



India Habitat Centre



Voices  
of the  
Young  
2008



# Voices of the Young

*Towards Habitat Young Visionary Award 2008*



India Habitat Centre

**India Habitat Centre is involved in building care, commitment and awareness in the citizenship for issues of common concern; and strives to position the Habitat discourse in the public domain for better governance for framers and consumers of public policy.**

The essays in this publication constitute the short-listed submissions for the Habitat Young Visionary Award and have therefore been carried verbatim.  
The views expressed in this publication are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the India Habitat Centre.

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# The Habitat Young Visionary Award 2008 Semifinals

December 21<sup>st</sup> 2007

Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre

*Presented by: India Habitat Centre  
in association with National Geographic Channel*



SANJIV KAURA

ABBAS ALI BAIG

JITENDRA KUMAR DADOO

SONIA JABBAR

Dr. HARI GAUTAM

## The Jury

### Semi-Finals

**Mr. Abbas Ali Baig**

*Former Indian Cricketer*

**Mr. J. K. Dadoo**

*Secretary (Environment),  
Government of Delhi*

**Prof. Hari Gautam**

*Former Chairman,  
University Grants Commission*

**Ms. Sonia Jabbar**

*Well known Journalist*

**Mr. Sanjiv Kaura**

*Activist and one of the Finalist  
of Lead India from Delhi*

### Finals

**Mr. Nikhil Mirchandani**

*MD, National Geographic Channel*

**Mr. Lakhan Mehrotra**

*IFS (Retd), Former Ambassador to China &  
Sri Lanka*

**Ms. Renuka Narayanan**

*Renowned Author*

**Mr. Rajiv Mehrotra**

*Managing Trustee, PSBT*

**Mr. Pankaj Pachauri**

*Sr. Editor, NDTV*

**Dr. Dilip Simeon**

*Senior Research Fellow, Nehru Memorial  
Museum & Library*

## Council of Interjectors

**Prof. Purushottam Aggarwal**

*Member, Union Public Service Commission  
of India & Former Chairperson, Centre  
of Indian Languages, SLL & CS,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University*

**Prof. Dinesh Singh**

*Director of South Campus,  
Delhi University*



### Name of the finalists

Rahul Saikia	II Year Geography Honours	St. Edmund College, Shillong
Saahil Chauhan	II Year, Political Science Honours	Hindu College, Delhi
Sayan Ganguli	7th Semester, Metallurgical Engineering	IIT, Chennai
Utkarsh Amitabh	III year, BE Mechanical Engineering	Delhi College of Engineering, Delhi
Vishes Kothari	I year, Physics Honours	St. Stephen's College, Delhi



# Foreword

The Habitat Young Visionary Award, began as India Habitat Centre's initiative to connect public discourse to the aspirations of the undergraduates in the country, who were beginning to weave their personal dreams and what they would do for this world, or do to their world.

The award carries a fully funded summer programme at Cambridge University. This course content is flexible and enables the winner to get perspectives on areas of his interest and feel and participate in the thinking and living process of a University with a great academic and social profile.

In the four years of this initiative, the journey has been interesting and informative. The screening process for selecting the award winner begins with an evaluation of the statements of vision sent by the participants. The fifteen qualifiers then have to articulate and defend their vision before a panel of eminent judges. The five finalists then compete for the award before another panel of judges drawn from public life.

In the last two years, the NATGEO joined us in this partnership. Their support has been invaluable in taking the message of the Young Visionary Award to every corner of the country. They have also added an additional award of an internship with NATGEO at Hongkong. In a sense, the Habitat Young Visionary Award has been well received, for its opportunity as well as for the linkage with East and West for our young undergraduates competing this year.

Through this initiative, we hope that the youth has an opportunity to connect with an experience of value for the horizons and frontiers they would extend and reach.

*Raj Liberhan  
Director  
India Habitat Centre*



# Semifinals

December 21<sup>st</sup> 2007

Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre

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SARITA KHURRA

ABBAS ALI BAIG

JOHN KAP SUT

SONIA JABBAR

IL HAD DATTAR

## The Habitat

## Young Visionary Award 2008

## Semifinals

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## The Habitat Young Visionary Award 2008 Semifinals

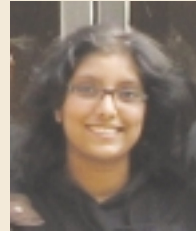
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JOHN KAP SUT

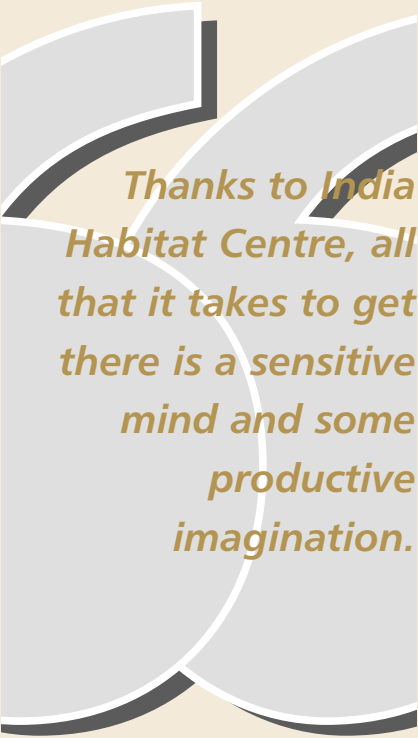
**Srilata Sircar**  
*The Cambridge Diary*



When I first saw the poster for the Habitat Young Visionary Award 2007, I thought it was some kind of a practical joke or a Wodehousean prank. Summer School at Cambridge just for having a "vision"? It sounded a bit other worldly. But as time has proved, this truly is an out of the world opportunity. In the words of Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the chief guest for the final round, "ours is a disgruntled generation. There is a lot that we are unhappy about and a lot more that can be set right, a lot that needs to be set right". At the semi final stage, I came to realise the power of this platform. There were people of my age from all over the country, each with a different set of concerns and a different set of solutions. They were all visionaries in their own rights. To be able to air your dissatisfaction and voice your opinion is a rare privilege, and it is

this, the biggest prize of all, that has been brought to us by India Habitat Centre. This is a unique concept that has the power to harness the best in today's youth. From being just an incentive for writing an essay, it has now become the defining moment of my college life that not only made me think but also brought out the socially sensitive and responsible adult in me. My days in Cambridge have been the best learning experience of my life. Once again it was an opportunity to interact with people of my generation, this time from all over the world. I do not know what I enjoyed more - the stimulating academic challenge of sitting in a Cambridge University classroom or the sheer joy of exploring the by-lanes that Lord Byron and James Stuart Mill have walked down. The ambience, the ethos and the heritage of a place like Cambridge cannot be recreated in words.

*I do not know what I enjoyed more - the stimulating academic challenge of sitting in a Cambridge University classroom or the sheer joy of exploring the by-lanes that Lord Byron and James Stuart Mill have walked down.*



***Thanks to India  
Habitat Centre, all  
that it takes to get  
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mind and some  
productive  
imagination.***

With her punts, her bridges, the Shakespeare plays in the college gardens and the magnificent library (bigger than Rashtrapati Bhawan), Cambridge is paradise for both the footloose traveller and the knowledge-thirsty student. And thanks to India Habitat Centre, all that it takes to get there is a sensitive mind and some productive imagination. Thank you

Mr. Liberhan for this wonderful opportunity that I hope will continue to engage more and more students. Thank you for giving me a vision. This has been the most humbling and yet the most inspiring experience of my life.

*Winner, 2007*

**Vishal Pulikottil**  
*To Hongkong  
via the Habitat Young Visionary Award*



It seems like yesterday. I was about to leave for college when I got the call and was told that I was among the fifteen semi-finalists selected for the Habitat Young Visionary Award 2007. To say I was elated would be an understatement. I wasn't only excited about getting to miss college for a few days, travelling to Delhi and meeting new people. The prospect of being able to share my vision with like-minded people was what wound me up more. I've always had a vision. But now I had the platform.

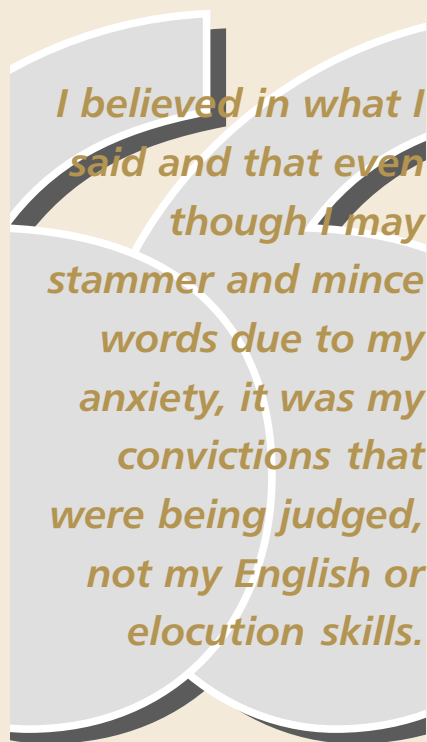
And thus my journey began. I was told I would be defending my vision in front of a panel of judges (very well-read and accomplished judges, by looks of last year's panel). From the onset it was clear that to be passionate about something wasn't enough. You needed to have a basis of facts for your vision, you needed to justify your

passions. The days went by quickly as I filled my days with endless, heated debates and late nights of researching and before long the day came for me to leave for Delhi. I arrived early in the morning and was received warmly and was graciously given comfortable accommodation, which made the unforgiving Delhi winter a little more bearable.

For better or for worse, I had arrived one day before the semi-finals. I spent some of that day reading, thinking and going through what I was going to say. Most of that day, however, was filled with intense sessions of anxiety. On the day of the semi-finals, my stomach was *raging* with butterflies. Time, they say, goes a lot faster when you're nervous and right they were. Before long, I was sitting in the front row of Gulmohar Hall, the program minutes away from

*The prospect of being able to share my vision with like-minded people was what wound me up more. I've always had a vision. But now I had the platform.*





commencement. They began with the introduction of the panelists after which they picked our names out of a hat to decide the order of speakers. I was set to speak towards the end. Truth be told, I hardly remember what the first speaker spoke about. I was too self-absorbed in my own nervousness. But as my anxieties settled (which was somewhere between the third and fourth speakers), I found myself unconcerned with my own speech and engrossed in the speech of my peers. It hit me right then like a ton of bricks. Contest and prizes aside, here I was participating in a process that would, somewhere down the line, contribute, in whatever little way, to the development of this country. And as clichéd as that may sound, there was no better way to describe that experience. Soon it was my turn to speak. I can't say I didn't feel any nervousness at all, but I knew, deep inside, that I believed in what I said and that even though I may stammer and mince words due to my anxiety, it was my convictions that were being judged, not my English or elocution skills.

I remember sitting in the audience when the top five were being announced. Although part of me knew that to come this far was an achievement in itself, I still wanted to get through

to the next round, to develop my vision. The feeling of joy I felt when I heard my name being called out is a feeling that I don't think will ever be outdone. I had made it!

