

Courtesy: time and
good manners



Courtesy begets courtesy” is just a gem of practical wisdom. It seems to me that it’s about time we recycled some of these old saws our parents drummed into our ears. The modern times are fiercely competitive and, with them, go aggression, which is enjoined with a certain amount of discourtesy and bad manners – signs of unkind hearts. Arrogance and aggression pay and “ kind hearts” be damned, seem to be the creed of the modern smarties. Many old timers (believers in ‘ those were the days’ philosophy) will agree with me that the present time is characterized more by dysphoria – a cluster of bad feelings than euphoria.

They may also nod with me that “ kind hearts” frequently result in bleeding hearts! I have for long nursed a sneaking conviction that kindness gets you nowhere. That if you try to be always kind or gentle, you are dubbed as spineless, weak or wishy-washy. You are the one to be treated as doormat. You are pushed back, sideways, anyway. Those who possess the go ahead-instinct are loud-mouthed, ill-mannered or intolerably arrogant. They are the pick of the society. They ‘ go’ where they want to. Nobody can push them around. Nobody -dare shut them if no other reason than that everyone wants to shut them as speedily as possible!

I speak from personal experience. I was standing in a queue at a cinema hall to buy a ticket when a heavy man, whose breath could start a distillery, bulldozed himself to the front. The equally well-fed looking policeman, with a “ danda” in his hand, smiled and chose to amuse himself with the free entertainment. The heavy man’s thick hand was thrust into the window and came out with crumpled tickets tucked into it. Everybody, including this

scribe, heaved a sigh of relief. The intolerance of a proud man is more offensive than any other form of rudeness.

Another incident took place at a fast food jaunt. A woman (who said she is the weaker sex?) with a face like a mountain cow and manners to match a 'bander hotel ke andar' elbowed her way to the counter to get coupons. All others already waiting for the purpose were jellyfish for her. Virtually slapping and literally snarling, she rapped out an endless order, interjecting in passing that nobody could stop her from getting what she wanted. A warning was flashed too. Nobody could fob off stale shift to her. She would get anybody into trouble. Sundry other "compliments" also followed.

Many of us (faceless zeroes) awaited the counter assistant's reaction with breathless interest. Those of us, spineless junkies, who were expecting an explosion from the counter cabin, were disappointed. But she dashed to her seat, walked to and fro to the counter, doing her bidding. Using bluff, bluster, roar and rage, this specimen of modern dysphoria, revolting against "kind hearts" got what she wanted. I had accompanied a Delhi lady journalist to a quiet lunch at a popular rendezvous, we occupied a table. We sat there for ten minutes without seeing the pate or the hide of a waiter.

Ten minutes look twenty in such a situation. Our manners forbade us to drum the table. We waited. Patience is a virtue, we have been told from childhood onwards. Then in marched what may be called a fire-eater. He threw himself in the chair adjoining to ours and waited for about 50 seconds - what to him looked like eternity. Then his dander was up. He rapped for attention. No waiter appeared. He "hammered" the table again with his

heavily ringed fingers and shouted “ Manager. ” A well-behaved man appeared. To me, he did not look a waiter.

He bowed, almost sweeping the floor with his flourish, and said, as politely as he could that he just could not do enough for him. Food service, everything was wonderful. Nothing could have been better. I have a speaking conviction (again) that the waiter who was openly reprimanded, loathed the customer. Possibly, he burned his effigy over the blue flames of the gas in the kitchen. But his dysphoria had brought results, which means food and service, while my guest and I literally cooled our heels. You may say that I am over-reacting. That such behavior is exception rather than the rule.

Others may chip in with such behavior is nothing new. All through the years people have been guilty of treating waiters, bus conductors, shop salesmen and others serving the public in various capacities with rudeness. My contention is that this attitude reflective of a massive, mass bad temper has never been so prevalent as it is today. People are increasingly becoming callous and indifferent to other’s feelings. A certain calculated lack of tact, which is the subtle discrimination of saying or doing a thing at the right moment, is missing even in our day- to-day social contacts.

I have taken pains to teach myself that it was polite always to look interested when someone was addressing me however dreary his story, how stale his joke. No wonder, I have been martyred to good manners hundred of times and I do not know what else is in store for me because the number of bores who bore a hole in your head with endless talk is increasing by the day. Shall I take my conduct as old-fashioned and be a convert to the mighty tribe of

those who talk much without saying anything? Or interrupt the Niagara of words? Or look disinterested?

Or like Goethe stand up and leave the talker alone? Bad manners! But it saves you from a lot of drivel and suppressed yawns! What to do when someone insists on thrusting his verbosity on you, having the last word, interrupts you when you talk or goes on repeating himself – insulting your intelligence? On several occasions have I resisted the temptation of saying “ Shut up. ” But I do not know how much longer I can hold myself. The impression is gathering ground that dysphoria pays. It gets things done, it gets you better service: it permits you to do many things, which good manners do not.

But is it worth anything? Are jangled nerves and bad tempering any substitute for a harmonious life? Will it not make life smooth and pleasant without black bile? For, after all, good manners cost nothing. Soft words and politeness cannot be as taxing as not worthy of use. If there is anything we need badly today, in the rush and cut-throat competition of life, it is decent manners, which lubricate the roughness of competition. So, my conclusion is that we need not re-write old laws, especially the one about kind hearts are coronets because small courtesies sweeten life.

Goethe says, “ There is a courtesy of the heart, it is allied to love – from it springs the purest courtesy in the outward behavior. ” Many have found in the adult education movement, the great increase in “ do-it-yourself” craftsmanship, in photography, sports, and the like, testimony to the creative impulses, which are able to find expression in the leisure lives of

millions of persons of all classes, particularly among those who work for an ordinary living. Two aspects of leisure we must note.

One of these is the pleasure of being sociable of sharing things, with others, which is often in sharp contrast with the acquisitiveness demanded of persons if they are to attain success in the economic field. The significance of our free time activities is that almost inevitably they place us in a sharing mood. We emerge from our isolation. We learn the fine art of complaining. We tend to grow the habit of wishing for others the happiness that we ourselves enjoy. What about the importance of being alone? of having certain times when one can remove oneself from all others and enjoy a period of tranquil contemplation and relaxation without esponding to any other person? We should recognize the serenity that can enter the life of the individual when, for a time, he is enable to sequestrate himself and move quietly with his own brooding thoughts. What is the significance of this entire wish on our part to be ourselves, to inhabit worlds of our own making, to be not blown hither and thither by the gusts of external demands? It is to get “whole” again, to gather ourselves, and to think and put things together, to explore ways that are intimately our own. This freedom of the individual is one of life’s keenest delights. “ The best amongst all of thee is one who shows good manners”