

Social Awareness for a Well Rounded Education

I'd like to raise the point about an individual's attitude toward involvement in social work. When I raise this issue with friends, they always confuse the issue of advocating social work with the issue of equal distribution of wealth or some other socialist ideology. However, this is not what I am advocating. I think each individual should be allowed to be as productive as they can and at the same time enjoy the fruits of their labor. But then, how does social work come into the picture? How do the concepts of individual prosperity and social work go hand in hand? Firstly, volunteering does not necessarily mean a person has to make a monetary commitment to a social organization. Volunteering should first require a personal commitment to a social cause, financial contribution is secondary.

Recently, as part of his Holi celebration, besides other little things, our president asked children to visit patients in a hospital and to help a blind man cross the road. He asked them to talk to a blind person and ask them about their problems. Why are these little things important?

The reason is simple. Social service brings about a sense of awareness, responsibility, humility and gratitude in an individual. This experience is important for the overall development of an individual. At the same time, our contribution helps to uplift the community around us, thereby, everyone moves forward. Society, the individual and the overall system are beneficiaries.

Instead of approaching this issue with the open attitude described above, and instead of encouraging children to get involved with a social cause, we often shelter or cocoon children from the various problems we face in India. Often, we are told that "the suffering of people is part and parcel of life...It is just the way it is" or "they may be stuck with poverty but they are as happy as us, money is not everything," Well, these statements are partly true. But while making these statements, we overlook the fact that there are a lot of people who can use our help. Why shouldn't we, as individuals, try to help them? This, in fact, seems to contradict some of the founding principles of our culture, where service to the community is traditionally valued.

The concept of social work is not new, and its importance for a child's overall development has already been recognized by our institutions. This is the reason that most schools have some kind of organization that is meant to support this cause. The National Service Volunteer Scheme (NSVS) is just one example. But how often are these organizations actually put to good use? Shouldn't parents ensure that their children not only join these organizations but also ensure that these establishments are doing good committed work? According to [1] the NSVS was launched in the late 60's (as the NSS) and evolved into the NSVS in the late 70's. The intention behind setting up this organization was the same as those mentioned in this article. However, participation in this program was made voluntary. And this is where society has not fulfilled its responsibility or made use of an opportunity. In a recent gathering that consisted of about ten Indians, the topic of the NSVS and similar youth related social groups came up. All of us at the gathering acknowledged that there was presence of some such organization in our Undergraduate Colleges, but only one out of the ten actually testified to their and their organizations meaningful involvement with social causes. The rest of us either did not participate in any work

at these organizations or the organizations themselves were not active. This is a clear case where society is lagging behind the system.

I'm not advocating that every individual dedicate their entire lives toward social work, or social causes. Most of our lives are already rather stressful and getting by is rather hard. But even if we dedicate a couple of hours a week toward the development of our external world, it will go a long way in broadening our view of the world we live in. Society, in many developed nations instills this habit in children for the same reasons that I've mentioned above. It is quite simply the right thing to do. How is it that we don't value this attitude, or see its importance, in our country? This must change.

It is, of course, something we can rectify as individuals in society. This is an area where parents and teachers can make a big difference. For instance, parents can attend their Parent Teacher Association meetings. Teachers and parents can start projects and involve each other from the design stage. Teachers can identify parent leaders and give them responsibility. This is also a great opportunity to empower stay at home mothers who may otherwise get caught up in running the house. An effect of a mother in a child's development, especially in India, is invaluable. While teachers, women and children play a pivotal role in the development of any society, their contribution is sometimes less tangible or visible. This is a great opportunity for teachers, women and children to make a difference in more visible ways.

A great start is for every parent to enforce this issue at the next parent teachers' association meeting. Teacher, parents and society at large must ensure that the existing systems are put to good use.

[1] <http://yas.nic.in/yasroot/schemes/nsvs.htm>

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