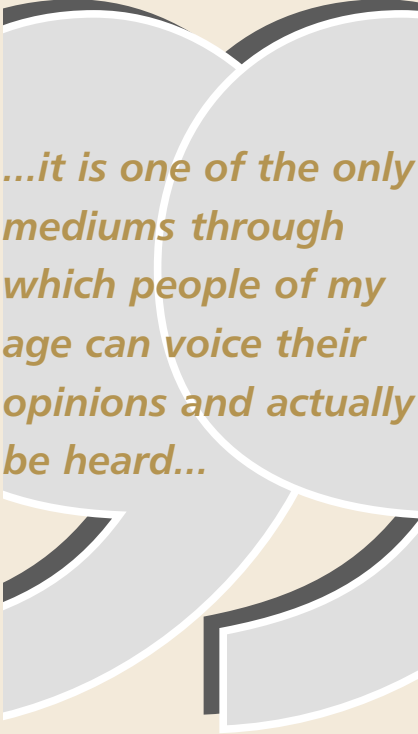
The finals were a lot less eventful as I knew, more or less, what to expect. I remember joking to a friend before the finals that I would be much happier getting the second prize (which was an internship opportunity with the National Geographic Channel) than getting first. Perhaps God took heed of that wish because that's exactly what I got. I haven't started my internship in Singapore yet. It's still in the process of being finalised but I'm looking forward to the experience immensely. I've always been amazed by the talent and skill that's showcased on the channel. To actually be part of the process that makes up National Geographic is something I'm dying to experience!

All in all, the experience at IHC and the experiences I'm yet to encounter at National Geographic will stay with me for the rest of my life. It was a long journey, ridden with anxiety and worries and disappointments even but at the end of the day, it was a journey worth taking. What sets the Habitat Young Visionary

Award apart from other such contests is that it is one of the only mediums through which people of my age can voice their opinions and actually be heard and I strongly encourage all undergraduates out there to give it a shot. Not

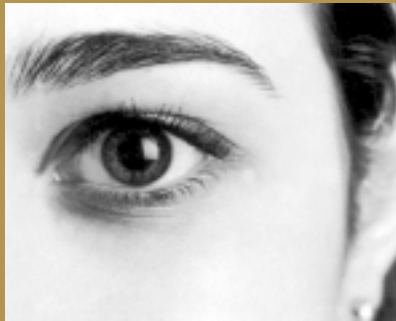
for the prizes (although they are *very* good!). Not for the recognition. But for experiences you'll cherish your entire life.

*second Awardee, 2007*



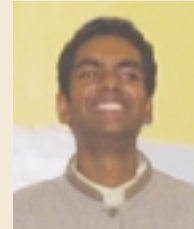
*...it is one of the only mediums through which people of my age can voice their opinions and actually be heard...*





My Journey  
From The  
Classroom  
To The  
Parliament

**Aadarsh Chunkath**  
St. Stephen's College, Delhi



### Introduction:

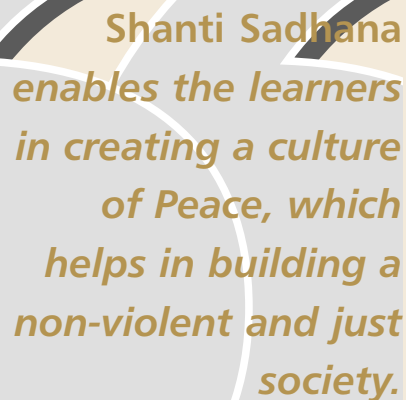
Peaceful co-existence has always been mankind's greatest dream. Yet the present age of globalisation and technological advancement is plagued by violence of all kinds. Peace is the need of the hour. At present there are five inter-dependent threats to the peaceful survival of humanity:

- (1) Crisis of selfishness in problem solving, denying truth and love.
- (2) Destruction of environment
- (3) Violation of human rights in all levels
- (4) Poverty: The "holocaust of hunger and malnutrition and the lethality of the material deprivation of the increasing many exacerbated by enrichment of the few".
- (5) Violence and militarisation: An eye for

an eye, a culture of killing and getting killed, genocide and nuclear weapons, the graph goes up like that.

In the past to solve these problems we followed the dictum of the defunct Roman Empire, "If you want peace, prepare for war" thus it all ended up in violence and failure of peaceful co-existence. After Mahatma Gandhi, especially over the past decade the power of essentially non-violent movement has been manifested in different communities and thus non-violence has become salient in problem-solving efforts. In the light of this, my vision is to introduce a concurrent education scheme to equip the present system of education with love and commitment for serving the nation and to create a world of peace and satisfaction.

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**Shanti Sadhana  
enables the learners  
in creating a culture  
of Peace, which  
helps in building a  
non-violent and just  
society.**

**My Journey From the  
Classroom to the Parliament**

### **(a) Concept of *Shanti Sadhana*— Peace Education**

The concept of Peace education or *Shanti Sadhana* is based on the Gandhian concept of Satyagrah. According to Gandhiji every student is a 'satyagrahi' and the process of education is a journey in search of truth through the path of non-violence. *Shanti Sadhana* in its broader sense consists of education for non-violence, education for tolerance, for environmental protection, human rights, disarmament, etc. Peace education is more than an alternative to war education or the present style of education. Peace research is concerned with development and accumulation of knowledge; Peace education is concerned with development of the process of education in and about Peace; whilst Peace studies as an area of concern relates to the substantive issues regarding the purpose and problems of the dissemination of Peace as a process. Peace education concerns with Peace ideas, Peace studies and Peace activities. *Shanti Sadhana* enables the learners in creating a culture of Peace, which helps in building a non-violent and just society. It deals with conditions within society in which foster violence even including elements of violence in the family and educational system. *Shanti Sadhana* is also to

be considered as 'national security education' or an education system which will produce 'Shanti Sainiks' (peace brigades) to safe guard the development of community and the nation at large.

### **(b) Relevance of Peace Education**

Peace education program or *Shanti Sadhana* can help everyone to experience life as a whole which enables them to become more just, non-violent and peaceful. They have the capacity to germinate peace in the family, in the community, in the nation and in the world; they can act for the welfare of humanity, and they can develop feeling of unity among the followers of different ideologies. It is said "to reach Peace, teach Peace" We may say, before to teach Peace, learn Peace and to learn Peace, we must be trained for justice. Because from justice hope is created, and from hope understanding comes out, and from understanding Peace takes birth.

### **(c) Structure of *Shanti Sadhana* (Peace Education)**

*Shanti Sadhana* system of education will provide training primarily in self-discipline to acquire mental and physical power to control one's emotions and to utilise the energies for

constructive work. Self purification is necessary for an individual to prepare himself for the process of purification of the society.

The second aspect of *Shanti Sadhana* is analytical and scientific study and understanding of the problems in the society and realisation of its holistic nature, to solve them in a non-violent way. This includes survival problems, attitudinal problems and developmental problems. *Shanti Sainiks* have to conduct a proper study dividing the society from larger units to smaller units like district to village, village to ward etc. and analyse the problems of food, shelter, clothing, health, education, employment, land problems, environment and natural resources, water problems, security problems, etc. in detail. Proper discussions and dialogues are to be conducted to find out solutions locally. Proper schemes and plans are to be formulated in par with governmental schemes and sometimes beyond that to solve the problems in a non-violent manner, which will nourish healthy co-existence. Peace education in school level is a necessity. To inculcate the character of peace and justice we have to catch them young. They should also be aware of their own living conditions, problems and should be able to suggest solutions.

## Formula for Peace Education

### S4 X IR = Non-Violent World

Its elements are as follows:

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| S1, Spirit-    | non-violent inspiration of all religious faiths and humanist philosophies  |
| S2, Science-   | non-violent contributions of all sources of knowledge:   |
| S3, Skills-    | non-violent competencies from the Gandhian, non-violent problem solving experiences: individual, organisational, and societal. |
| S4, Sanskriti- | the non-violent inspiration of all arts and tradition  |

Spirit, Science, Skills and Sanskriti must be combined in mutually empowering relationships. Each alone is not sufficient.

But to combine the four “Ss” and to amplify them in service to the well-being of all—from individual, family, school, workplace, community, city, state, nation, region, to

My Journey From the  
Classroom to the Parliament

*Peace education in school level is a necessity. To inculcate the character of peace and justice we have to catch them young.*

*Positive meaning of non-violence is love. It ranges from external manifestation of love to the building up of a new social order free from exploitation, injustice and inequalities, ....*

*My Journey From the Classroom to the Parliament*

world—two additional elements are needed. These are:

- I. Institutions- non-violent institutions including departments of Gandhian Studies etc- public, private, formal and informal, that support and combinatorial and applied problem-solving tasks
- R. Resources- commitments of human and material resources that ensure discoveries, education, action, evaluations, and steady non-violent progress from local to global non-violent community.

Problem-posing method, not problem-solving, strives for the emergence of conscious and critical intervention in reality. To learn Peace through dialogue, the teacher-of-students and students-of-the-teachers cease to exist, and new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. Thus dialogue method is useful and effective in learning peace.

The stage of conflict resolution wholly centres on the concept of *ahimsa* or non-violence.

Positive meaning of non-violence is love. It ranges from external manifestation of love to the building up of a new social order free from exploitation, injustice and inequalities, through affection, kindness, forgiveness, sympathy, tolerance, patience, co-operation and mutual aid. Non violent direct action is to be used as the alternative to violent action to achieve the specific goals in all the three levels: (a) individual level in private life (b) individual and group level in public life (c) collectively in public life. In Gandhi's words: "the essence of non-violent technique is that it seeks to liquidate antagonisms but not the antagonists themselves.

#### **d) Outline of Academic Training**

*Shanti Sadhana* or Peace education is to be incorporated from school level to the level of professional education to equip the students and professionals for proper service in the society based on justice, truth and *ahimsa*. In universities there can be full-fledged courses at graduate and post graduate level. Along with it students in various other disciplines should be trained in peace education as a concurrent subject or as a concurrent short-term course. This will help them to develop a culture of peace in their further activities in the society. Thus education will provide service to the nation rather than

becoming a tool for exploitation. In universities where cafeteria system of education exists, the students in other disciplines can come to the center for Peace education (*Shanti Sadhana Ashram*) to attend the concurrent course as a concurrent subject. In professional colleges (Engineering, Medical, Management, etc.) the students have to learn *Shanti Sadhana* as a concurrent course for one month. Those who got trained in *Shanti Sadhana Ashram* are to be employed in schools and colleges for conducting the training programmes. The trained experts working in society in various categories have to co-ordinate with the *Shanti Sadhana* sections of the near-by educational institutions and bring in a holistic approach for social development. The students in the educational institutions should make the survey and analysis on various problems like agriculture, communal rivalry, castism and so on. The energies and skills of the students are to be diverted for realising and solving the

problems in their locality for self -reliance and for peaceful co-existence.

## Conclusion

The idea of *Shanti gena* originated in the mind of Mahatma Gandhi in the context of communal riots in 1938. Gandhigram Rural University developed it further and a full time *Shanti gena* co-ordinator was appointed in the university for the first time in any part of the world. Martin Luther King (Jr) during his visit to Gandhigram was highly impressed by this idea. He requested to develop it further since "it is bound to grow as it held great promise to the entire humanity".

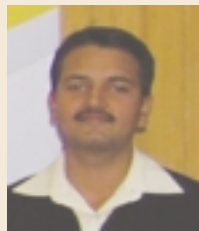
My vision is to develop *Shanti Sadhana* into a proper educational programme relevant to the present society, which will mould committed group of educated youth to serve the nation and to build a non-violent and peaceful India.

