

## DISCUSSION

### I

#### *Education and Quality of life - A Few Comments*

I share Professor Rajendra Prasad's concern at the collapse of values in our country and agree with many of the suggestions he makes to retrieve something of what we have been steadily losing. Let me add a few points.

To what Prasad has to say about the desirability of teaching the child to write an elegant hand and to construct linguistic structures with a view to creating 'communicating excellence.' I would add one more 'skill' which we have almost completely lost sight of today. I mean the art of reading. Television and video-vision have cast a spell over the child (and the parents too), which is extremely difficult to shake off. Indeed those who are bewitched by it, do not want to shake it off. Even if we consider immense usefulness of these audio-visual aids in education, art-appreciation and serious recreation, there is absolutely no substitute for reading. I would urge all teachers to do whatever they can to inculcate this habit in their pupils (and even in themselves in many cases) and to dispel the stupid notion that those who read are book-worms. It is true that ninety per cent of what you see on the roadside stalls and even in reputed book-shops is food for worms, but good books do still exist and they remain largely unread.

The art of reading has two components-selecting rightly *what* one should read and knowing *how* to read it. In both these areas, the teacher's guidance is exceedingly valuable. I suggest that the curriculum at school and at college should include at every level a weekly reading period. After helping the pupil to select a worthwhile book from the library ( how many schools and colleges have good libraries? ) the teacher should read the book with the pupils during the reading period. Reading does not mean merely skimming through the pages; it means, firstly, approaching the author with an open mind and a certain degree of humility in order to *understand* what he is saying; next, if necessary, re-reading a sentence, a paragraph or a page to really absorb what he says; then, pausing to reflect and

weigh critically to see if what he says makes good sense, and, finally, if you think sincerely that it does not, to criticise it relentlessly; be the author or a relatively unknown writer or a famous and revered figure. Good reading—so the pupil should be shown—is, like the Law, no respecter of persons.

I entirely agree with Prasad that, in order to inculcate moral values, one should never resort to sermonising. Like him, I have little faith in moral instruction period. Whatever you want to get across should be done *through* whatever other subject you are handling. Literature, history, philosophy and certain other subjects offer a particularly rich scope for surreptitiously squeezing in questions about values. And one must not forget that one of the most potent weapons to combat the enemy is a sense of humour. The Devil, it is said, can meet every kind of reaction except laughter. One must show the pupils, who are often so fascinated by the spectacular life-styles of the rich, the corrupt and the infamous, how empty, ridiculous and laughable is the existence that our 'dons' and 'big bulls' lead.

In his attempt to inculcate values, perhaps, the toughest obstacle the teacher encounters today is the home-atmosphere of the child. It is quite common to hear little children telling each other how much money their respective parents make and the ways by which they make it. Whatever the teacher may be able to achieve in the classroom with regard to values is often undone by what the child experiences, at home, where corruption, black-marketing, tax-evasion and a score of other dubious practices are not only indulged in but held up to be admired. Children have a congenital affection for and faith in their parents: what chance does a poor teacher have?

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