

Education in India

POINTS TO DEVELOP

1. The true meaning and purpose of education has sight of.
2. Problems beset every stage- primary/secondary schools and colleges.
3. Problems and remedies for each level of education.
4. Hope lies in realizing problems and need for remedy.

The situation in schools, colleges or universities is pretty disconcerting with several forces competing with each other in polluting the academic atmosphere, while educationists all over the country recognize the malaise, they have not been able to suggest a workable remedy although suggestions for nostrums have been forthcoming regularly. The malaise persists due to the bottlenecks in the bureaucratic structure. Also, there is the absence of accountability of the different players such as the teachers, managements, government, students and even the parents. This factor goes hand –in hand with the performance and thus it leads to the issue of evaluation. VOLUMES of books have been written on the importance of education in life. The essence of all those writings and views is that education means the fostering of the personality through the unhampered development, of innate qualities of a human being. It also means the awakening of intelligence and development of an integrated life. It aims to adjust the rhythm of the individual's life with the rhythm of the society. This adjustment involves strengthening of character and consolidation of the moral fiber. Today education in India, however, appears to be at variance with these standards.

Due to the heavy demands of the modern consumer civilization, even two – and – a half-old toddlers are being pushed out of the security and friendliness of their homes into the strange world of the classrooms. The mushrooming of play schools at every nook and corner testifies to the existence of a demand for such facilities. Instead of being imparted natural learning through familiar persons and objects, children are introduced at quite an early age to textbooks and outlandish rymes they are obliged to parrot. How pathetic is the sight of children carrying heavy sacks of books on their little backs! And as the competition increases every day, the sacks get bulkier, and oppressive, not only physically but also mentally.

Parents are often the contributing parties to the painful experiences of the children, they plant in their wards a hawkish competitive spirit, which can cause neurotic Childers. The violence thus committed by the society on children has its own fallout. Education which is supposed to be enriching, constructive, creative

and a dialogic process becomes monotonous and mechanical and is reduced to a mere merchandise. The pleasure of learning seems to be a thing of the past.

Remedial measures that can make children's education more creative and interesting can rescue both children and teachers from the present burden. Schools from nursery to middle level should be fashioned as children's clubs. Oral and practical learning should be given greater emphasis in the introductory stage. We should let the children first know what 'black' and 'sheep' are, only then should they be asked to spell the words. Rhymes at nursery and KG-levels should be in the mother tongues so that the children can enjoy and learn them effortlessly. The children's natural curiosity of 'how' and 'why' can be given more prominence than following the stipulated syllabus. Before teaching anything, the teacher must create interest amongst the students. The teacher should frankly appreciate the good work of students rather than only scold or physically punish them for mistakes. Again, the teacher should feel responsible for a student's failure to learn.

Today, the main problem that plagues secondary education is our failure to treat it as a comprehensive educational system in its own right; it is regarded merely as a preparation ground for university education. A single examination evaluation system, a syllabus which is not only unwieldy but often redundant, educational boards that are at complete variance with the aspirations of the students these constitute some of the problems of secondary education in India.

In a system that lays so much emphasis on achievement rather than on developing the true potential of a student, who is to be really blamed? Is it the teachers and school who perpetuate the syndrome by concentrating only on the syllabus or is it the students who increasingly have a one-dimensional approach to education with higher percentages as their target? Is it the education board that tries, most often unsuccessfully, to centralize a uniform educational system conducted as fairly as possible, or is it the poorly-paid examinations that often endanger the future (and sometimes lives) of several students?

The answer, perhaps, would apportion blame to all of these. But wherever the malaise might originate, it is the unfortunate students who suffer.

Even the most innovative of schools which try to move as far away from the curriculum as possible have to bow to the line when it comes to board examinations. The board examinations prefer cramming to analysis and application. They lay too much stress on content and too little on in-depth understanding. The pressure to secure admissions into traditionally prestigious fields and institutions of study by seeking percentages above the absurdly high cut-off figures often puts students

who do not have a natural Besides, the multiplicity of boards (the CBSE, the SSC, the HSC and the ICSE) only adds to the confusion.

It is well-nigh impossible to judge a student's proficiency in a subject through a single examination of those hours. The teacher's dereliction of duty in the classrooms can be measured by the number of students opting for coaching classes or private tuitions. Again, it is a sad irony that the best teachers are supposed to be employed in government schools, while people send their wards to the private schools.

Accountability, no doubt, seems to escape all except the helpless students who remain unfortunate victims of a system that breeds chaos and confusion. Schools education in India is in a maze. One wrong step and you are lost for good.

What could be the possible way out of this sorry state of affairs? An independent entrance test could be offered by every institution that a student aspires to enter as the IITs already do. This could reduce the anxiety about the unevenness of marks offered by different high school boards. An independent autonomous body like the US Education Testing Services, which conducts the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), the Scholastic Aptitude test (SAT), the achievement tests in the fields of the students' choice (ACH) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), could be set up. Private initiatives must be welcomed in this area. Apart from offering a uniform testing and evaluating system for all students, a score received from such an institution could be used to supplement school-leaving examination results.

Some weight age, at the college admission time, could be given to the class X result as well. More weight age could be given to internal assessment and independent projects despite the possible subjectivity of the teachers.

With greater budget allocation and some degree of organization, a uniform national examination for all students could be devised. Instead of a single examination of three hours and some 30 questions simpler two-set paper over five hours containing 60 odd questions covering every topic may be a fairer way of testing a student. Quite like the SAT in the US, answer sheets should be readily accessible to the students. It is high time we decreased the inherent distrust in students as cheats. While invigilation could be stepped up, the exminess should not be treated like criminals with police vigilance outside the examination centres. Aptitude testing, career counseling and a facility for psychological counseling can be provided at the class X and XII levels.