My Journey From the  
Classroom to the Parliament

*The energies and skills of the students are to be diverted for realising and solving the problems in their locality for self -reliance and for peaceful co-existence.*

*A good education system is not about rote memory but about inculcating values which would not only help an individual grow but would go on to create a better society.*

*My Journey From the Classroom to the Parliament*



**Aditya N. Prasad**  
*Hansraj College, Delhi*

The primary concern of a visionary should be a healthy society. One should try and achieve as much as possible not only for contemporary society but for our progeny as well. The fundamental pillar of any dynamic society, is its Education System. It is the foundation of any good society. Nonetheless it's also essential that the vision be planted firmly in practical reality. Numerous factors define our society and its' people, but the prime factor is its education.

### **But how does one support this fact?**

A person who has received a good education would do well not only as a good human being, but also as a responsible citizen, the two pillars for a civil society. Therefore it is of prime importance that we have a credible system of education. If the education imparted or the

method is faulty, they are deemed to affect us in the future. A good and credible education system would produce good politicians, bureaucrats and decision makers.

The broader prospect of education has to be understood. A good education system is not about rote memory but about inculcating values which would not only help an individual grow but would go on to create a better society.

Let us take the problem of the public transportation in Delhi. Most of the so-called literate drivers are often found to be driving irresponsibly, be it personal or commercial vehicles. Recent incidents do reveal shocking facts – that majority of the people who own private buses are literate, and so are the



authorities who have been set over them, but we still know and have to live with the fact that there is little affect of the recent incidents on their psyche, their morality and thinking. What they are doing is wrong and in a way detrimental to the nation's growth and a major disturbance in the lives of the families whose kin have suffered from the consequences. The point is - that they have only been given literacy – to read and write, as the education they have received has largely been in a grasping format. Reading and writing has become the bases for education.

The point I am trying to put forth is that as a student I have felt that even though you might not be learning anything in the classroom – you just need to memorize the text in advance and your future is secured. And this is what is even advised by our teachers.

### **This is literacy and not education.**

There would certainly be a vast difference between a person who is literate and a person who has received a good education, for example, an educated person would be responsible when he drives a car and so on. The education system is a question of the masses and as the number of students increases, the condition is deemed to worsen.

Be it any kind of education- primary, secondary, higher secondary, technical etc – the basic fundamental duty of the teacher has to be to go beyond the book, beyond comprehension and rote memory and to teach about life, about one's responsibilities as a citizen in order to strive for a better world.

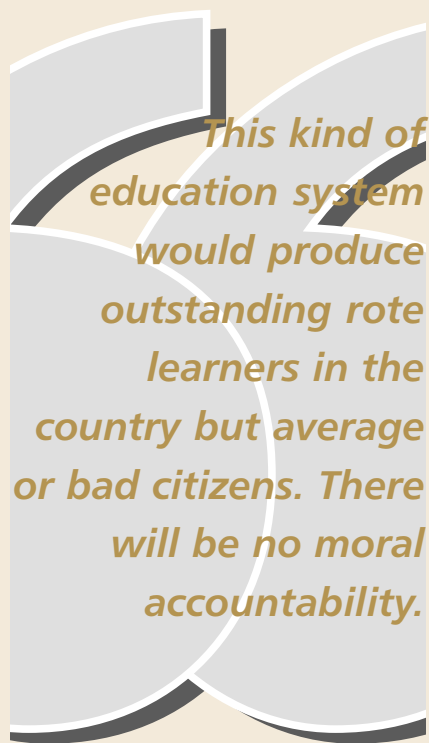
A major difficulty any person would face is to know the existing system – how it functions and delivers. In order to begin reforming, one has to have clear facts and a clearer vision. The Right to Information Act is a point in case. As a student I have been utilising the Act at many fronts and it is by far stronger than any legislation passed.

Let us take the case of a prominent Central Board which conducts higher secondary examinations. The examination system is not as secure and credible as it should be. First the inherent problem of memorizing and writing exists, but over and above the faults involved in the basic delivery system are numerous.

An examiner is supposed to check twenty five scripts a day. A script written in three hours is checked in mere twelve minutes by an examiner who is working for six hours per day. So how can it be expected that there would be no error

My Journey From the  
Classroom to the Parliament

*A script written in  
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is working for six  
hours per day.*



***This kind of education system would produce outstanding rote learners in the country but average or bad citizens. There will be no moral accountability.***

**My Journey From the Classroom to the Parliament**

in such a system? Is it humanly possible for an examiner to check twenty-five answer scripts, which have been written in three hours each? Also the monetary concern comes into picture, as payment is made on the basis of number of answer scripts corrected.

Further when a student applies for rechecking, his/her marks are merely verified and not re-evaluated. So even if an examiner makes a five mark error – this makes a major difference in the life and career graph of the student.

This is a major examination conducted by a major Board spread all over the country –and if the system and mechanism of such a central board are not credible enough, how can other state boards be expected to be accountable.

Four lakhs students appear in the examination conducted by this Board each year, with more than 30,000 verification requests received each year and about three thousand mistakes are detected, this trend is only increasing.

The students produced by this kind of a system are just going to be literates and one must not forget that they are our future – our politicians, our bureaucrats, etc.

The University system is equally dubious. Let us take the example of Meerut University where eighth standard students were found correcting the answer scripts of the university examination.

This kind of education system would produce outstanding rote learners in the country but average or bad citizens. There will be no moral accountability.

At grass root level, the education system is in tatters, students are taught in tents, most of the times there is no teaching at all, so where even basic necessities are not being fulfilled there the concept of a good education seems utopian – the authorities' base things on statistics and statistics are like this on the ground. It must be understood that the environment has to be conducive for imparting education.

I as a student have seen things happening, experienced things, there were instances where we were forced to sit and study mathematics for two to three hours at a stretch, instances where if one does not have a good memory, he is deemed to loose out on marks. Marks have become the very basis to judge an individual in this society, which is detrimental to the development of the individual. Physical training,

music and other extra-curricular activities are totally sidelined, thereby affecting the overall development of a student's personality.

And because I have received a good education, I can today think about this issue and write on this topic.

The solution, as the problem, must be practical enough so that it can be implemented. There are a number of ways to improve the existing systems, only efforts need to be made in this field.

Today, education is not the career of choice, but a career of compromise. If you are a teacher, people sympathize while they curse the prevalent unemployment in the country. Education is one of the highest profit making 'industries' in the service sector, but its workers are the least paid compared to those working in somewhat glamorous sectors like the IT industry. There has to be a gradual change in the mind set of the people and the best talents in the country must come into the education sector.

Students must be taught to question. The concept of questioning was the basis of the emergence of modern Europe from feudal

control, an era that we term as renaissance. A similar kind of renaissance is required in our education sector.

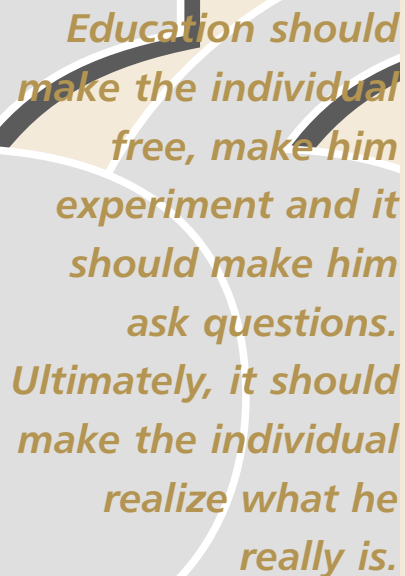
When a student learns the art of questioning the wrong, it opens up the Pandora box of problems that exist in the system, and this would further help in keeping a tab on the system.

If a student is taught to use the Right to Information Act, it would throw open how things are done – and thus the awareness. When information is thrown open it automatically exposes the weaknesses and faults and just the basic fact that the faults have been exposed would result in most of them being rectified. The knowledge of this act would inculcate a spirit of questioning which would be used by the students in their respective fields of work later.

The curriculum must be designed keeping in mind the requirements of students and also the different environments and regional variation in the country. There has to be better infrastructural support, the experience of travelling in a metro train is much better than suffering in the city buses. The experience of driving on four or six lane highways is much better the same way. Coherently, infrastructure has a meaning in education, world

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Ultimately, it should  
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realize what he  
really is.*

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class universities and schools with world class libraries, laboratories and classrooms, in a good building make up a world class infrastructure for education. Talent and resources should not be limited to a handful of IIT's or IIM's. Each village must be given a school with all possible resources and facilities. Each university should have whatever it requires for a better education. This would require huge investments. Education thus has to encourage innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. It is the task of the education system to change the conventional mindset. It also has to inspire the youth for the necessary courage and vision for entrepreneurship.

It is not that our education system has not produced any gems, a few people like M. S. Swaminathan who made India self reliant in food grains, Dr. Varghese Kurien who is the father of the Amul milk movement, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam who dared to build missiles for India, Pt. Ravishankar who is the ambassador of the Indian music to the world. Such people, though in small numbers, were always there. But they are not the products of our education system. This system did not teach them how to become innovators, entrepreneurs or artists. Had it done so, they would have been millions in numbers. These people were self-inspired. To some of them,

their education may have given the technical know-how, but not the dream or the inspiration needed. It is the education which should inspire an individual to become something which he or she really wants to. Education should make the individual free, make him experiment and it should make him ask questions. Ultimately, it should make the individual realize what he really is.

The next step would be to observe and learn from other education systems of the world which are better and try to implement them here and also indigenously develop systems and mechanisms.

Another important step must be to non-bureaucratize education. Interference by political ideologists should not be allowed. There has to be strict check against undue influence of the subjects by the non-academic authorities in power, for example the recent Saffornisation issue, it is but a mere fact that every other person who has nothing to do with history, write and make the students learn the history they want them to know. These non-academic people should not be allowed to enter the forefront, only specialized people in their respective fields must sit down to design the curriculum. Ultimately the

suggestions of students must also be looked into and they must be involved in the designing of their own future.

The youth has to be further made aware of the problems and motivated to play a proactive role in resolving them. Public Interest Litigation, media awareness, online blogs are some of the numerous methods through which awareness must be made.

Lastly, there has to be continuous and timely review of the existing mechanisms and systems, and observation of other education systems in various nations and efforts to adopt their positive points.

An individual cannot take on the existing

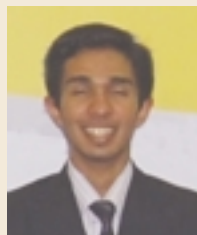
system head on, but has to work with a sustained zeal and efforts. Various issues and problems that I have mentioned need urgent attention. I strongly believe that the education I have received has been enabling me to take up issues and resolving them, the education system is important to me as this is a system through which each of us has to pass and thus it effects a large proportion of our population. Solutions to all the problems do exist and the ways and means are all available. There is nothing in this world that is impossible. It is just that a right will and determination, and a path has to be identified so that the problems are taken to their rightful solutions. Legislations like the RTI Act, can only help in providing us with the means but we have to envision a path and bring about a new way of education.

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***It is just that a right will and determination, and a path has to be identified so that the problems are taken to their rightful solutions.***

*Surprisingly by then I realised that those talks were not futile exercise but infused in me courage unknowingly. It equipped me with an understanding of issues that my countrymen are suffering from.*

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**Appu Esthose Suresh**  
St. Stephen's College, Delhi

With all the excitement of a first year in St. Stephen's college while attending my first post dinner talk, it was the aesthetic pleasure of being countering a 'celebrity' that glossed over my mind. It became a routine exercise, other than in some rare occasions when, that became truly interactive. Otherwise it just adds on to your disillusionment. As I moved into my second year, listening, discussing and debating contemporary issues, with the typical Stephanian snobbery, these talks became a platform to exhort my outrage towards, what I believed is anti-people measures. At one point, somewhere in second year, I posed the most difficult question to my conscience; by organising these talks or rather attending it, what am I changing?

