

## The Indian Educational System – Competitive or Desolate?

On the problems of the unemployability of Indian youth  
because of essential deficiencies in the system of higher education

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“The Indian educational system, in those years [*pre-Independence*] was terribly rigid, far more rigid than our own [*British*] on which it was modelled. The system rewarded the nebulous ideal of ‘well-roundedness’: it was designed to churn out the bureaucrats and technicians who would oversee the Indian empire (under our supervision of course). What it was not designed to do was to recognize genius – its obsessiveness and its blindness, its refusal to be anything other than what it is.” (1)

The various deficiencies in our present educational system can be described as non-reformable, as the doctoring of certain symptoms clearly shows. Failure everywhere, compartmentalisation, bureaucratic overkill, exploitation of resources and horribly outdated curricula: this is the abysmal picture we are facing.

Every new government, every new education minister, be it State or Central, tries to “do something” and invariably, this “something”, or sometimes even “some things” only lead to ephemeral ripples on the surface of the big ocean named education while beneath there is the same old, inefficient, unjust and hopelessly antiquated system, like an impenetrable swamp where all sorts of profit-oriented creatures play their games and these games are not in favour of what could be called education and enlightenment.

India has not been able to outgrow its colonial dependencies in many fields (2) but in our opinion, the inability – or is it unwillingness? – to adjust our educational system to the framework of a modern, secular democracy bears the biggest dangers for any developmental sustainability. Outside India, people somehow are in awe of the so-called IT supremacy of Indians, but they are not aware of the fact that the IT hubs in Bangalore, Hyderabad etc mainly consist of BPOs (commonly known as call centres). We consider these to be another form of subjugation to external (and internal, for that matter) exploitation where employees cannot make use of their acquired knowledge.

Let us focus on three of the main evils of the present day educational system in India:

1. Teachers' Training
  - Out-dated, authoritarian teaching methods
  - Deficient quality in teachers' training
  - Lack of motivation
2. Pressures students are subjected to:
  - Obsession with ‘discipline’ (3)
  - Killing of creativity by punishing students who question
  - Wrong appreciation – parroting is approved through marks; creativity is punished
3. Reservation in higher education
  - Prevents appreciation for merit
  - Demotivates brilliant would-be students
  - Harms our economy as a whole

With regard to the first point, we must mention that the average Indian teacher chose his/her profession not out of genuine motivation to communicate and work with children and youth and educate them for life but for the trivial reason that a teacher in India has a comparatively convenient, comfortable and well-paid profession and quality assessment, accountability and reliability of attendance or paying due attention to the students don't play a role at all. Job security is the mantra. Thus, the average Indian teacher is happy to draw his/her salary irrespective of whether he/she delivers what should be expected. Child and youth psychology are ‘taught’ through abstract knowledge from books but never experienced through practice. This applies to all subjects, not only during teachers' training but also to the way learning is transferred right from primary school upwards.

The second point refers to the usual teaching methods which are authoritarian and based on learning by rote which, as we all should know,

has nothing to do with acquiring knowledge for furthering understanding and independent thinking. Thus we produce parrots instead of creative, curious youths ready to venture to and discover the fields of learning. As one teacher told us, "We are not teachers, we are noise managers."

Our teachers don't know how to instil curiosity in children and they don't know how to create the joy of learning yet at the same time, they hardly enjoy their profession. This is the vicious circle of our education system.

Even so-called modern schools like Montessori schools hardly deliver what they promise. To compensate for their shortcomings, they are highly priced, conveying the message that they have highly qualified teaching methods. Yet their teachers come from the same training institutions as all the others. How can we expect any difference? They are sham packages, deceptively disguised in stylish buildings, conveying the message of splendid students' care. (4)

Our teachers are not happy; they feel insecure. From Sigmund Freud, we should know that children and young people are very sensitive to weaknesses in adults and that their weaknesses are usually compensated for by authoritarian patterns of behaviour. Unhappy teachers produce unhappy children who, step by step, lose their natural curiosity and eagerness to learn or to know as much as possible. Consequently, some compensate for their frustration through 'indiscipline' (and risk punishment) while some just submit to the pressure and 'behave'. The latter make up the majority of students since they are sandwiched between the expectations of their parents – hands-in-glove with the school authorities – and the teacher's demands. They learn well enough how to please but they suffer. (5)

One teacher told us, "Parents expect me to discipline their children, even to beat them. If I am lenient from their point of view, they complain to the headmaster and I get into difficulties."

The third point strikes a sensitive issue, especially in times of societal hush-up and political correctness. Our reservation system, well-intended after the country became independent, has become an evil in almost all spheres of society and we feel we can safely say that it has to be abolished. It is a complete

failure if measured against the aims and objectives with which it was incorporated into our constitution. Let us take all the efforts, the bureaucracy and the huge amount of money which is going down the drain with this system and instead build an efficient system where all children and young people have an enabling environment to develop their potential. The reservation system is tragically increasing the gap between castes and communities instead of bridging it. It is tearing our society apart. The reservation system is doing nothing more than substituting one injustice with another. Should we continue to allow this?

There is no motivational impetus in quotas – quite the opposite. Our best potential is withering away undetected and undeveloped while the average and the under-average are put into positions where they invariably cannot deliver. This is not their fault. As a German proverb says, 'You cannot transform an ox into a racehorse.'

Nelson Mandela put the aim of 'equal chances for all – according to their abilities' in the following words:

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another." (6)

Where do we go from here?

Logically, the consequences for all of us and for our decision-makers in education can only be:

- Overhauling the existing educational system starting from nursery schools upwards
- Creating an efficient infrastructure for holistic education which would include practice-orientation, social responsibility and 'happiness'. (7)
- Overhauling the present system of teachers' training and creating up-to-date teacher entrepreneurs who enjoy their profession and are happy
- Abolishing reservation altogether by substituting it for an environment where all children and young people have the opportunity to develop their potential.

Much more could be said but let us use this as a base for a lively discussion from all those interested in education, whether friend or foe!

#### References

- (1) David Leavitt, *The Indian Clerk*, Bloomsbury UK, 2008, p.102
- (2) Chapters on education in Marla/Taori, *Operationalising Holistic Human Development – Food for Thought and Ideas for Action*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2007, Marla/Taori, *Misery of Leadership – A Holistic Approach to Good Governance*, authorspress, New Delhi, 2011, Marla, *Middle Class Bashing*, authorspress, New Delhi, 2011
- (3) 'discipline' is widely confused with 'behaving' instead of learning conscious, positive self-control
- (4) It goes without saying that there are a few exceptions but we need not go into these when we are searching for the faults and inefficiencies in the overall picture
- (5) See chapter on education in Marla, *Just to be on the Safe Side – Middle Class Bashing (an analysis of the impact of Middle Classes on Indian Society)* which will be published in April 2011 by authorspress, New Delhi
- (6) Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown and Company, 1<sup>st</sup> paperback edition, p. 166
- (7) In a school-college combine in the German city of Heidelberg, having one of the oldest universities in Europe, the subject 'happiness' is an essential part of the curriculum.