Cultivate reading habit

In schools, the reading habit was cultivated healthily. Books were made available in the classroom, in strategic locations around the school and of course in the libraries.

In the classroom, reading skills were developed systematically and consistently through various strategies like Intensive Reading and the Big Book Approach. My children are testimony to this development. In short, reading was both fun and educational.

The teachers’ commitment and dedication in promoting reading deserves praise. I recall once when my son was unwell at school, I received a phone call requesting me to take him home.

When I arrived at the classroom, my son was draped in a blanket, seated very comfortably on the lap of the teacher, listening very attentively to a story being read by the teacher.

Upon seeing me, the teacher said, “Give me a minute. I’m about to finish the story”. I stood there watching in amazement the great job the teacher was doing. I definitely learnt a lesson or two on parenting that day.

The support from the city authorities and its people was overwhelming. The public library in the city was a massive building with lots of books from all over the world, catering for the different international communities that lived, worked or studied there.

Besides books, one could easily get hold of magazines, journals, newspapers and other publications.

Anyone could borrow a book irrespective of whether you are a local or not. Membership was free. And most interestingly, one could borrow up to 50 books at any one time!

I know it’s hard to imagine the transportation of these books but the joy of seeing your children actually competing among them in a healthy rivalry to read makes it an immense investment in moulding and nurturing the future generation to become good readers.

It was normal to see people reading books or magazines while waiting for a bus or a train, or waiting to be attended to at a service counter or waiting to be seen by the dentist.

While travelling using the public transport, the person seated next to you would greet you politely with “Good Morning” and “How are you?”, and perhaps “Where are you heading to?”

Very often, the conversation was a short but respectful one. Then, the person would proceed to open up a book and start reading. This was especially so for long hours of travelling.

Initially, I found this rather strange as I was used to engaging people in a conversation for long hours when travelling in Malaysia. Over the two years I spent there, I adapted, or rather had to adapt, to this new habit.

I do not know how much of this holds water today but I’m sure we can learn a thing or two from such a good practice abroad.

It is through reading that we become more knowledgeable and better thinkers, become more aware and tolerant of our surroundings, thus helping us expand our potential and scale heights beyond our imagination.

JAGINDER SINGH
Batu Gajah