It was not a question that difficult to comprehend and answer was an obvious one-NOTHING!

Surprisingly by then I realised that those talks were not futile exercise but infused in me courage unknowingly. It equipped me with an understanding of issues that my countrymen are suffering from. But the million dollar question remained, what am I doing for that? I have no regrets in confessing that it was my fully developed Stephanian snobbery that fetched answers. If, I being the part of an elitist institution cannot bring change even to a person's life, what moral right I have to be outrageous? But I consoled myself that time hasn't arrived.

In an attempt to organise another talk with Yasin Malik for the society I represent, I happened to go and meet him. There I found half dead faces of old, women, young, even infants. There were here for a protest, asking for their beloved ones who went missing ages ago. Again, it was

not the empathy that disturbed me, but shame for being indirectly responsible for these crimes committed in the name of National Security. I recalled a guest who spoke on “why Afzal Guru should not be hanged”, what I heard there, is right in front of me. Towards the end when I was making my gentle departure with a final question to a boy whom I bonded in those two days, ‘which class you are studying?’ The answer was beyond my expectation. “I stopped studying when my *abba* was arrested, they humiliate me every time I go to school”. With absolute shock, I asked, “who?” With an outrageous face he pointed towards a *jawan* guarding India Gate.

But I on the other hand was trying to come to terms with a larger issue, what is that a *jawan* has to do in a school? I didn’t know then I was venturing into an issue nobody has ever explored until the Google search showed *zero* results to my questions. However, legacy of my college in addressing issues of national concern motivated me to be more determined. I decided to conduct a study on the impact of militarization on education and child rights. I could have easily conducted a study by sitting back in the luxury of my room, but to do maximum justice to the subject I chose to do it in ground.

In ten days, I compiled the archives of two leading English daily to find out details related to my topic. Realising the gravity of the issue, I conducted field studies to five districts of Kashmir valley, most troubled with insurgency and counter insurgency operations. There, after talking to students, teachers, academicians, journalists, and psychologists among other locals I collected a first hand data to start with. The findings and the conclusion of my study was quite disturbing.


There are nearly 50 schools that are converted as barracks for security force with normal teaching happening along side. These schools carry out their regular teaching in huge risk of an ambush. In that case it could happen that majority of the causality would be unarmed children, with a huge benefit of provoking a public outrage against terrorist, justifying continued militarization of J&K. For example in the districts like Baramulla and Kupwara out of the 20 schools occupied by the security force 14 of them are either primary or secondary schools.

It numbs one’s conscience when you see adolescent girls get physically frisked by soldiers before entering classrooms. From Kupwara

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district education office I got to see bundles of similar complaints forwarded by the authorities regarding the forms of atrocities. Not only that it amounts to a tacit strategy of using these schools and its wards as human shield but also to smother the aspirations of new generation by subjugating them to perpetual humiliation. It is very human to be silent in the face of rudeness. With the help of some psychologist in valley, I found that nearly 40% of students in the age group of 4-18 suffer from serious psychological disorders.

J&K happened to be a state where there is no juvenile jail in the country, where the implementation of Children's Act is far from reality. At the same time when government in the parliament clarified that there is no juvenile detainee in J&K. From the available documents there are nearly 1000 minors who are missing in custody. Every year there are some incidents where children are used as human shield for military operations. Being a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, India is bound to follow the principles enclosed in it. It is an international embarrassment where by we remain in a treaty and disown it blatantly. Moreover it is the moral decay of Gandhi's non-violent country that is painful.

It is high time we asked that, Is it the case that the Army sees everyone, including students of all age groups, as prospective militants? Is it that the life of Kashmiri students has become so cheap that they can be used as human shields?

To conclude, it amounts to tacit strategy-whether it is intended be so or not-to smother the aspiration of people by denying them education and terrorize them into a state of psychological subjugation from childhood onwards, under what amounts to be, de facto, military dictatorship. As mentioned earlier, a whole generation is being coerced into accepting humiliation with the help of crude and overpowering might. The indifference of the rest of the country in respect of the smoldering fire of alienation, created by sheer arrogance of power is just counter productive in our attempts to integrate Kashmir with main stream India. If we are serious about integrating Kashmiri's with the rest of India, surely this is not the way to attain the goal. Immediate attention is needed in this regard.

The force should be evicted from the educational institutions. A demilitarized educational zone should be created where no military action is allowed to take place, and in

case of a physical security check it should be gender sensitive as it is the case every where else. Special care needs to be taken to minimise the humiliation inflicted on young minds of Kashmir. In case we fail the outcome will be most undesirable.

“The hottest place in hell is reserved for those who keep neutral at time of crisis.” It is not just a matter of concern for Kashmiri’s alone. It is a larger issue, if we think that Kashmir is an integral part of India, what is happening to Kashmiris might as well happen in the other disturbed parts of the country, just because the policy that we are adopting is wrong. Infact you can see that in Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and in different parts of Andhra Pradesh where they are adopting a similar repressive line be it *sa/wa judam* or state.

It will be a gross collective “National Failure” if we could not bring about a change towards the atrocities committed. As a student of political

science, what I study in theory in my classrooms is to practice it for the welfare of my country. It is the firm belief that being the part of one of the most prestigious institution of the country I have more responsibilities than others, encouraged me to venture in this “healing” effort. When I present these facts as a student of a prestigious institution there should be hardly any doubt about my intention. I am neither an activist nor affiliated to any political organisation. When as a student I informed the government, officials and wrote about this in different news papers it received follow up from different corners. My effort partly paid when defence ministry asked security forces to stop using schools. But this is not complete, there are more things to be done. As I stated above, my vision is to bring in peace to the young minds in conflict areas especially in Kashmir. My case study of Kashmir is an effective tool to generalise the situation in similar conditions. And by discussing it with conscious citizens of the country I am sure that “We” can bring in change.

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*My case study of Kashmir is an effective tool to generalise the situation in similar conditions. And by discussing it with conscious citizens of the country I am sure that “We” can bring in change.*

*But the irony is that while children are dying of hunger, we are also faced with the problem of obesity on the other hand.*

*My Journey From the Classroom to the Parliament*



**Jyothsna Elizabeth Verghese**  
*Jesus & Mary College, New Delhi*

### **Introduction**

Yesterday was Children's Day. But millions of Indian children who live in absolute poverty, went to bed hungry yesterday; not just yesterday, but almost everyday of their lives. As if hunger and poverty were not enough, death is a constant companion, stalking these children like a shadow. It is estimated that every year nearly 11 million children die in India before their fifth birthday. But the irony is that while children are dying of hunger, we are also faced with the problem of obesity on the other hand. In the case of disability, it is estimated that 5-10% of the country's population are afflicted with some form of disability. While thousands of children are deprived of the joy of school and education, hundreds of children commit suicide due to stress over exam pressure. Is there no escape;

is there no scope for healthy living; can't our children be healthy again? I think they can be, and I think I can play a role in ensuring that children in India enjoy the highest level of health possible.

### **My journey**

My deepest desire is to work with children and for children. And by working with children, I hope to make a contribution to the development of India. My journey towards this began in a very small manner, when as a teenager I got an opportunity in educating the children of women who work as domestic helps and children of other low earning mothers. In the year 2002, during my summer vacation, I was specially partnered with a 5-year-old child who was living with Autism and now that same child is doing well in school. Subsequently, I had the privilege of

working with an orphanage run by the Missionaries of Charity, assisting the older children in their studies and taking care of younger ones. Then in college, I got involved in a national movement of university students supporting the oppressed and standing for peace, justice and the rights of weaker sections. All these different exposures gave me certain insights into the special needs of children.

### Burning issues

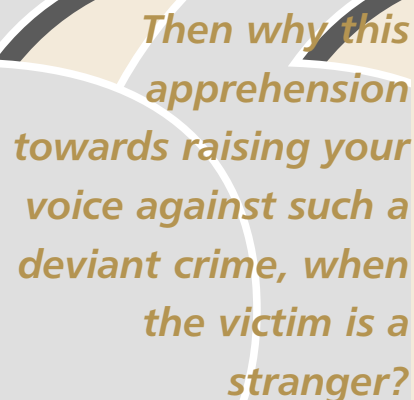
**Harassment:** A major issue faced by children is the harassment faced by them. The harassment can be of different types, but here let us consider the sexual harassment. Looking at the statistics, it is shocking to note that in the year 2006, about 600 rape cases were registered in Delhi of which 76% of the victims were minors. If children are exposed to such an environment, how can a child feel safe, or be expected to grow to be good citizens, when they haven't seen or felt what it actually means to be safe or constructive? There's a saying given by Dr. Haim Ginott that goes like: "Children are like wet cement, whatever falls on them makes an impression". Therefore, why not let good fall on them and make a positive impression on them? Why let tragedy strike them when we very well can dismiss it?

**Poverty and education:** Another issue I found was that when children were expected to be the future leaders of our country, many of them were working as rag-pickers and were being harassed and exposed to harsh conditions of living. While it is believed that children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future, I found that they are still exposed to the inhumane conditions of life due to child labour. Children at the age of 5 years are being pushed into working in factories, being road-side vendors, domestic workers and so on due to poverty, when they actually should be in school exercising their right to education. But then the question arises of whether they even know about their rights? Then again, how will they know, if they are not being educated?

**Problems in education system:** On the other hand, where children are meant to enjoy life thoroughly, the damaging effects of education are stressing them out. This has led to the third burning issue which is that of our education system. The heavy burdens they have to carry on their backs daily at a very young age, the rush of time to complete their homework, rote-learning and other such practices built barriers for them to grow mentally and to develop analytical and creative skills.

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*"Children are like wet cement, whatever falls on them makes an impression".*



*Then why this  
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**Disability:** An area I am passionate about. It disturbs me to see that disabled people are being treated and forced to pay the consequences of their condition. They are denied the special attention required in their education and often looked down by their fellow mates. They are often being rejected jobs in the public and private sector due to their impairment.

### **The mission and my role**

**Awareness:** Considering all these issues, I feel that raising awareness among children and youth about their rights would be a good starting point. If I start this in my college, and if each of my friends spreads it to their friends in the college and neighbourhood and friends-circle, soon we will have a network of informed children and youth. As citizens who are aware of our rights, we can form a watch-group who could solve rampant crimes like harassment of minors by being vigilant and catching hold of the people committing them and handing them over to the authorities, so that it is a lesson to be learnt by the rest. We the citizens of India, claim our fellow citizens to be our brothers and sisters, yet it is known to be mere words. As a students group we could tackle this by spreading the message of unity by raising this question to each other: if the girl or woman being raped was your sister

or your mother or your daughter, wouldn't you make an effort to put a stop to it? Then why this apprehension towards raising your voice against such a deviant crime, when the victim is a stranger?

**Right to education:** The second issue that I would take up is to ensure that all children get an opportunity to go to school. As student's groups we could begin by working in our surroundings at least to ensure that all parents and children are informed about the need for education, and for sending their children to school. But they will not remain in school, if the education system remains the same and encourages rote learning.

