

SCHOOL REUNION BLUES

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(Iâ??m the alumni president of Nirmala High School in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, In India; where I completed my 10th standard forty-two years ago. I have narrated a few of the musings that went into my planning for the grand reunion event on 23rd December, 2018)

It truly overwhelmed me. Why itâ??s so tiring to plan out a school reunion. How it turned out to hold such an emotional offensive on my senses? Itâ??s not that I considered myself a mediocre organizer. As a school administrator, I have had a multilevel experience in planning and making a huge success of scores of extravaganzas celebrated in the school I have managed.

In the school which I governed Iâ??m the boss and an army of teachers, thousands of students, were ready to bow to any order the moment itâ??s popped out.

But, at present, Iâ??m on a different turf. I have to plan and play a significant role to pull off a grand event. Iâ??m speaking about coordinating a school reunion. In the institution where I carried a slate, walked up and down with my tiny five-year-old pair of legs and traced my first alphabets, forty-two years back.

Iâ??m the alumnus of the semi-centennial Nirmala High School in Vijayawada the city in which Iâ??m the native. Forty-two years ago, my detachment, as I bid my farewell after wrapping up my school final exams, I only stepped out physically. My psychological and emotional affinity never left the ten-acre sanctum since then. Unknown to me then, perhaps, owing to the profound influence of evangelical nuns as

my teachers formed a bond with the school that couldnâ??t break â?? forever. The school and their missionary zeal with which they conducted the healthful care taking have deeply impacted my individuality, my thinking style and quality of life Iâ??m living today.

Surely, our school playground played an effective training role in my formative years than what I learned in the classrooms and textbooks in our laps. Whatever fragments of talents I owned they were unfolded in the time I sweated on the well-maintained playing fields. I still believed today I had picked up the seeds of my confidence donning my sports dress dashing across the play-fields.

Missionaries of sisters founded and managed the school. When I was young, it confused me at the look of their white religious habit. Gradually I got accustomed to their attire when I marched out every day for the mandatory drill, the music classes, craft classes, the science lab, in the school office; I tickled myself sitting in front of the nuns dressed in white.

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Iâ??m blessed in many ways as I so well cared in the classrooms. Our Christian sisters were passionate about our welfare, and they morally nurtured us. Most of these dedicated women, sacrificed their family relations to serve where the need is the wealthiest â?? the good English education.

There is no time I ever felt lonely. I have only one reason for the status I enjoyed the trust of my friends who were also the successful offshoots of the same school. All my childhood buddies, they were always close enough to spread the warmest â??feeling wantedâ?? blanket around me. Not to lose them I even adopted an attitude to keep myself, my moods flexible enough to understand them; and I donâ??t wait much to be understood.

These were a few of my emotional hinges where I can claim why Iâ??m deeply indebted to the school where I completed my primary and secondary education.

Since the last three months, after being nominated as the president of the alumni association, which we called NOSA, (Nirmala Old students Association) I got wedged between â??Iâ??m what Iâ??mâ?? breed of younger batches of former students who brought up on multiple forms of a smartphone, closeness defined by Facebook, identities highlighted by selfies. And I catapulted from an era where closeness defined by real physical intimacy, more of talking eye to eye. The consequence, I quickly realized a growing discomfort that hindered my acceptability and my guidance.

A sense of restraint held me back, I appeared discouraged and worried.

â??I think my job of reunion wouldnâ??t be easy, I need to move in a restrained, cautious, and wise mannerâ?? I was a wee bit disappointed, but then I decided, as the senior alumni, it wouldnâ??t sound sane, if I announced, â??Iâ??ll quit.â??

As the deadline for the reunion day racing closer, the issues with blunt edges of discord leaked into everyday deliberations. Many hitches, lack of clarity, countless unhelpful debates seemed triggering edginess among the committee members. Adding fuel, Iâ??m found all the time on a complaint mode of their terrible lack of time-sensitivity.

Everyone would report late to the meetings; itâ??s like we are operating a 24/7 restaurant, anyone could walk in and they expected a courteous greeting and accommodate without an objection. And I sit there to hear the stock excuse, â??sorry, Iâ??m late.â??

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Whatever, Iâ??m not expected to utter a whisper of protest. Adjust; some wiser group of well-wishers, advised me. Adjust I did, and quickly the youngsters who seemed to assemble in good numbers, with good intention to collaborate in planning for the reunion, threw at me a loud message.

I interpreted it like this:

â??Donâ??t give us directions of how to do, what to do, when to do, we are not here to put in your hands our reins of freedom, our behaviour even for a short interval. Our approach and presence are like an ice-cream, use our talents as fast as you can or else, we melt and disappear as quickly as our queer minds dictate.â??

The message was clear and open. Iâ??m here to learn a few chapters of the importance of patience and how to deal with quicksilver mentalities of the smartphone generation.

The same tough to handle guys, along with their friends, once resumed their practice sessions on the stage seemed a remarkably pleasant lot. I enjoyed the agility of their slim bodies; and the coordination of their body movements. The onstage bonhomie among boys and girls was apparent and awesome. I couldnâ??t help thinking these were the kids good at what they are capable of but to learn many more the worldly wise good aspects their age isnâ??t ready yet.

The cooperative dynamic of upcoming former young batches of the school and their keen interest to contribute for the event has relieved me from my daily dose of frustrating spasms. A boosted feel of optimism reassured me that the reunion day

would be as exciting as bubbly young ones I see practicing their dance steps tirelessly every day.

Self-doubt is my quizzical nature and fear is under my skin. I accepted it, and Iâ??m living with it for five decades. This inbuilt nature of mine, I donâ??t know since when I had fallen prey to it, but its existence has for me more advantages than its flip side I could count. It has granted me many favours whenever I got into a deep sense of angst. In such cases, I reacted in a particular mode what I call, â??functional tension.â?? Itâ??s a helping sort of alarm bell that warns me to be alert, a forewarning siren to stay cautious in the decisions Iâ??m up to.

Fear makes me appear milder, and likely to make me stand on a shaky footing. Itâ??s good to say the â??functional tension,â?? on its precautionary side-lines, generates a flood of trust within preparing me to face any challenge with hope and a resolute â??I can do mindset.â??

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For the reunion gathering, I worked with a strong proposition that people are gentle, willing to collaborate. I have to, for this event, to bring them together, the most voluble, and the heterogeneous grouping. And ask for their help with a plea in my eyes, soft words on my lips, and an agreeable smile on my face. These were the emotional contours that have eventually invited good luck, willing participation, and colours of triumph to whatever I designed for the grand alumni get-together.

On the D-day the reunion was glamorous. I found scores of former students regaling themselves with their batch mates. Glory was mine when I saw the playgrounds, which laid the foundations of my self-worth, have become the spark that kindled a thousand lights of warm nostalgia. I felt gratified at the beaming faces of old friends talking about their memories. I didnâ??t miss, at the end of the event, most of them longingly looking at the school buildings now in dark nightly shadows forcing their reluctant feet to step out of the campus. Perhaps, I could visualize their ardent plea â??we will wait with amplified eagerness for a call to the next reunion.â??

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