

Comparative Cultures

Learning Curve

By Kinjal Dagli Shah

One of the many questions I get asked on my sojourns to India is if my almost four year old daughter goes to school. When I reply in the negative, and add that she will go only next September, I am usually greeted with looks of astonishment, sometimes shock.

The Indian education system, much like that of other overpopulated countries, focuses on competition and pressure to outshine your peers. Starting with mom and tot classes at six months of age, I recently learnt that children have started going to preschool at as young as a year and a half! Even if most babies are probably dozing off trying to fit one block on top of another.

Compare that with my preschooler who has never stepped into a school and will be turning four in February. The maximum time she has spent in a school-like setting is a half-day camp I sent her to this summer. Naturally then, her cousins and peers in India, who have been attending school for most of their lives, are surprised (half-envious I think) that she gets to enjoy her childhood.

In our India home too, my daughter has been having a wonderful time. While her cousins wake up and rush about

getting ready for school and finishing their homework, my daughter remains in her pyjamas until noon, lies on the swing on our patio and watches the birds fly from one rooftop to another. A neighbour commented on how lovely her childhood is, and how carefree she seems.

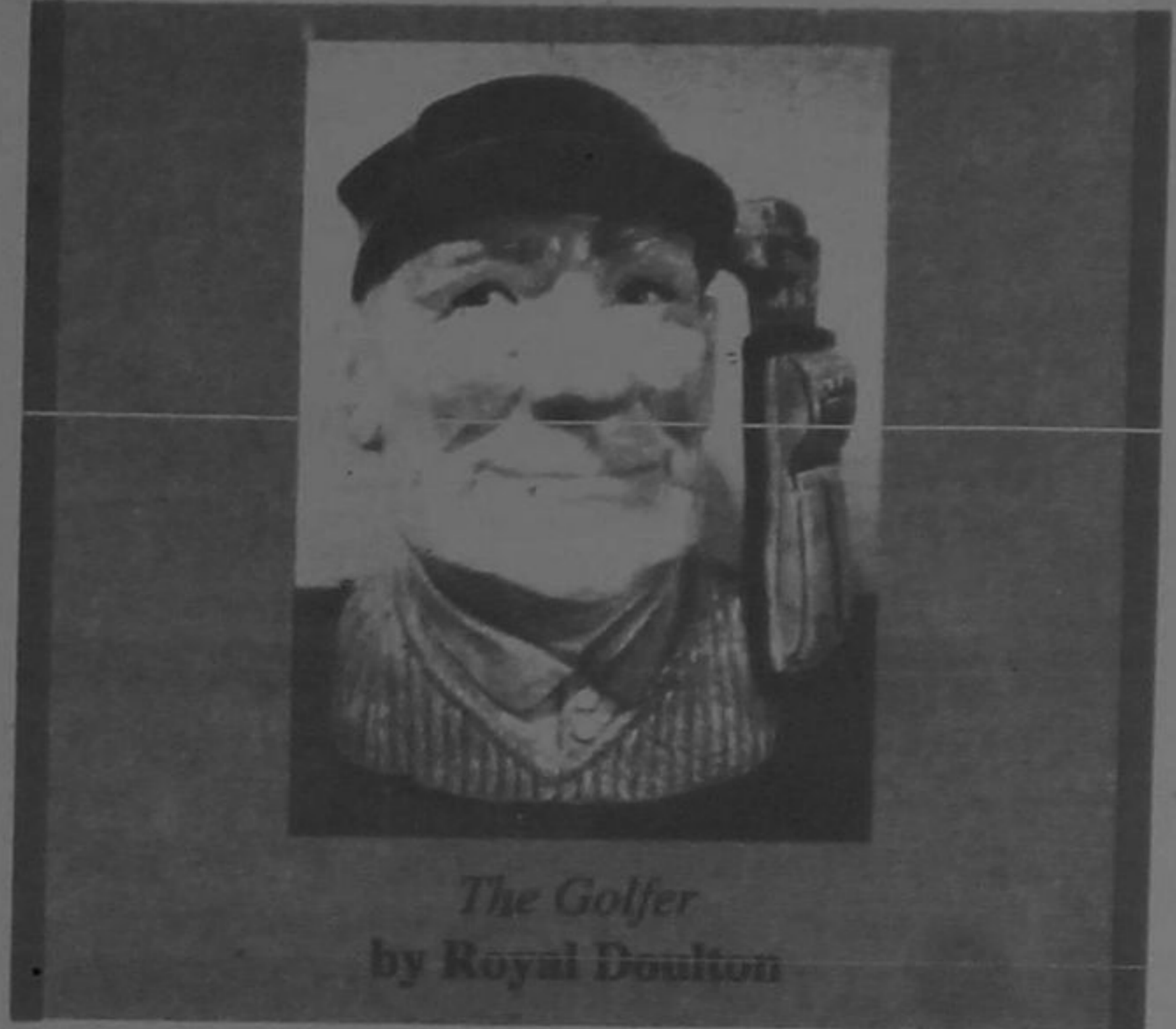
I did send her to a drawing and craft class with one of her cousins so that she could spend some of her time learning and developing her skills. Unlike in Canada, it was a class where I could leave her with the teacher for an hour and a half and go back to pick her up. Even though she has socialized with other children at parks and libraries, at play dates and birthday parties, I was a little worried about how she would react at being left with other children and a new teacher. Apparently I was worrying without reason. She did wait for a while but quickly followed it up with some good behaviour.

Perhaps, that's why her teacher commented, "She is so well-spoken, I would have never guessed she doesn't go to school yet."

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Play Reading At Nineteen On The Park Stouffville Theatre Company to tackle Priestley classic

On Friday, Jan. 16 at 8 p.m. at Nineteen on the Park, the Stouffville Theatre Company will present a staged play-reading of *An Inspector Calls* by J.B. Priestley.

Set in England in 1912, the classic three-act drama/mystery takes place on a single night and focuses on the prosperous Birling family, who live in a comfortable midlands home. They receive a visit from a man calling himself Inspector Goole, who questions them about the suicide of a young working-class woman, Eva Smith. During his interrogation, it emerges that the family may have

been responsible for the young woman's exploitation, abandonment and social ruin, effectively leading to her death. The play is filled with unexpected twists, and is sure to hold the audience's interest to the end.

An Inspector Calls will be read by a cast of seven actors, some of whom are familiar to Stouffville audiences including playwright Neil Marr, who wrote *Bienvenue Oh Trout Lake* and John Sellins, who starred in *Storm Warning*.

Admission is by cash donation and refreshments will be served.



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