

Too Much History Chokes the Child

By MANOJ DAS

A profound comment on history from an unknown source says, "When you hear two eye-witness accounts of the same traffic accident, you grow suspicious about history". History of several countries, since long, had been subjected to the Bed of Procrustes of ideologies and fancies; a fact bigger than the bed is cut to size and one shorter is stretched to fill it up. Yet something survives the operation. Despite omissions and exaggerations by the chroniclers, the time-spirit has culled out ideas from events or characters that have contributed to our understanding of the profundities and complexities of life, to the growth of our consciousness, both at the individual and collective planes.

When the aristocrat par excellence, Sir Philip Sidney, lying exhausted in the battlefield, is offered a cup of water which could have saved him but which he sacrifices for a wistfully looking ordinary soldier with those immortal last words, "Thy need is greater than mine", he is not uplifting Christian virtue as much as exhibiting a divine quality which is potentially present in all of us. When a Sikh guru sacrifices his life instead of compromising with an arrogant, tyrannical demand, he is setting an example in courage and not



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championing a creed — an example that can inspire millions belonging to any of the defined faiths or to the faith in human destiny alone. Herein lies the importance of the teacher — how conscientiously he can lay stress on the human excellence transcending creeds and institutionalised faiths.

It is superfluous to inform school-children of an 'official version' which in any case is the version of those who executed the Guru, suggesting that he had also been guilty of plunder. It's important for a child to know history, but it is equally important to determine how much of it she must know at that tender age. Let the school system arouse in her interest and quest if it can, let it not choke her memory.

Is it necessary for the child to bother about the Aryan menu — whether those legendary ancestors ate beef or not? The Vedas are not a product of the modern logical mind. Our intellect cannot be a guide unto them. In the Vedas the term 'Gou' does not mean the cow; it is Light. A very different discipline is necessary to delve into the Vedic text. Bones of cattle discovered at an ancient kitchen site as proof of their eating

beef is as valid as the non-discovery of wires 'proving' that they used wireless methods of communication. The early Aryans themselves were of several sects and some sects could very well be beefeaters. To school-children, it simply does not matter.

It is enough to present the Vedas to them as the dawn of our literary heritage. If the teacher narrates to them some legends from the Upanishads — the direct offspring of the Vedas, which, though highly symbolic, are significant and inspiring even as stories — he would have enriched the child with values that are sure to help her in some of the crucial moments in her life.

We cannot think of a civilisation and a culture without values. At any given time a society has both weaknesses and promises. Let us take the case of King Harishchandra. He promised to give whatever a stranger asked him, little suspecting that he was being put to the most severe test imaginable. He gave away his kingdom and his palace and was reduced to a pauper. Even then, the stranger demanded more on some technical ground. The king and the queen had to sell themselves as slaves in order

to fulfil their obligation. The story thus informs us of the custom of slavery in that remote era. But that is not

the reason why it is remembered for hundreds of years or why it should be taught at school. What the story highlights is the ordeals a determined soul could pass through for the sake of an ideal which he considers the truth. So far as the element of slavery in the legend is concerned, a historian is welcome to trace it in his research library.

True knowledge is inherent in the child like the flower is inherent in the bud. Let's prepare the climate for its blossoming. She can acquire more information if necessary later. Competition and consumerism, overtly and covertly wedded, are crushing the child. Look at the fat bag riding her on her way to school; look at her cramped timetable. Joy, the child's birthright, is denied to her for the sake of a chimerical success. Lighten her burden; recast the syllabi so that her leisure, the hours when she can be with her own imagination, are not sucked away either by the professional tuition masters or by her parents assuming that role. Give her stories; tell her about human aspirations for perfection. Her quest and her character are her best assets, not the insurance policy of her parents.

Sacred Space

Helping Hand

The ignorant work for their own profit, Arjuna; the wise work for the welfare of the world, without thought to themselves. By abstaining from work you will confuse the ignorant, who are engrossed in their actions. Perform all work carefully, guided by compassion.

Bhagavad Gita



Rendering help to another is the function of all human beings.

Tattvarthasutra 5.21



The best of men are those who are useful to others.

Hadith



Without selfless service are no objectives fulfilled; In service lies the purest action.

Adi Granth, Maru, M.1, p. 992



Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2.3-4



He who prays for his fellowman, while he himself has the same need, will be answered first.

Talmud, Baba Kamma 92a



I slept and dreamt that life was joy.

I awoke and saw that life was service.

I acted and behold, service was joy.

Rabindranath Tagore



One does nothing who tries to console a despondent person with words.

A friend is one who aids with deeds

at a critical time when deeds are called for.

Titus Maccius Plautus



You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.

Abraham Lincoln



That service is the noblest which is rendered for its own sake.

Mahatma Gandhi