At the time of the appointment of teachers, besides their academic achievements, their real interest in and dedication to teaching should also be made a qualifying criterion for the final election. The present status of 'poor' school teachers should be improved so that they command the same respect and dignity in society, as do professionals like doctors, engineers or civil servants. This would attract talent. Like civil servants and other professionals, the teachers should also be on duty round the clock; this measure can solve the needs students for private tuitions.

After passing out of school, the students are pushed into colleges where there is no uniformity of procedure, in which various considerations other than the intelligence of the students play a vital role. Even those who manage to enter a college are not without problems. The way academics manage their affairs has led to much cynicism and even disgust on the part of the public.

Measures such as conferring autonomous status on colleges, putting teachers through in-service training programmes in academic staff colleges, and extending financial aid to enable them to pursue research have not improved the scene to the expected extent. So far, the UGC has failed to curb rampant unionism and politics in the colleges and universities. Nor has there been any improvement in the miserably poor standards of higher education. Very few university departments in the country can boast of offering courses, both futuristic and internationally competitive. There are still some campuses which reflect a serene academic atmosphere, but the majority just do not fit into the mould of higher educational institutions. Anti-social politically overactive elements have sneaked into even some reputed institutions, and violence has become the order of the day. Politics has so much spoiled the clean and studious environments of some universities that sincere and hardworking students find it tough to pursue quality. Nehru University and Delhi University could be cited as classic examples. Once the pride of the capital and known for excellence and high educational standards these universities, of late, have become hubs of political activities. Here, research, a sizeable section of students are found actively involved in devising ways to win university elections. Tickets are eagerly sought, blessings taken from political parties, and funds generated to emerge victorious at all costs. Study can wait. Even Visva Bharati University, another classic case of degeneration of educational standards thanks to politics, has witnessed long-scale violence.

This picture is the consequence of indiscriminate proliferation and also the unprincipled admission and recruitment policies pursued by the so-called centres learning. Today, there is far too much inbreeding, regionalism and parochialism in student admission, faculty appointments and in appointing the vice-chancellors. In many universities, teaching even at the post graduate level is now in the vernacular, but there are no good books and journals available in many Indian

languages. While theoretically we say the medium of instruction should be in the regional languages, we have not done enough to invest in producing books and journals in these languages. Most importantly, what the students are forced to learn in colleges and universities is rarely useful in practical life, more specifically to earn his livelihood. A majority of the jobs available with the government are offered to those who can successfully do 250 or so multiple-choice questions, covering General Knowledge, English, Arithmetic and reasoning, in a stipulated time. Then why should one go in for other subjects? The position now is getting more complicated on account of the resource constraints and the deterioration in values on all sides.

Another noteworthy shortcoming in our educational system is that science education is not imparted to students in the desired way. Though children are naturally observant and curious, the way science is at present taught in schools, instead of encouraging and harnessing these advantageous traits, usually stifles them. Despite the fact that India has produced, and continues to produce, exceptional scientists, engineers, and doctors, the numbers are not so great mainly because science teaching in schools in India is in a pitiable shape. It is quite well known that school's system in India emphasizes on rote learning and science classes only instill the ability rapidly to solve problems in competitive examinations. As a matter of fact, children opt for the science stream in school not because they are in love with the science they are learning but because they are told that it is the favored career path for brilliant young girls and boys, the one that shows the way to entrance exams for medical and engineering courses. With the rapidly growing value of science and technology in the modern world, and for India's own future development, the system of teaching and learning science in schools must be revamped on a priority basis. Students need to be taught that science is not about memorizing laws, 'facts,' and formulae, but figuring out how to apply them. Science is also about wondering why the universe is so and then setting about scientifically to unravel the innumerable mysteries it holds. It is also a means by which many economic problems of this country could be tackled.

The problems are many and their intensity is also growing day by day. At least some ad hoc measures must be taken immediately if we cannot devise effective and lasting solutions.

There must be a proper performance appraisal system for the faculty members. We can take help from the experiences of the West in this regard, though indigenous devices can also be developed to suit our circumstances and students. Besides, healthy and transparent criteria for admission of students, conduct of classes, evaluation of their progress and optimal utilization of the staff are urgently called for. Teachers must cease to be just employees with salaries

guaranteed by the government but become professional with complete accountability.

Mindless commercialization of education should be stopped. This system in which the highest bidder is assured a place in an educational institution is detrimental to the dignity and worth of the Indian educational system which has to see that even the poorest of the poor in India reaps the advantages of education. The charging of capitation fee is manifestation of the tendency to extract maximum possible profit from what one calls the education 'industry'. Education, after all, should come in the purview of social responsibility.

Most of the problems are attributed to resource constraints. Several suggestions like hike in tuition fees, introduction of education cess, public funding and greater privatization have come and some have been adopted. Yet another suggestion is that the fees can be charged on profit basis from foreign students who should be encouraged to come to Indian universities in still more numbers. Also, there are alumni associations which can raise funds, not for running the universities but for development activities, for funding scholarships and instituting chairs. As for regular maintenance expenditure, that must be borne by the government. It can also be obtained by raising the tuition fees. The universities can also raise funds through consultancy services offered by its faculty.

Indian cannot remain content with basking in the success of the IIMs; all other institutions in the country have to achieve that competence level.