**Improving the education system:** Hence my third attempt would be towards improvement of the educational system. As college students, we can work with the schools in setting up more exposure projects, so that children could learn the art of learning creatively and not be stuck to rote learning. For example, for a teacher to explain about wind energy, usually she would draw a wavy line on the board, and a wind mill. Instead why not be more creative and let children experience wind themselves and see a real windmill to understand it better. We could

accompany the children on these trips, thus opening wider avenues of learning and making it more fun and creative. Making a child ask questions, than simply accept what is said, helps the child to learn more and develop an ability to critically analyse ideas and views before accepting them. Giving heavy work load to a child just decreases the child's receptivity to learn more. Why take away the pleasures of childhood before even a child experiences it?

A different perspective towards disability: Over the years, it has been ingrained in the minds of differently abled people and the rest that they are good for nothing. But these differently abled people have taken challenges and proved their potential to the world inspite of their condition. My mission as a student would include contributing to changing the perspective towards the disabled people. I could contribute to setting up self help groups through which the differently abled people can find opportunities to be self – employed or find suitable employment in government or private sector. I could also work towards conducting workshops with the involvement of the differently abled people on issues concerning disability. I could organise film

shows to sensitize people to the various issues faced by the differently abled people. Finally but definitely not the least to empower them with a sense of viewing their 'weakness' as a strength and inspiring and encouraging others.

## Conclusion

There's a saying that goes: "there are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children, one is roots, the other wings". To do this, we have to increase awareness among children and youth about their rights to prevent harassment, motivate children and their parents to send children to school so that they have a better life; and revamp the education system, so that children can learn creatively and develop an ability to critically analyse ideas and views before accepting them; create self help groups for the differently abled people while sensitising the larger population to issues faced by them. As a college student, these are things I can start from the class-room. And yes, by doing these things I can make the voices of children and youth reach the parliament. If that happens, then we can ensure that Children's Day is not celebrated once a year, but everyday becomes a children's day for all the children in our country.

*Making a child ask questions, than simply accept what is said, helps the child to learn more and develop an ability to critically analyse ideas and views before accepting them.*

*My vision for India is an education system that teaches the young citizens how to set goals. The ultimate aim is a system that produces leaders, and not mere graduates.*

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**Karan Nagpal**

*St. Stephen's College, Delhi*

I envision an India where everyone is a visionary. "We are not limited by money, but by the poverty of our own dreams."<sup>1</sup> My country today is in that position: limited by the poverty of its dreams, or rather, by the poverty of dreams dreamt by its citizens and by the absence of well-defined goals in their lives. We may declare our intention of becoming a superpower by 2020, or 2025, but have we considered what being a superpower means? Have we considered what will be our role in the process? Have we even contemplated what we want to be in ten years from now?

If you are an average Indian (and I trust you are not), the answers to the questions will be no, no, and no. This is because our

education system does not equip us to set value-based goals. Earl Nightingale wrote, "People with goals succeed because they know where they are going." Accordingly, people who do not set goals don't know where they are going. If the parts do not know where they are going, how can the "whole" know where *it* is going? I consider "going" in this context to be synonymous with "developing" or "evolving." We *are* developing and evolving, but how?

My vision for India is an education system that teaches the young citizens how to set goals. The ultimate aim is a system that produces leaders, and not mere graduates. Leadership can be inculcated in many ways—

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Weed, American thinker and motivational speaker.



and I will briefly describe some of them—but teaching the youth how to set goals is the most feasible way.

The most important skill required in India is leadership. Schools are realising the importance of extra-curricular activities and sports as precursors to this. However, adequate access to extra-curricular and sporting opportunities does not exist in most schools today. The pressure to deliver academic results, the scarcity of competitive opportunities and the limited space in most schools hinder the schools' efforts towards this end. It is also true in many cases that the school itself is not making these efforts.

For instance, consider the activity of Model United Nations. In a year, there are barely 2 Model UN conferences in Delhi. Only one thousand students get the opportunity of participating in either of them. One thousand is a negligible proportion of all students in public schools in Delhi. This proportion becomes increasingly minuscule as we broaden our classifications, to include *all* schools in Delhi, all schools in North India, and eventually, all schools in India.

To make this opportunity accessible to government school students, DPSMUN started

a committee in Hindi. However, all government schools invited declined. They simply weren't willing to prepare their students for such an event.

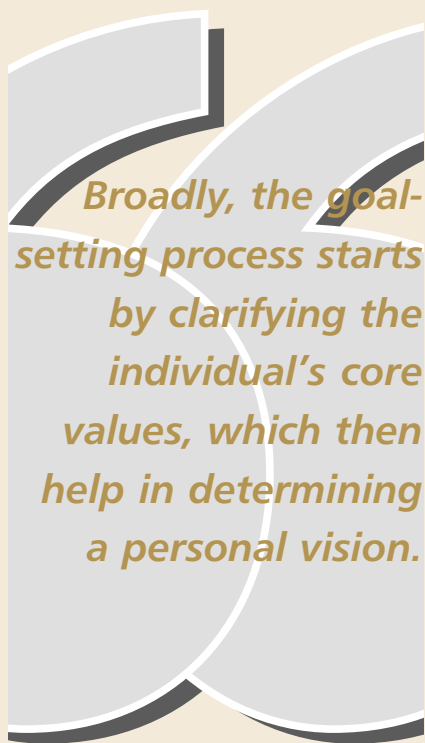
Many other such activities that develop leadership, such as Youth Parliament, NGO outreach programs, other "conferences" for school students are not effective because of their transient nature. Besides, they are not able to influence a significant proportion of school students.

Alternatively, in many countries, compulsory military training is viewed as an ideal apparatus for developing team-work and discipline. However, this does not necessarily lead to leadership development. Military culture, which promotes regimentalization and a religious adherence to the superior's order (for a good reason, no doubt) blunts a person's courage to take independent and unconventional decisions and to take the road less travelled by; in short, to be a leader.

A comprehensive policy that includes goal-setting in school education is the best way to make our adolescents leaders. This is my vision for the Indian education system.

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*The pressure to deliver academic results, the scarcity of competitive opportunities and the limited space in most schools hinder the schools' efforts towards this end.*



*Broadly, the goal-setting process starts by clarifying the individual's core values, which then help in determining a personal vision.*

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The goal-setting process will be part of the NCFSE<sup>2</sup>. In my model, students of classes '6-8' will be given intensive training in the goal-setting process through 2-week long training camps held during the summer vacations within the school. The camps would then not interfere with normal academics, and would make the summer vacations much more productive than they are.

This process has to be gradual. It will start from the public schools in the cities, then extend to the government schools in all urban areas, and gradually, over a period of time spread to the rural areas. This pattern would thus follow the order of decreasing infrastructural capabilities among schools in the country. But infrastructure is not the only requirement for this program. We also need a co-operative school management. Nobody likes change, but the managements in urban public schools would be *least averse* to this idea, as they have been trying to promote leadership-development on their own in the recent past.

There will be no teachers in these camps; only

guides. The atmosphere would encourage the students to explore and learn the process by doing, perhaps through games. Teaching through this medium is much more powerful than reading the same process in a book.

Broadly, the goal-setting process starts by clarifying the individual's core values, which then help in determining a personal vision: what does the individual want to be one, five, ten years hence. Once we know where we want to go and why, all that remains is the how. This involves evaluating the paths that can be taken towards the dream, and breaking up the large tasks into smaller parts. A goal is simply a dream with a deadline. Once we attach deadlines to these smaller parts, we write the goals, and re-assess this "goal card" everyday.

The camp would also teach visualisation: imagining the accomplishment of the goal, and dealing with setbacks through self-belief. It is very easy to lose motivation; all it takes is one negative word, or one missed deadline. The camps would teach the students how to overcome this.

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<sup>2</sup> National Curriculum Framework for School Education The HRD ministry can direct the NCERT to include "Teaching of Leadership skills and Goal-setting" as a Core Concern of the NCFSE.

There is a vast body of work on the goal-setting process produced by many motivational speakers, particularly John Maxwell, Jim Ron, Skip Ross, Vic Johnson etc. This can be adapted to the Indian context, and tailored to local needs: language, contexts, and examples, by a team of psychologists, sociologists, educators working under the Department for Higher Education, Human Resource Ministry. This department will be the nodal agency overseeing the implementation of the process. In the schools operated by the state governments, the Department would work through its counterparts in the state government.

Initially, the school teachers would be the guides for the children. These teachers will be trained by either the NCERT or the HRD ministry. However, over the next few years, the students of classes 9-12, who would themselves have undergone the training during classes 6-8, would be required to volunteer as guides for two of their four high school years. This would breed positive leadership among the youth, and act as a strong incentive to act as constructive role models.

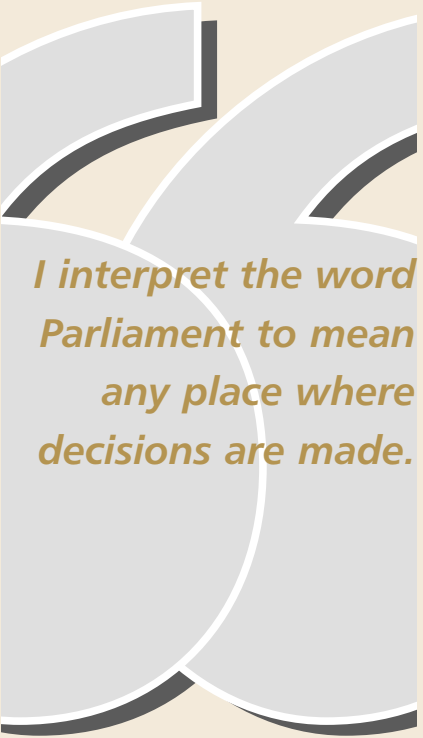
The entire model would exert a great financial burden on the Central government. The costs

would include the cost of preparing the course material and adapting it to the local contexts, the cost of training the teachers for the initial years (before the students of classes 9-12 assume this responsibility), the administrative costs of the camps etc.

To deal with costs, first we will have to treat them as investments, not costs. Expenditure that builds skills always returns multiplied as increased wealth. Moreover, in my model, the students themselves may be able to pay for this program. The Department of Higher Education can establish the cost per student. This cost can then be added to the examination fees students pay to the national and state education boards at the time of class 10 and class 12 board examinations (or their equivalent). All exemptions granted to a student for these fees will also apply to this additional cost.

The accrued cost to a student would be much less than the benefits, as we will be using economies of scale. As the number of students paying this fee increases, the total cost would remain largely constant. The same amount of knowledge capital will be distributed amongst a larger number of students, but because the capital is intellectual, the share of each student

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would not diminish. The cost-to-student will decrease as more and more schools are brought under this program. However, the initial funds would have to be provided by the government, because of a lag between the students' benefits-period (classes 6-8), and the cost-period (classes 10 and 12).

I interpret the word Parliament to mean any place where decisions are made. When my vision becomes reality, the classroom will become a

place where young citizens are equipped through the goal-setting process to make decisions for themselves, for their communities and their country. Thus, the goal-setting process would itself be the journey from the classroom to the Parliament: from being a student to being a leader; from learning how to make decisions in the Classrooms, to actually making them in the "Parliaments". This is the vision that we need to make a reality.

**L. Gokulahasan**

*Loyola College, Chennai*

The first thing I want to do is to thank the India Habitat Centre and the National Geographic Channel for two things (I really have to say this, because it is the truth), one for giving me such a wonderful opportunity to voice my views, the other is for bringing up this topic at the most appropriate time, because with the globalisation phenomenon being more vigorous than ever before and with India being more open to the World than ever before, I feel that the time is most ripe to discuss about Her (India) Future. Below I believe are the problems and solutions.

