

## SPARE THE ROD

Dr. Zakir Hussain, the Governor of Bihar paid us a visit. Being an educationist he had a deep interest in the 'Netarhat experiment'. Shri Dar had a long association with Dr. Hussain. He belonged to the set of pioneers who had implemented the concept of Basic education formulated by Dr. Zakir Hussain.

Dr. Hussain addressed the school assembly. He talked about the objectives of education. The objective of education is to develop a positive personality by letting the latent qualities in a learner bloom forth. Though the education should enable a person to undertake a suitable vocation in life, it should not be taken as a means to win a bread-ticket only, he said. This was fully in tune with the Netarhat philosophy so it drew a wholesome applause from the audience.

After the speech questions were invited. A number of questions were asked about his experiences in the field of basic education and about his association with Gandhiji. Dr. Hussain gave a vivid account of his experiences on both scores.

When the session was about to close Shailoo (Shaileshwar Sati Prasad) got up.

"Sir, there is a saying in English 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'. Do you believe in this dictum?"

Dr. Zakir Hussain peered closely at Shailoo. His french-cut bearded chin bobbed up and down twice. A faint smile flickered. He turned his head slightly towards Shri Dar and whispered audibly, "Do you use the rod often here?"

"Rarely sir", was the cryptic reply.

"Yes, the rod should be there lest a child gets spoiled", Dr. Hussain replied, "but before the teacher picks up the rod he should deeply ponder over all other options and alternatives. He should sleep over the question at least for twenty-four hours. Only when there is no other way out he should use the rod and then too gently".

He glanced over his shoulder towards the faculty. Perhaps he wanted to bring home his viewpoint more to the teachers. The

teachers had not expected this reaction from a Gandhian Educationist. They had the apprehension that Dr Hussain would squarely condemn and reject corporal punishment for erring students.

The rod did exist in Netarhat. It is true that it was rarely applied but, alas! never gently. Shri D.P. Singh was the doyen - the Acharya, of the creed of the rod. He had come from May College, Ajmer, which used to be the school for children of Rajput Chiefs of Rajputana. The rod was the primary instrument to control the pampered tribe of Kunwars, Bhanvars and Tanwars. Shri Singh maintained his Rajput traditions even in the plebian surroundings of Netarhat. Whenever he decided in favour of the rod — I wonder whether he ever considered other alternatives; he would borrow a wooden metre-scale from Shri B.D. Pande. Whenever we saw the metre-scale adorning the teacher's table in the history or English class we knew for sure that there would be a spectacle to witness. Heavy betting started as to who would be the gladiator facing the angry Singh (lion).

One incident is clearly etched in my memory. We were in the second year. The main school building's construction had just been undertaken. Due to the induction of the second batch more classrooms were required. To meet it a barrack type tin-shed was erected close to the Chalet. Now I think the school printing press is located there. The shed had been partitioned with C.G.I. sheets to make a number of class-rooms. Our classes were held in this tin-shed for more than two years.

One day we were given a home-task by Shri Singh. This was to write a letter to a friend in English describing the change of seasons in Netarhat. Our answers were to be submitted by next morning. Compared to others my English composition was better. I had had the advantage of studying in a school run by Jesuits where proficiency in English was given more weightage compared to government run schools. I could compose this letter in the evening itself. Premchand Singh, my class fellow was a very bright student but English was his Achilles' heel. Moreover that evening he was pitted against Luxmi Narain in a game of chess. Both were top-ranking chess afficianados of the school. As a result he could spare no time for the English composition.

Next morning he approached me and asked me for my answer-

book. I readily obliged. Hurriedly Premchand copied my letter word by word in his answer-book and submitted it. He did not even alter the proper name of my friend to whom I had addressed the letter.

When we entered the English class-room on the subsequent day we found the ominous metre-scale on the top of the teacher's table. It sent a chill down our spines. All chit-chat ceased at once. We waited with baited breath to find out as to whose back was going to brave this burden.

Shri Singh entered a few moments later. He immediately asked me and Premchand to stand up. Praying inwardly to all gods, goddesses and deities to save me from this impending catastrophe I got up. My legs were all rubber. They could hardly support me. Premoo also must have felt likewise.

"Now here I have got two identical answers", Shri Singh thundered, "I know great men think alike, but I also know that even great men cannot think identically and in identical terms and words. Hence it is evident that one has copied from the answer-book of another. Tell me who has copied whom".

Both of us kept mum. Premoo did not own it up due to fear of the punishment. I observed 'omerta' adhering to the school boys' unwritten code of honour. It is not good to rat on your comrades. Reprisals would be worse than any punishment meted out by the teacher.

"So you choose to exercise your right of silence", Shri Singh remarked sarcastically. "You think I do not have the capability to find out the truth".

"Sit down both of you and write another letter to your friend describing the change in seasons", he ordered.

We sat down. Since I had done the exercise only the other day I quickly penned down a similar letter and submitted it within fifteen minutes. Premoo had only copied down the text. He now found it to be a hard task. Somehow he also scribbled down a few lines and handed over the paper to Shri Singh.

The entire class's eyes were rivetted on us. Shailoo was into the secret. So he smiled encouragingly to me and winked towards poor Premchand.

Shri Singh glanced through the two sheets. Then he put down the papers and picked up the metre-scale. My heart was pounding like a big war-drum. Shri Singh surveyed the entire class and then focussed his attention on Premchand.

“Come here Prem”, he ordered.

Prem walked upto his place slowly. Shri Singh brought down the scale on the posterior of Prem. Prem doubled over partly to reduce the target and partly due to pain. The fleshy parts of his anatomy got a fiery treatment. Mercifully after four-five whackings the scale broke down. Prem lapsed into his native tongue, Bhojpuri, entreating Shri Singh to spare him.

“Mat Sab Daya Kareen; Ab Ham Aisan Na Karab” (Please have mercy upon me, my teacher; I shall not do it again), he cried out.

Once the instrument broke down Shri Singh ordered him back to his desk and resumed his teaching of English composition.

Luckily such incidents were rare. The usual punishments meted out for indiscretions and misconduct were ‘Chukkers’, extra-sweeping assignments and the withholding of the sweet-dish.

‘Chukkers’ had been introduced by Mr. Napier and it became the regular regimen. It meant going round the 440 yard track at the double. For minor infringements normally four chukkers were awarded. The order would be ‘Char Chukker’. The alliteration made it all the more appealing to the teachers. Sometimes the number of chukkers was not mentioned. In that case the boy had to keep running round and round till further orders. The prevalence of this practice was such that one could see one or two boys doing the rounds at any hour of the day.

The visitors were not aware of this mode of punishment ~ when they saw the boys running around the track they presumed that they were practising for track-events. Once an elderly couple were taking the evening stroll near the ground. They saw three boys doing the chukkers. The gentlemen genially smiled and remarked, “What a wonderful sight. It is very heartening to see young boys preparing so arduously for the school athletic meet. The-love for sports is getting lost in schools these days. It is good that Netarhat gives proper stress on the physical education”.

