

Honing social skills

As behavioural changes sweep over our society, is there anything we can do about it?

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

OUR social skills have somewhat blunted over time. Virtues that we had taken for granted in the past almost sound like pipe dreams today.

Tolerance, live-and-let-live, mutual, professional respect between men and women, consideration for the elderly, civility, courtesy, compassion, and hospitality—once the markers of social behaviour—have turned utopian, unattainable!

These have been replaced by one-upmanship, self-promotion, ladder-climbing by dash and push, success without ethics, heart-burning at other's excelling but legitimate attainment, insatiable greed ("The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed" -- Mahatma Gandhi).



Actually, a social revolution, quiet in some respects but loud in most others, has taken place in the country without an acknowledgement. Politics, economics and sociology have each played its part—in that order—to bring about a metamorphosis of social values, for good or evil. This has been conveniently called "a new normal."

Society has become consumerist, abjectly acquisitive, grabbing and exploitative. Long-drawn usurpation of power by extra-constitutional means and spoilt system of legitimisation of power had treated popular will disdainfully as a doormat, so to speak. Strange political bedfellows of alignments were forged, sometime successfully, at times

floundering as ragtags.

People lost some of their interest in national politics, though not in a passionately partisan sense. It never came to alienation. And, their interest in elections that were democratically held remained undiminished—in fact with a festive flair.

In the meantime, a change came over the traditional role of the burgeoning middle class. It has expanded over time with the growing size of the economy but its character has changed, rather perceptively, according to researchers and publicists. The middle class, once perceived as a change agent, has gone through a "culture" shift—towards an acquisitive and money-centric disposition. As a

result, their potential as a change agent may have now been compromised taking on a greater economic flavour.

Add to this bank scams, whopping capital flights, default loans and incidence of corruption, you have an issue with governance.

Knowing that it is not proper to have an overly negative view of aspects of society, we can't but turn to a dangerous trend in social behaviour. On numerous occasions we have noticed that when rowdies carry out acts of brutality, young men with mobile sets get immersed in recording the acts of violence and posting them. They just show a perverse interest in the incident with scant regard for the life of the

victim. Whereas they should have mustered the courage to resist and turn over the culprits to the police, they not only become mute spectators but also abettors to the crime.

Social skills are tools that enable people to communicate, learn, ask for help, and get needs met in appropriate ways. "Building good relationship with other people can greatly reduce stress and anxiety in your life, in fact improving your social support link to better mental health."

The process must begin with the children and at the primary school in a context where parental authority has weakened and generation gaps have blurred.

Skills for successful behaviour include four methods: (i) Enhance verbal communication with a note of caution about volume and tone of your voice; (ii) Learn the right manners in which to initiate a conversation; (iii) Find ways to expand conversations; and (iv) Steer clear of inflammatory topics.

We have a "self-confident manual" which may be used for years to come as a self-training material prepared by Mark Tyrrell, an expert in the field. He outlines six features: the ability to stay calm in social situations; listening skills (the art of connection); empathy with, and interest in, others' situation; knowing how to build rapport; knowing how, when and how much to talk about yourself (self-disclosure); and last but not least, looking into the eye and smiling.

Not some pep talk, really.

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