**Careless children**

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Greek philosopher Plato opined that the wealthy fostered a lack of restraint and refrained from conforming to legal and moral standards.

Nearly two millennia later, Hobbes argued in his seminal work ‘De Homine’ (Concerning Man) that the rich were more inclined to cause injuries and unsuited for entering a society of equitable law. ‘The Social Contract’ had Rousseau trying to create a balance by defining an ideal society as one where no citizen was rich enough to purchase another and none so poor that he had to sell himself.

Poverty has always been deemed a virtue and wealth a symbol of debasement. Bertrand Russell saw the downtrodden as better beings; he dubbed it the ‘Superior Virtue of the Oppressed’. Despite this fallacy, the poor have always been vilified and the rich valorized. Factually, wealth or poverty has no intrinsic vice or virtue. Aristotle believed humility to be the golden mean between the two. Humility and empathy are the attributes that transcend material barriers.

A recent tragedy made national headlines. An underage boy accompanied by four friends was chasing and harassing a family. On being admonished, he rammed his car clocking 160km/hour into the family’s vehicle. Such was the impact that the other car flew 70 feet away killing all six family members including a four-month-old and a three-year-old child. Tragic that it was, the preluding events of a father initiating them by handing over the car keys to his minor child, harassment of a family and then the conversion of the vehicle into a deadly projectile portray a spine-chilling bent of mind.

The boys have been slapped with criminal charges. However, there is an awkward silence on the parenting of children prone to such murderous and, given the speed of impact, suicidal tantrums. This is also despite the fact that there is an encouraged obsession amongst many of the young today that focuses totally on narcissism and pricey possessions. The parents enabling such devoid of empathy children can well be defined as incidental parents.

Children are the building blocks of a nation. A responsible society raises a worthy generation. The family is the oldest and the first educational and social institution. It is here that, first and foremost, the values of honesty, modesty, tolerance and mutual respect are inculcated. Parenting is assuming responsibility for raising children with these attributes. Abdicating it to an always-at-hand cheque book helps raise emotionally unstable children.

This increasingly toxic trend has parents overindulging their children. Experts term parental guilt as one of its main contributors. In today’s frenzied world some parents, guilty about the amount of time away from their children, give in to whatever is demanded as means of compensation. Such parents justify this by stating that saying no to children decreases their self-esteem. Psychologists hold the contrary view that children who are raised with less-permissive parenting have higher self-worth and feel more empathy towards others.

The other personality distorting enablers have such children being given no responsibilities. No rules are enforced while all obstacles, be it school or materialistic demands, are catered to immediately. This ensures the child’s development in a materialistic cocoon bereft of gratitude and patience and the concept of earning a reward.

Children are masters at testing boundaries. The failure of teaching and enforcing the crucial age-appropriate limits results in a self-centred child bent upon instant gratification and prone to tantrums if unmet. American psychologist Madeline Levine explains the psychological ailments plaguing such children in her bestselling ‘The Price of Privilege’ as anxiety, depression, addictions and self-harm.

Cash, they say, is king. This manifests itself brazenly in all facets of our lives with our social order kowtowing to the wealthy. Schools too suffer from this contagious syndrome. Structure and uniformity give way to preferential treatment. Its absence at home and in school nurtures children with maladapted characteristics, uncontrollable mood swings and abnormal impulses.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, our criminal justice system too is shaped by economic bias. Its enforcement sees the wealthy remain untouchable and unaccountable whereas crime and wrong is treated as the exclusive domain of the poor. This fortifies an already lop-sided and unjust social order. What chance does a young mind have when this remains its grooming environment?

Children absorb these travesties and come adulthood the traits, by now set in stone, are passed on to another unwary and innocent generation. The vicious cycle continues unchecked and unchallenged.

Physical and material attributes are superficial ones. Overindulged children are brought up by the parents eulogizing them as something which makes them special. The parental largesse of material things and blanket praise that is not contingent to the child’s behaviour compounds this negative mindset. The imperative of developing a sense of self-esteem based on compassion and empathy is totally forsaken. Generally, such children are a reflection of their parents.

It has been said that the negative effect of power is one of the most reliable laws of human nature. Wealth, privilege and power are the stilts that make overindulged children feel that they are above the law. It manifests itself when some of these young scions take lives just because they were brought up in an atmosphere contemptuously dismissive of the consequences of such actions. The poor are punished whereas the wealthy, devoid of even an iota of guilt or remorse, flash victory signs as they jubilantly walk free.

Moderation, deliberation and empathy create a harmonious social order. These are the characteristics we should strive to adopt and instil in our children. Wealth may help achieve everything in a dysfunctional society; it also fosters a sense of entitled impunity. However, one thing it can never achieve is to undo the heartbreak and agony caused by some actions of the overindulged ones.

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