

An Idiotic Society?

The 3 Idiots has already acquired a cult status. I remember having seen the movie with my colleagues in the first week of its release in the month of December 2009. As we were coming out of the hall after watching the movie, I involuntarily listened to the people coming out along with me and it became amply clear that the message, the film was trying to put across had already been lost. The discussion was more on the plot, the acting and of course the humour. The film is a commentary on the rot that has set into India's educational system that places more importance on getting good scores at the expense of acquiring knowledge and skills. This sorry state is exemplified by statistics like 30% of India's engineers are unemployable, MBA's applying for bank clerical posts (where the qualification required is at most a simple graduate) in hordes, more than half of class IV student's in India's government schools being unable to read as well as write and so on. I myself am a testimony to the abysmal quality of today's graduates as being a University teacher, I keep coming across them. Graduates who write horrible English (its not that they can even write in their mother tongue correctly), have pathetic domain knowledge and more importantly are very deficient in life skills. Critics would be quick to point at the failure of the Government in providing quality education. But the deeper malaise is in the Indian society and the way it looks at learning and more importantly the way it looks at success.

Let us look at education at the growing up stage of today's children. I feel pained to see that today's children are not allowed to grow and learn *naturally*, but are brought up *artificially* denying them a childhood that teaches them the art of exploring and readies them for the journey of life that lies ahead. I'm amazed at how much juggling these kids are forced to do, studying, dancing, sports,... A criminal neglect is the one shown to primary education which should have been given the maximum importance for it lays the foundation of the learning process. But it is a fact that an overwhelming majority of the teachers at this level are unfit to teach because of a number of factors like training, temperament and commitment. There are policies and schemes galore, but the objectives of those are most of the time lost in propaganda, populism and rhetoric. The much touted Sarba Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the Mid-day Meal Scheme are examples of how schemes fail to succeed. Crores have been spent on both these, but the outcome? Government statistics would show that enrollment have increased after the implementation of the Mid-day Meal Scheme, but it is a common knowledge that the children and teachers alike are more preoccupied in having / serving the meal than learning. What a joke? The SSA have failed miserably in improving the quality of primary education, I would say that the quality actually have deteriorated. This is what I've found from my field tours while working on a UNICEF project in the upper Assam district of Dibrugarh.

Education at the secondary school level are no better because most of the time the youngsters are preoccupied with tuitions and coaching classes so as to enable themselves to a career not of their choice but decided by others (read parents). It's a mad race, phew!

A new obsession with the Government is higher education, which talks of World Class (sic!) Universities, institutes of excellence in science, technology, management and what not! But no talk on the existing institutes of higher education which are rotting and going downhill because of lack of infrastructure, faculty, etc. Whatever good is left in these institutes will invariably be sucked in by the upcoming new institutes as they have been touted to be a class apart! As though a society based on different classes was not enough, we are now talking about creating

classes in education also. Utter rubbish! It would have been much better if all existing institutes could have been made equal in quality and competence so that it would not have mattered where one studied.

I fail to understand as to why every one should be made a post graduate through formal education. A big reason behind India's burgeoning unemployed population are the highly qualified people we are producing who apparently don't find a job commensurate with their qualification and refuses to do some other job or try for self employment with their ego at work. Earlier, it being difficult to get into a PG Programme, only the best would get in and the rest would try doing something and eke out a living. I'm at loss looking at the quality of PhDs that are being churned out today. I might be exaggerating a bit, but it is like producing cars in an assembly line!

Finally, am I sounding too neurotic? No, I'm not. I'm in principle not against many of the policies that are being followed to uplift the state of education in the country. But I'm definitely against the way things are moving. Education should not reduced to mere statistics...this much literate, so many universities, PhDs...blah...blah...blah. Think about quality, be realistic as to what can be done and don't try to change things just for the heck of it!