

THOSE WERE THE TIMES..(SIGH)!?

They say that if the foundation is laid well then no upheaval can shake the structure. Likewise, the rule also applies to human beings wherein the things learnt during childhood remain with one throughout life. Lessons learnt in the formative years, when the mind is most impressionable, form the bedrock of an individual's personality and his way of thinking. The sounder the values and principles ingrained, the more disciplined and integrated is the development of self.

The older generation often remembers the days gone by, regaling the pure atmosphere and the tremendous love and care put into the upbringing of children. Times have definitely changed and the state of affairs is not the same anymore. But does this change imply that the society in old times was better equipped to make men out of children? Are times today incapable of grooming and upbringing the children as they used to a couple of decades ago? The issue poses a question that needs to be looked into. One may be able to invest a great deal of money and take the services of external agencies of socialization, but if it does not fulfil the purpose of developing a wholesome personality, then there is a snag somewhere that needs to be mended.

Miss A There is no doubt about the fact that we are living in a much more easier world as compared to the generations before us. One cannot but imagine how work and children and home could have been managed earlier? Today, if there is a need then there are several products and services catering to that need. When it comes to the question of upbringing of the children too, I think that it is a lot better now. There are so many gadgets and inventions that have reduced the drudgery time involved in doing the mundane tasks and this time can well be utilized for spending with children. Likewise, many ways of safe playing have been devised, where children only need a periodic check, where there isn't a fear of serious injuries. A lot many studies conducted into the facets of child's personality have also helped design games, toys and recreational activities that help in better blossoming of the child's talents and interests. There are all sorts of facilities available today which were not in the days gone by. There is hardly any reason to rue; rather one should be glad to have so many facilitators at one's disposal.

Mr B It is true that there are a greater number of gadgets and inventions to take care of a lot of needs. And also that there is a great increase in the number of institutions that have taken over the functions of a family. But has one wondered about the reason for the inventions and increase in the external support bases? It is mostly because we are more tied down with the business of earning. There are new fears of insensitive crimes, of risks and of unthinkable reasons that are peculiar to the modern times—these have put forth the demand of a safer environment and arrangements and mechanisms that ensure protection from dangers. It was not so a few decades ago. There was more love and care involved in the process—definitely more than what an average child gets today. Joint families and warm relations between the people in a neighbourhood guaranteed that the children had someone elderly, not only looking after them but teaching them important lessons in life through simple ways like fables and songs. Not to be dismissed as trivia, these were essentially values that stayed with the individuals all through their life. Also, continuous interaction among the generations made sure the passing down of cultural ethos and traditions. It is difficult to find this today as there is a plethora of isolated households and because the agencies of socialization are only doing their 'job'.

Miss C I would not disagree more. We cannot possibly get stuck in a time frame or drag it along for an undue period. Change is inevitable in life and the sooner one accepts it, the better. A more sensible approach would be to evolve and adapt to the changing circumstances. From what is evident in today's world, one can make out a very positive trend where children are given freedom to be able to make their own choices in almost all fields. Children these days are fully aware about what they want. They choose their fields of study, their clothes, their careers and many other things. It is true that one cannot live life for one's children. It would be only best if one is not overly protective about them and, consequently, making them into individuals who are apprehensive about taking even the smallest decisions in life. With increased independence the mind learns to take a stand and is not overwhelmed by crisis like situations.

Also, with such an approach the child does not suffer from repression or feelings of frustration on not having been able to do what he/she would have loved to do. Definitely, who could have dreamt of such freedom and an inner sense of fulfilment in an age when parents and elders decided everything for them!

Mr D True that the younger generation and the children today have much more freedom today. They can exercise their discretion in most matters concerning themselves, without having to necessarily agree to the will of the elders. However, this freedom comes at a cost. Today the ease in life comes in a package deal that also includes a lot of stress and pressure. Life today has come to mean cut throat competition. You have to be on your toes always if you want to be anywhere in the race, let alone succeed. There are too many contenders for the same positions. Isn't it horrifying to hear of the kind of distress that even school-going children face? The media is full of reports of suicides around the time when exam results are declared. This kind of stress was non-existent in old times. Now, even the teenagers need counselling frequently so that their tender minds are able to cope up.

Miss A In any case one has to agree that the progress made with time has ensured better life chances for everybody. There is so much that can be achieved and there are ample opportunities to make the quality of life better. In times gone by, there were fewer occupations and a limited picture of life. Today, sky is the limit when it comes to careers. Definitely, the life chances have also been made better by the improvements and advancement in medical sciences. The susceptibility of children to diseases and epidemics in the olden days was much greater. The break out of an epidemic was sure to claim hundreds of lives. Today there is better access to health care facilities. Immunizations, health camps, availability of medicines have also made certain the longevity of the young ones. The spread of awareness and widened horizons have made their own contributions to better circumstances. Government has made sure that even those who cannot afford vaccines and medicines get them at subsidized rates or free of cost in special camps. I agree that all does not seem well now, but that is simply due to pressure on resources because of over population. Beyond that there is no reason for doubting the better conditions and facilities in our times.

Mr B It is quite disturbing but the trend has set in. A latent dissatisfaction is taking grip on the people today. The vision has been bombarded with an array of things with such intensity that the consumerist culture is fast spreading. Even if one cannot afford, the aspiration has been driven in. It is this that sets off the 'earn more' syndrome. If one has acquired a certain status, then that

must be maintained or improved. Families today are caught up in this spin, and with both the parents working the children tend to get ignored. In the lower strata, the problem is different. They need more income to meet their basic needs. So children are pushed into earning early, instead of enjoying the carefree days. In the times gone by there was certainly more contentment and premium was placed on simple living and high thinking. Today the case has become opposite, with the focus being more on the style of living. The company and care of the elders have been replaced by the day care centers that make the whole process of socialization and upbringing a very businesslike activity. If impersonality and paid service is all that would remain of what is essentially a bond that demands lots of love and caring, then not much should be expected of the individuals. I feel that nothing can take place of the warmth and affection of old times.

Miss C I would agree somewhat to what my friend has just stated. The pure unadulterated love and attention from the elders cannot be replaced by the paid services of crèches and daycare centers. The consequence of such impersonal effort is that the children are being brought up but there are hardly any values inculcated in them. Parents and elders try to make up for their absence by plying the child with toys and fancy gifts, in turn making the child materialistic in his approach. In the absence of proper attention and guidance, the young ones are free to make forays into the world by themselves, little aware or prepared to meet the situations. In today's world, exposure to corrupting influences comes as easy as air itself. What can be more harmful than exposing an untrained mind to violence, crime, pornography and a whole lot of nuisance that is easily accessible? Earlier one could be sure that with elders around children would be taught lessons in discerning right from wrong, in being conscientious, and disciplined. And all this in a gentle warm manner. Now, children turn out to be too big for their boots, before one has anticipated it.

Mr D Considering all that has been stated one can make out mixed conclusions. In some ways, our times are definitely better and for some aspects one cannot discount the contribution of the times gone by. Bringing up children is not child's play. One step gone wrong and we have a misfit or a deviant individual at our hands. It is not a small problem because it is a whole life gone wrong. It is true that we have better healthcare facilities today, and that we have more opportunities to develop the persona, and that youngsters have more freedom of choice. All said and done, there is definite erosion in the values and discipline is a crucial element that is lacking. The responsibility lies with parents and teachers who need to put that extra amount of effort into making men out of the precious clay in their hands.