

## ✓ Ringing up ma'am

by Suchita Malik

THE school education system seems to have been designed to create a perpetual conflict of interests between parents and teachers. Homework, given in their respectable-looking diaries, is more of an instrument of judging the capabilities and patience of the mothers than fulfilling the aim of educating and enlightening a child. But there is no escape especially when the order of merit rests at a phenomenal high score to facilitate admissions in higher classes of reputed educational institutions.

One of the many rituals of the everyday household chores of a woman is to coax her unwilling children into doing their homework well in time. Whether you are a housewife or a working woman, there is no way it can be avoided. And there can't be - in a male chauvinistic society where it befalls the lot of the woman to undergo domestic drudgery.

As has become customary, one afternoon I was lazing in the sun trying to have a nap while simultaneously persuading my daughter to complete her homework before the stipulated play time. To my bewilderment, I found that there was none recorded in the diary. "How can that be?" I wondered. How can an

education system that believes in giving loads and loads of homework leave the children free to enjoy and make merry? My amazement slowly started giving way to a sense of panic. My daughter must have missed it, I guessed. "Haven't you got any homework today?" I inquired from my tiny tot who is studying in class II of a well-known convent of the city. "Oh, yes! Mama, we did. But I couldn't write it as I had gone to drink water", she replied without the slightest feeling of remorse. "You, silly girl! you got to take care. You could have jotted it down from a friend even at the end of the class". "Don't worry, mama, I can still manage it. You just wait and see," she quipped while moving towards the phone.

I thought that she was going to contact her friend and decided in favour of a nap till she finished chirping with her friend. It had almost become a daily ritual for her to talk to one of her friends, critically scrutinise the homework and exchange gossip on her classmates.

But, here, something was amiss. She was not her usual chirpy self today. Talking in polite and hushed tones was certainly not her cup of tea. "What was wrong with her today?" I

wondered. Amazingly, the conversation had also not lasted beyond five minutes.

Hey! did you talk to your friend, Surabhi?" I enquired with a tinge of implied indifference.

"Friend? Mama, what are you saying? I was talking to my ma'am," she said.

"Ma'am? Are you mad, girlie? You were to find out about your homework!"

"Yes, mama, that's precisely what I was talking to my teacher about", replied my daughter.

"And did she tell you, girlie?" I was horrified.

"Yes, mama, and why not? In fact, I had to wait for a minute till she went to her room and got her Plan Register and then dictated the homework to me", she said most casually. I was speechless. "What's wrong with you, mama, are you alright?" Surabhi was a little confused. "Nothing dear, you better do your homework fast".

By now, I know she can take care of me as well, let alone herself and her homework, I thought. I really marvelled at her guts. Even a thought of ringing up the ma'am was certainly not all that easy during our time. The times have changed.