, generally, will give the university midget Vice-Chancellors ever ready to kowtow to politicians, ever prompted by a desire to appear their obliging servant, and not a free and dignified role model for the University community.

The learning process must be far more important than examinations and the nature of examinations must completely change. The learner should be involved in the learning process through a human interaction between teacher and taught. The process should be flexible, attentive and sympathetic to the various needs of students. If there is a slow learner—as ever so often among students coming from the underprivileged, weaker sections of society—and he wishes to proceed in his studies through a slow stream, it should be possible for him to do so. And examinations should help a student flower and fulfil his full potentiality. An examination should perhaps be an evaluation helping a student understand his strength and rectify his weakness. It should not compare or classify students, put them on merit lists, encourage them in being performers vying for attention, obliging, clever and competitive, or grumpy, frustrated and sulking; either way, fake and dishonest to their urge to be, corrupted by the desire to seem.

No job in such a residence of learning can be classified as a menial job for class four employees. Can those who come to teach and learn here feel responsible (which means able to respond) to everything—for fans not turned off in vacant classrooms, for spitmarks on walls, litter in corridors, vulgarity on campus; for classes not met, lessons not taught, for students fresh from home who are lonely? For an urge to be must respond to and take care of the whole, for everything before our eyes. It cannot fragment the tasks of living, separate one task from another. Education would be beautiful when holistic, received within a large community tied together by a network of harmonious relationships. This is not the time to go into all aspects of the complex

entity that is a university. Here it would be sufficient to emphasize that the university, even though complex, is an organic, interrelated, ever changing whole. Its life being dynamic, evolving, fluid, its challenges cannot be met with rigid rules and structures but by an attitude of alert and caring watchfulness which will strive so that within the university community fraternal feelings prevail and divisive, competitive feelings of hostility and conflict do not find soil to take root. In a university, if there are acts and statutes they must protect freedom, autonomy, decision making through dialogue, equality, and not hierarchy; they must help the flowering of the urge to be, of knowledge that is wisdom and not information, of skill that is creative intelligence and not imitative know-how.

The Humanities

Values are lived, not talked about. Therefore, they are imbibed from an atmosphere where they are lived, or from a person who lives them, or through a form of expression that explores them as states of being or experience and not as concept. The humanities, specially literature, are such a form of exploration. Literature explores meaning as journey in experience, as movement through states of being, states of imbalance and balance. The central position given to the humanities in university education in the past contributed vastly in awakening the human / social conscience and the urge for values in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, perhaps even into the 'sixties. The take over by 'Management' and 'Resource Development' studies is an ominous sell out to market forces masquerading as academics. The renaming of the Ministry of Education as the Ministry of Human Resource Development puts men, women and children in the category of coal, petroleum and steel.

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which would have been a weighty contribution in defence of History, Philosophy and Literature, linking them to man's 'religious quest', regretfully, had to be abandoned.

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