### **I. Myth and Reality:**

From a superficial point of view, our Nation's leaders may appear to be the main source of all misery in India. It may also be true that most of them are extremely selfish and corrupt. But I

personally feel that they are not the main source of all problems in India. India is a democracy and a very strong one too (besides being the largest) and thanks to the Election Commission of India, the elections are tried to be conducted quite fairly in India. The people are empowered to freely choose and elect their leaders. And in every democracy, the people blaming their leaders is synonymous with the people blaming themselves.

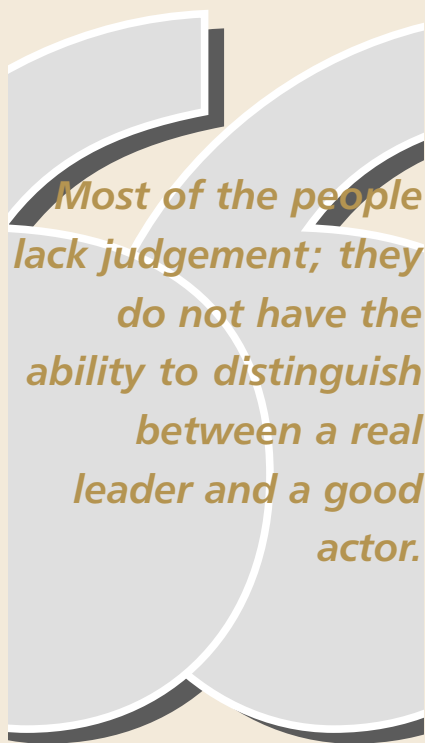
### **II. Problems:**

According to me there are two main problems in India, namely Illiteracy and the lack of Social Awareness and The Apathetic Attitude of the Literate.

#### **(i) Illiteracy:**

When I speak about Illiteracy, I not only mean

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the inability to read and write, but also the degree of social awareness prevalent among the common people of India. Most of the people lack judgement; they do not have the ability to distinguish between a real leader and a good actor. And our politicians make full use of their ignorance and the politicians (most of them) put in their best efforts to make the people stay this way or in some cases put in extra efforts to increase their ignorance.

This has led to innumerable problems in India. More and more parties have cropped up and more the number of parties, more is the negative impact (like a virus multiplying exponentially). Politics has become the most profitable and the safest (with Black Cats and Z Order Security) anti-social business available in the country.

**(ii) The Apathetic attitude of the literate:**

The more worrying thing in India is that even those people who are in a position to change the situation are not doing anything to change it. I am referring to the educated and the socially aware class. Most of them feel that it is none of their business to try to change things, and even the microscopic minority who aspire to make a difference are mentally thwarted by the magnitude of the task.

I am not denying that it is a mammoth task to take up, but all I am saying is that 'a trial costs nothing'. If sufficient numbers of us try to change the situation, the probability will increase tremendously and there is no other possibility but success for at least some of us and in due course of time, all of us. Swami Vivekananda said that "Give me a Hundred Capable Youth and I will change the Face of India". My notion is the same. I believe that, that is all it would take to transform India into a paradise that She deserves to be.

**My Vision:**

I am convinced that the solution to the above problems lies with the youth of India because of three reasons:

1. Only they possess the energy and courage that is required to drive India to success.
2. There is a saying in Tamil that goes like this - 'A person who cannot bend when he is 5 years old, will not be able to bend when he is 50 years old'. Therefore it is easier to mould the youth and focus their energies in the right direction.
3. The population of the youth in India is very high, in fact the highest in the world in

number and in proportion. So rallying them together will result in the emergence of a mighty movement.

They have to take up the task of educating themselves and the masses and make them aware of essential information and rights.

A transformation like this cannot happen overnight. It requires time and planning. The roots of this kind of a transformation can start from the college level, by involving the final year students. In every college, there are organisations like the NSS (National Service Scheme), YRCS (Youth Red Cross Society), Rotaract club, Students Union etc. These are organisations which connect students. There are many students here who share the same intentions and ideas that I have, infact there are some 15 similar students in my class itself. All these students need is a little bit of guidance to transform them into good leaders.

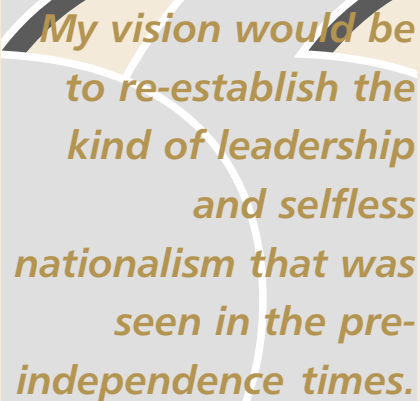
I can go to these organisations, get in touch with such students and start a small movement, wherein we go systematically, to the nearby villages and towns and try to spread political awareness among uninformed people and elucidate the kind of promising future available to them. First we can focus all our energies on a

particular locality, convince the people of our credibility and convince them of the long term goodness that can come out of a good administration. Then we can promise them such an administration and ask them to elect us as their representative. If we get elected, I am sure we can deliver more than what we promised. Once we do this, we would get the courage and credibility to expand our network and take it to the next stage. The next stage would be to contact other colleges and the respective college secretaries and ask them to try the same thing in their college. They would go to the people in their neighbouring localities and adopt the same approach that we employed. We can spread this to the whole of Tamil Nadu and consequently to the whole of India. That this kind of a phenomenon can actually work in the real world can be seen from the Microfinance example. Introduced in Pakistan by the Grameen Bank founded by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus, the concept had very simple beginnings. But gradually it began to spread to the entire world. This concept has now been adopted by the World Bank.

Therefore this shows that grassroots movements can initiate chain reactions which would ultimately yield success. We will also enlist the support of the press, social information

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*Then we can promise them such an administration and ask them to elect us as their representative. If we get elected, I am sure we can deliver more than what we promised.*



*My vision would be to re-establish the kind of leadership and selfless nationalism that was seen in the pre-independence times.*

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channels like the National Geographic Channel and national news channels for our cause. With every election we win, we would become stronger and gradually we would start making a significant impact on the Indian Administration.

***Consequences of my Vision would be:***

1. On the Literate: When we have established a foundation like the one above, many more well qualified capable people who earlier had a phobia of Indian politics, would come forward to contribute their part to the progress of the Nation.
2. On the Illiterate: We would do our level best to eradicate illiteracy and social ignorance, by providing access to quality education to lesser privileged people.
3. What is the assurance that we will sustain this performance?: We would have made the majority sufficiently literate and in future it would be their responsibility to see that good governance is carried on through good leaders. Empowered by way

of education and knowledge, every voter will be able vote judiciously to ensure that corrupt people do not get voted to power. If the people feel that anyone else could better our performance or sustain it further, then they will vote wisely to get their aspirations realized.

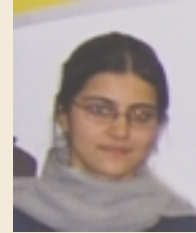
I am already working on such a movement. I am a recipient of the Goldman Sachs Global Leaders Award and we awardees form a National and International students' network. I plan to involve them as well in this process.

I will lead the movement which I have now described. I want to become a leader who can gain the trust of the people. I would like to stand for elections, go to the parliament and espouse the issues of the people. I would like to reproduce the kind of administrative vision that was seen in the Nehruvian days. Ultimately, my vision would be to re-establish the kind of leadership and selfless nationalism that was seen in the pre-independence times. Without a doubt, this will put India back on her way to Peace and Prosperity.

*Mr. L. Gokulhasan was one of the top 15 entries but he could not be present for the Semi-Finals.*



**Meghna Brahmachari**  
*St. Stephen's College, Delhi*



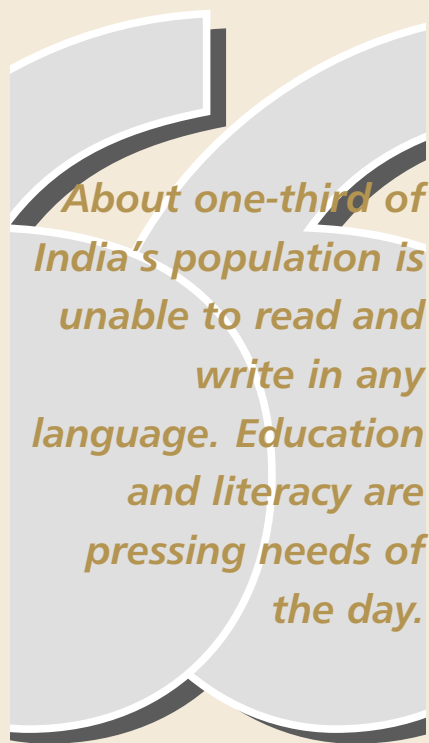
As an Indian, the word parliamentarian often evokes the thought of a hidden agenda. After all it is quite difficult to believe that an individual would spend his or her life in the service of society without a selfish motive. The task of being a member of parliament, of making decisions that could alter the course of a nation, is a daunting one.

India, in particular, is a country of many contradictions and dilemmas. A nation united despite being home to more than twenty-four different languages yet deeply divided by one of the most rigid social systems the world has ever seen, the caste system, a social stratification in which social classes are defined by thousands of hereditary groups. The rights and privileges of an individual are determined according to their position in a pre-defined social hierarchy.

Unfortunately, the caste system is deeply ingrained in the Indian consciousness. This mindset exists both in urban as well as rural India. Although economic progress has decreased the intensity of this discrimination in urban India, the problem persists in rural India.

However, the caste system is not the only form of social discrimination that exists in India. Gender discrimination is a problem that needs to be immediately eliminated from our social horizon. A harsh patriarchal system exists in many parts of the country, especially in northern India. Women are discriminated against to such an extent that having a girl child is now seen as a burden and female infanticide has almost become a norm in several states such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Of the women who do survive, a

*Gender discrimination is a problem that needs to be immediately eliminated from our social horizon.*



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majority of them spend their lives without the rights and privileges enjoyed by their male counterparts. These inequalities are also reflected in statistics.

The overall literacy rate in India of 65.38% is quite low. The rural literacy rate is even lower at 59.21%. About one-third of India's population is unable to read and write in any language. Education and literacy are pressing needs of the day.

Education to a large extent, is the answer to several problems afflicting Indian society today-poverty, unemployment, caste based discrimination and gender bias. Education for all is the first step towards sustainable inclusive growth.

Annual government expenditure on education as of the financial year 2000-2001 is about 4% of the Gross Domestic Product and about 13% of the expenditure on all sectors. In addition to various government schemes, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also taking up the challenge of increasing literacy rates in the country. One such organisation is Pratham, which has launched the Read India movement, an accelerated learning program to help over 60

million children read, write and do basic arithmetic.

I feel that the evolution of an educational system that ensures basic education for all and simultaneously endeavours to eradicate social evils such as gender bias and caste based discrimination from the minds of India's youth should be the target that India as a nation sets for herself. Achieving this target would imply an immense amount of innovation in public policy.

