

# Sionara ...classroom!

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**T**HE redundancy factor seems to be overtaking me of late. I feel I have become redundant ... redundant as a teacher ... at least that is what I gather from my students in the college. I insist upon the students to come to the classroom along with the text-book, if they want to understand and appreciate the finer nuances of poetry or drama. I was to teach *Julius Caesar* as a part of the syllabus. I always look forward to teaching this great play... I consider it a sacrilege if this play is not taught line-by-line, because there is no other way *Julius Caesar* can be taught. But my insistence on the text-book resulted only in reversal of attitudes, thinning of attendance in the classroom and a loss of esteem in the eyes of the students.

As a silent witness to this gradual waning of interest in studies among students for quite a few years, I have witnessed how classroom lectures have a poor attendance. The lectures have been substituted by more focused and exam-oriented private academies. Disheartened and demoralised, I dared to ask them one day, "Am I not up to your standard or don't you find *Julius Caesar* interesting... aren't you concerned about your exams or what is it... why do you prefer to loiter around while classes are in full swing? To my utter disbelief, pat came the reply: "Ma'am, you are not 'down' to our level. You teach in an old-fashioned way... explaining the play line by line... it's so boring. Just tell us the story of the 'novel', explain the important 'passages' in Hindi or Punjabi, point out the important questions and we'll mug them up from Super, Bindra or MBD (guides). Reading *Julius Caesar* line by line is a waste to time and college-time is fun-time..." they grimaced at each other.

The spontaneous outpourings shut me up instantly but later on this outburst forced me to sit back and take stock of the situation with a cool mind. Do we need to re-orient our education system so as to bring it in line with the market forces? Do we need to change our teaching methods and adopt more innovative approaches that are to the liking of our students? Is the syllabus of the humanities group outdated and old-fashioned? What is the role of the teacher in the present scenario? Have the ready-to-mug-up guide-books by Supers, MBDs and Bindras become effective replacements and substitutes of the teachers? Is classroom teaching passe? Or is there something wrong with the classroom teaching methods? The list of questions posed to one's own self may be endless. In any case, the need for drastic measures for improvement is indeed dire and imperative.

I was passing through this mood of self-deprecation when, all of a sudden, I experienced a fresh breeze of life. While on a shopping-spree in the market in the evening, I came across a smart young boy who came and touched my feet. Sensing a confused look on my face, he politely introduced himself by reminding me that he was my student in the year 1995. Somehow the conversation drifted towards his other classmates and how all of them were fairing in life. And then, he casually remarked, "Ma'am, I still remember how you taught us *Julius Caesar* ... line by line... explaining the minutest of details... It really stirred my interest in literature. Though I am working for my doctorate in economics, keep up my interest in literature and keep reading classics...and for that I have to thank you and *Julius Caesar* both..."

"Oh, no! Not *Julius Caesar* again..." was all I could mumble up before hurrying up to excuse myself and take leave with loads of blessings for that sincere student who cared to remember his teacher for the book she had taught him once. I was, indeed, both touched as well as elated by the reflections of my old student. Yes, once upon a time, and not too distant in the past...the teacher was relevant. Classroom teaching was also relevant. What has changed the responses so fast? Have the teachers been replaced by these Supers, MBDs, Bindras or have we lost touch with the ground realities? Will the students keep chanting "*Sionara... classroom ... phir milenge*". But by that time the opportunity of attending the classroom would be lost forever. Given the continuance of these trends, the time is not far when a teacher might find himself relegated into the realms of a museum!