

Education  
Dawn  
9.2.03

# The importance of

By M. Jam

**S**OME events in one's life are of such supreme importance that they remain etched in one's memory forever. One of these, perhaps, is starting school. I quite distinctly remember the time when I was about four years old and my mother, without any preamble, announced that very soon I would have to go to school.

This was back in the good old days when four year olds were artless and innocent and so the prospect of going to school appeared rather frightening to them. Ignorance is said to breed fear and so afraid I was, since I only had a very vague idea of what a school would be like. Though my mother tried her best to reassure me, expounding on the joys and delights of school and the affable and benevolent nature of teachers, the thought of being away from my mother did not appeal to me at all and I dreaded the day my carefree and happy life would be shattered and I would have to conform to the idiosyncratic ideals of grown-ups.

The day finally arrived when I was jolted out of my reverie and rudely woken up by my mother early in the morning. Despite my vehement protests I was made to don my newly acquired uniform and was soon on my way to school with a scrupulously scrubbed face, slicked down hair and polished shoes. The school seemed immense. We went up an endless flight of stairs and entered a room full of boys and girls of my size. A kindly looking lady greeted us warmly and soon my mother and she were engaged in earnest conversation.

The next thing I knew, my mother kissed me goodbye and went out the door. Though I did have an idea that this was to happen I was still not prepared for the suddenness of this eventuality and so gave vent to my feelings by howling as loudly as possible and running after my mother. The kindly looking lady, with an alacrity which belied her appearance, grabbed hold of me with one hand and shut the door with the other. Before I could think of another escape plan all windows and doors had been closed and the inmates of that room were looking at my histrionics with amusement and an air of superiority which seemed to say: "Been there, done

that." Surprisingly when I realized that there was no escape I quieted down and very soon started to feel at home.

My prep class teacher, Mrs Malik, who I still clearly remember was an extremely nice and affectionate lady. She had a wonderfully calm and soothing manner and always seemed to be smiling. She was, I suppose, my first encounter with authority and I am grateful to her for making my first experience of school enjoyable and something to reminisce about.

Now I am myself a teacher. A lot of water has flowed from under the bridge and times have changed. We have made astounding progress in multifarious ways but whether we are happier than our forefathers still remains to be a favourite topic in school debates. Something is not quite right and though our country has done itself proud in many ways the collective attitude and outlook of our nation leaves much to be desired.

I have always felt that a person is mainly the product of the education system he has been through and so if you want to have a nation of upright, patriotic and law abiding citizens you have to ensure that the education they receive, that is if they are lucky enough to receive education, is geared to achieve that objective. I feel sorry for a society in which a teacher can not feel proud of being a teacher, a society in which your antecedents rather than your abilities determine your place and status. Education is defined as a process of training and instruction which is designed to give knowledge, develop skills and train the mind and character. Is education in Pakistan, on the whole, achieving these objectives? Much as I would like to answer in the affirmative, I cannot.

The two entirely incompatible sys-



tems of private, English medium schools and the state-run government schools exist side by side, both thoughtlessly producing pupils whose faculties of analysis, inquiry, initiative and research are stifled and whose course of life is almost pre-determined. The average school teacher, who has to keep up appearances in accordance with his white-collared existence, is so bowed down under economic pressures that lofty ideals and sublime notions do not hold water for him. He resents his place in society and the status it has afforded him and this resentment inevitably manifests itself in his treatment of his students, sometimes consciously but most of the time inadvertently.

Thus a vicious circle, of sorts, is created. Any pupil who does not come up to his expectations is told