In many parts of rural India, parents are unwilling to send their children to school, as they are unable to see any quick economic benefits of doing so. The effective implementation of a system of quid pro quo is the need of the hour. Parents should be given an incentive to send their children to school. In addition to the Midday Meal Scheme, the government should evolve a scheme linked to the already existing Public Distribution System such that parents who send their children to school are given higher subsidies in food grains and other essential household needs. The fraction of subsidy given should be directly proportional to the child's attendance in school. This scheme will not involve too much additional expenditure by the government as a portion of the funds that are currently employed in the provision of

subsidies on essential goods have to be reallocated according to this scheme.

A disturbing trend in India's educational system is the constant interference of political parties in the curriculum determined by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). These parties use school textbooks as an arena to promote their own political ideology. On one hand we have the saffronisation of Indian history by parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party and on the other we have the over-glorification of certain historical personalities by the Congress Party. Thus it is very important to make the NCERT a completely autonomous body which cannot be subject to control by the government of the day. Only the Supreme Court should be given the power to overrule the decision of the NCERT.

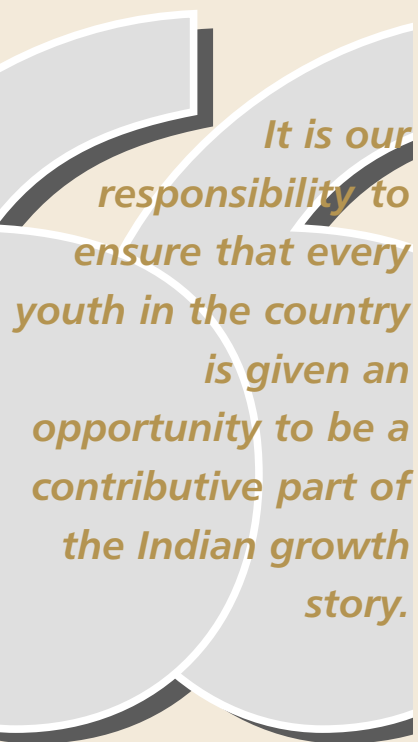
The curriculum is a very important tool that policy makers have at their disposal as it can help shape the mindset of India's youth. History and the Social Sciences should be taught in a way that makes children aware of the inherent equality of all people. Stories highlighting the strength and capability of women, such as Laxmibai, the Rani of Jhansi and Razia Sultan should be given due attention.

Physics, Chemistry and Biology should also be given enormous importance. Scientific education has to move away from heavy theory and made more practical. This would require an immense amount of infrastructural investment in the form of equipment and laboratories across the country. However the government need not undertake all this investment alone. The Research and Development Wing of corporate companies should be given the responsibility of setting up a given number of small laboratories with adequate facilities and well-trained personnel in every district, in exchange for which the government should give these companies tax benefits and remuneration in other forms. Laboratories will give children a first-hand practical experience of the lessons taught in class and this will maintain and possibly increase their interest in these subjects.

Children should also be given a basic training in any vocational skill of their choice from a given number of options. This will give them economic empowerment and also add to their skill base.

However the keystone of this entire system is the employment of good teachers. Most teachers would not want to work in government schools because their salary would not be as high as their

*Laboratories will give children a first-hand practical experience of the lessons taught in class and this will maintain and possibly increase their interest in these subjects.*



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market value today. Also, the government cannot afford to pay teachers very high salaries as its resources are limited. However, the government can use public policy to its advantage and make it compulsory for every person pursuing a Bachelor's of Education degree to teach in government schools for at least two years.

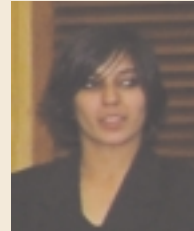
It is evident that implementing these ideas will be expensive and require a budget expansion by the government. Public expenditure on education in 2001-02 was Rs. 84,179 Crores (at 4.02% of GDP). However, due to the nature of the governmental framework in India, a large fraction of this

expenditure is superfluous and illegally appropriated by government agents. Involving the private sector in the educational system will increase the efficiency with which funds are utilised.

Finally, and most importantly, the responsibility of ensuring the efficiency and honesty in the implementation of these policies lies with the people of India. With laws such as the Right to Information Act, we can ensure transparency in the functioning of the government. It is our responsibility to ensure that every youth in the country is given an opportunity to be a contributive part of the Indian growth story.

**Neha Chaturvedi**

*Lady Shriram College, New Delhi*

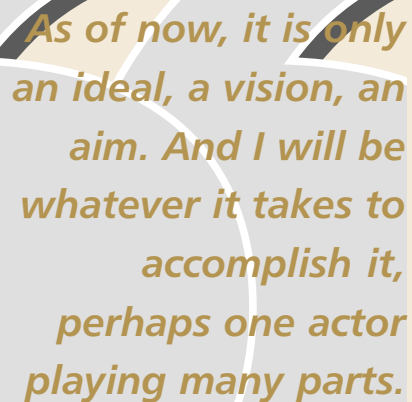


*"Do not complain, either change it or just shut up!"  
"One has to be a part of the system to change the system."*

**T**hese two statements are a part of my blood stream. They were reiterated when I watched 'Rang De Basanti' and 'Yuva'. But the violence made me uncomfortable. I do not think we can afford to give away the beautiful minds that can think big to the insanity of violence. This country is so vast and full of insensitivities, that the point of martyrdom is more often than not, missed, the grand idea overlooked. We have all been part of some group or the other which has tried to make changes in the existing system. I worked in teams dealing with projects related to energy, cleanliness, an NGO which dealt with local issues of the city, and the experience was different every time. What did not change was the belief that one

needs to feel alienated and uncomfortable in a situation, to feel angry and pained by what is happening in the world, to be able to feel the need to change it. One needs to be both a loner and a people's person, in order to analyse situations and then share ideas. After two years of pre-school, fourteen years of schooling, almost two years of college and twenty years as an Indian, I am what I am because of my experiences in various spheres of life. I am, as each one of us, just another site where forces intersect. My aim is, therefore, to create such sensitivity in the people of this country, especially the youth; to create awareness about the fact that there are choices at every step in life. Every step taken or not taken makes a difference. We need to realise

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that it is not some predestined grand scheme, which shapes the events in this country. It is what we do, or not do, that makes the world around us the way it is. India, every part of it, is precisely what its inhabitants are. My vision is not to solve issues like poverty or corruption. My aim is to bring about a sense of collective responsibility, through understanding, empathy, a feeling of belonging and the urge to make the best of where one is; to make people aware of the problems around them and the ways in which they can contribute in solving them.

It is difficult to locate where exactly the journey began. I was always the one whom friends called the 'cynic'. I always felt and still feel uncomfortable with the way things are around me. The ways in which most people react to situations enrage me. I have always wanted to be the one who could make a change, not because I think of myself as some great reformer, but because it bothers me. Whenever people scoffed at a daughter of a divorcee; rioted over some comment passed about their religion by a callous lad; passed by in a big car at a traffic signal with a disgusted expression at a starved beggar; blamed the government they had been campaigning for-it bothered me, and still does. The complete disregard of social responsibility

irks me. And I always wanted to change it. As a 6 year old, it was the desire to be the Prime Minister of the nation; at 16 it was the passion to be an IIT product walking away as an official of the Indian Foreign Service; at 26 it may be being a reformer, an academic, a social worker, an artist and a woman who can see her vision taking shape. As of now, it is only an ideal, a vision, an aim. And I will be whatever it takes to accomplish it, perhaps one actor playing many parts.

Art and Social Service are my driving forces. 'Art' refers to the visual arts and dramatics. The impact of illustrations of mythological stories on the mind of a four year old was inescapable. With time I realised I need not to talk to a person, but could simply paint or draw to convey my message, even if I spoke a different language. I felt victorious when I made a Spanish pen pal, Susan, with whom my letters were nothing but mere sketches and paintings. We shared the books we read, our ideas of family, friends, festivals, everything that a 9 year old could, through those paintings. But soon came the moment of revelation, when the same paintings stood meaningless in front of a group of students in a blind school I visited as part of an outreach programme. I was baffled for months till the

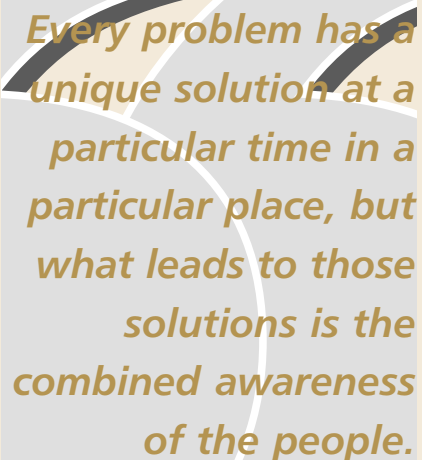
anxiety of not being able to communicate faded from the young mind. It all came back two years later, when suddenly while narrating a play on stage I noticed the laughter on the faces of the mentally and physically challenged children who had come to watch. I realised that I could communicate with those blind people, through yet another form of art - theatre. And I loved it. I now knew that in a country with innumerable dialects and diverse cultures, painting could help me relate to those who could not speak my language or, and drama to those who could not see what I painted irrespective of their being educated or not. Now I needed a medium to get these forms to reach the masses. It was Media. Art channeled through Media was what had made an impact on me. Appreciation and implementation of art as an instrument of social reform emerged as extremely important. Art needs to get space in the lives of people as an integral part. With every lesson of literature in the classroom, with every discovery of the growth of art forms and styles across the world, I feel more convinced about the importance that art deserves to get in the society. I cannot forget, even for a moment, the impact of the renaissance artist, or the cubist or the surrealist forms. The effects of films like 'Fiza', "Mr. & Mrs. Iyer", "Pinjar" are beyond measure. Art grows, and it grows at pace

greater than anything else and it can definitely reform the society it mirrors. Theatre and now the biggest influencing factor in the lives of people, Media, has to be put to use in every possible way as a forum of creating awareness, discussing issues, and finding solutions. I can feel the potential of media as a free lance journalist for more than a year now.

Art needs to be used as an instrument of creating awareness and sensitivity. Educational institutions need to work on inculcating the sense of social responsibility in students. I was lucky to be in a school where they had a subject called 'Moral Science'. I still shudder to waste a drop of water after one those classes when a teacher discussed about the problems one faces in a desert with the help of a documentary. "The Inconvenient Truth" manages to unsettle me as many times as I watch it. The "Vagina Monologues" managed to make a lot of us think. It is this impact of art that I want to be used in waking up people as they try to sleep over problems. Schools need not aim at producing doctors and engineers alone. The idea should be to produce thinking citizens who cherish humanistic ideals. Creating toppers who get engrossed in individual success need not be the top priority. I suggest that schools make it

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*Every problem has a unique solution at a particular time in a particular place, but what leads to those solutions is the combined awareness of the people.*

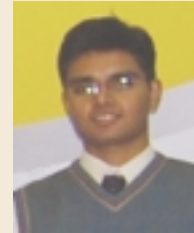
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a point to expose their students to their history and problems of the world around them through various art forms. The student initiatives to make amends in problematic areas should be rewarded in order to encourage them.

I am today, a student of literature who can appreciate art, a free lance journalist who can understand the problems of the society, a non-religious, rebellious girl of twenty from a lower middle class family of academically inclined people with religious ideas. I have a vision to initiate another step towards the making of a better India. I want to use art as an instrument of social welfare. By February 2008, I aim to bring together a group of people in Agra, my hometown. The group will be called 'WE'. The members will be students, young visionaries and a few senior members of the society who can guide us through this. The aim is to locate problems and create awareness about them through newspapers, local news channels and theatrical performances. We will seek support

from the government machinery and do what we can to sort them. This will, in time, extend to various cities and to the underprivileged masses making them a part of the endeavour. At the same time, we shall continue with our studies, work in our respective fields so that no one seeks material and personal gains from the organisation, since I know, from prior experience, that commercialisation is fatal to the growth of any welfare organisation. The idea is to encourage art, not only as a form of expression but also as an instrument of revolution. Art cannot give solutions. Every problem has a unique solution at a particular time in a particular place, but what leads to those solutions is the combined awareness of the people. Awareness, which can be created through art, can lead to a truly democratic functioning of the society. Bringing about such awareness, to each and everyone around me; awareness that they can make a choice, bring about a difference and provide a solution, is my dream, my vision, my motive of life.





**Rasaal Dwivedi**

*National Institute of Technology, Raipur.*

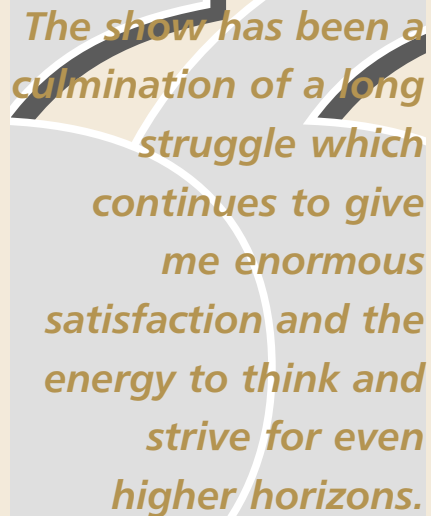
***“Yes, nations are often built by great leaders; who rise from amongst the masses, capture their imagination & stimulate the people to follow their dreams.”***

*-Mohandas K. Gandhi at Inter Asian Relations Conference at New Delhi, 1946-47*

**A**s newspapers bustle with the news of Indian CEOs leading the global markets and at the other end of the page, the news of some of our rowdy legislator MLAs (facing criminal charges) beating up media persons, the relevance and irony of this statement by the father of the nation can hardly be exaggerated. This stifling problem of disillusionment of committed youth from politics and my endeavour (SWADES/ LEAD INDIA) to alleviate this systemic malice forms the centerpiece of this essay, which is a statement of my vision for a resurgent and empowered India. I shall also discuss two other problem-solution subsets which deserve urgent attention- **Participatory Democracy and Illiteracy.**

**First-**While India is a predominantly ‘young’ (Average age of an Indian is 24.8 years) country with an enviable reputation for efficient, motivated and innovative workforce; our political system can justifiably be labeled as a gerontocracy which doesn’t seem to promote the committed youth to join the mainstream leadership of the nation. As we celebrate 60 years of our vibrant, utterly enchanting democracy, this experience shall always be charade unless we ensure that the most powerless, the most zealous, the young can hope to rise to the highest echelons of power. Unfortunately, it seems that our current political structure doesn’t provide a platform for the

***As we celebrate 60 years of our vibrant, utterly enchanting democracy, this experience shall always be charade unless we ensure that the most powerless, the most zealous, the young can hope to rise to the highest echelons of power.***



*The show has been a culmination of a long struggle which continues to give me enormous satisfaction and the energy to think and strive for even higher horizons.*

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young, honest and able to actively engage in political processes. It is this tragic irony that motivated me to think and envision a platform that could be the starting point for youth interested to join national leadership; a potent catalyst that imbues our political process with the vigor and vivacity of young spirit unadulterated by corruption and malice.

I, along with a friend from IIT Kanpur whom I met at 'National Youth Parliament' held at IIT Roorkee in Feb.2006, developed the concept of SWADES—Leaders Wanted, a political reality TV show that offers the requisite platform for able Indians to short cut their road to the seats of power through a rigorously designed selection procedure (including a public voting round), at the end of which the winners would either be taken up by the contemporary political outfits or they would be sponsored in general elections by the show (in case no political parties comes out to offer a seat to the concerned winner candidate). Through the course of 17 months, the two of us developed the draft, thought of the premise and viability of the idea, delineated the parameters for selection of candidates and the phases of the show and came out with the final executive plan of SWADES. We presented the idea and

won prizes in international b-plan competitions and approached TV production houses to materialize the idea. During this process, we faced a lot of cynicism and ridicule too as some redundant people opined that this idea was immature and unfit for a large country like India. Finally the idea has seen the light of the day in the form of LEAD INDIA, the nation-wide initiative taken by The Times of India Group though we aren't at the helm of steering the show. The show will be shown on television in Dec.-Jan. and I hope it will be the beginning of the change that India needs to rejuvenate its leadership. What is needed further is a more mass based and pervasive social movement (as we had proposed for SWADES) that not only handpicks some deserving elites (as in LEAD INDIA) but reaches out to the poor and the powerless who have the zeal and commitment to work for the nation. The show has been a culmination of a long struggle which continues to give me enormous satisfaction and the energy to think and strive for even higher horizons. It shall, in fact, be the vehicle for the journeys of many worthy students from their classrooms to our parliament. Incidentally, the endeavor comes out to be in amazing complementarity with the title of this essay!

**Second-**Coming to the aspect of Parliamentary Democracy, I believe that India will become a superpower only when it significantly empowers its teeming millions. The tentacles of the welfare state seem emasculated before the massive problems of education, public health, infrastructure and these problems can be combated effectively only by involving the people not as 'subjects' but as 'partners' through the 'human social agency' model in development programs. My state Chhattisgarh is grappling with naxalite problem (with 14 out of 18 districts affected) and our policy makers need to realise that the first step towards curbing naxalism has to be towards preventing the alienation of the people from the statecraft.

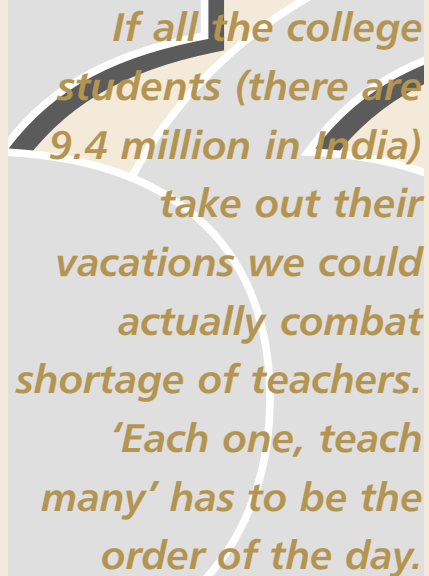
In America, when 9/11 happened, the person who took charge of the affairs of rehabilitation, reformation etc. wasn't President Bush or the Governor but Rudy Guilani, then mayor of New York. Do we see that kind of decentralisation taking place in India? The process has to commence by giving financial autonomy to panchayats and ensuring that they are truly a representation of society rather than the concoction of class, caste, alliance identities by conducting free, fair and regular elections. The model has to be

adopted elsewhere too, like in organisations and educational institutions. For example, Student Placements of my institute registered a surge of 120% this year because for the first time, students were actively engaged in the management of Placement Cell. This paid historic dividends because the students worked zealously to improve their own future prospects and in the process the institute has also benefitted manifold. Similarly, as the only student member of the governing body of the Senate of my institute, I tried to involve and encourage maximum participation of students in student grievance ventilation, cultural festival management etc. This experience entrenched in me the belief that participatory model is definitely the best as people in all conditions, at all places work with an amazing motivation for the espousal of self-interest. Management guru C K Prahalad's award winning 'Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP)' model also supports this line of thought.

Last but certainly not the least, let us address the problem of illiteracy. While India is being recognised as a hub for high quality technical manpower, we cannot shy away from the fact that still only 61% of the children are in school till age 10. Our primary education system, with

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*If all the college students (there are 9.4 million in India) take out their vacations we could actually combat shortage of teachers. 'Each one, teach many' has to be the order of the day.*

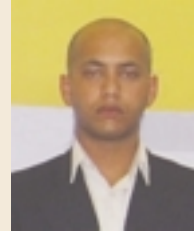
*My Journey From the Classroom to the Parliament*

its high drop-out rates is in tatters and here in, I would suggest two simple strategies that may help us to alleviate the acute illiteracy. First, is the introduction of 'Shiksha Vikas Patra', an inducement that I had suggested in a national level competition organised by MP Education Department at IIITM, Gwalior. On the lines of a Kisan Vikas Patra, it envisages the corpus of 8000 rupees and certificates (these certificates apart from certifying capability for job opportunities would also be an enabling provision for higher wages in assured employment programmes such as NREGA) for each student in his account but these will be disbursed in installments, starting from class IV (that's when the dropout rates start burgeoning), as he/she completes the primary and secondary education. This also has to be backed by a vibe towards vocational skills and regional prowess improvising on the relevant fields of agricultural sciences, rural technology etc. These two, supported by the mid-day meal programme, will act as a strong incentive to curb the dropout rate.

Second, is the rejuvenation of the long lost cliché of 'Each one, Teach one'. I realised the

potential of this simple approach during my semester break holidays after first year of college. Along with a friend, I was asked by my school principal to design some softwares, flash presentations or audio-visual aids for Class 10<sup>th</sup> students to help them understand and thus fare better in board exams. We ended up teaching them for a month, designing orientation modules, preparing course hand-outs, organising parent-teacher workshops and creating an entity which we christened as Consultancy Development Scholars (CDS Inc.). The story of CDS Inc. was covered by Sandpaper 2.0 magazine as one of South-Asia's best social entrepreneurship start ups. The experience was wonderful and we realised the enormous potential inherent in this idea. If all the college students (there are 9.4 million in India) take out their vacations we could actually combat shortage of teachers. 'Each one, teach many' has to be the order of the day.

Through the course of this epistle, I have tried not to sound prophetic and to present an earnest set of solutions that together form an integrated and holistic vision of a truly empowered India. My India of 2015.



**Rahul Saikia**

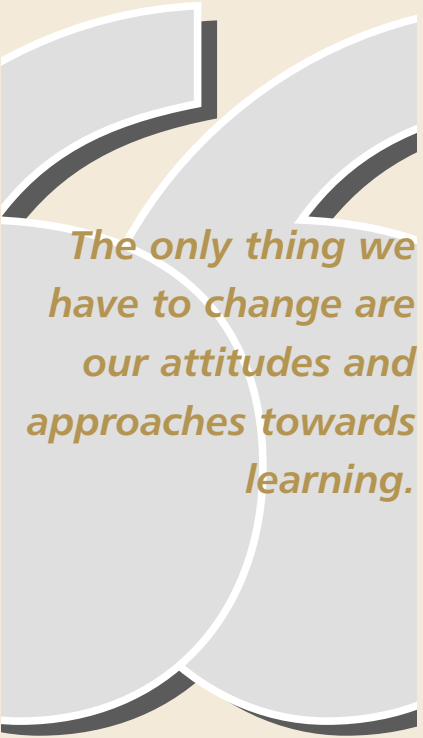
*St. Edmund College, Shillong*

*She wept in silence. Stunted beauty frozen in her eyes. Reflecting the darkness we left her to inherit. A world away, I fall asleep over a pile of alien words. Only adding to the darkness that she must endure.*

I am a B. A. second year geography honours student from Shillong. My course requires me to attend more than two thousand hours of classes. Half of these hours are wasted; learning outdated concepts, memorising obsolete information. Compulsory general subjects will further distract my energies away from my core subject. I will graduate, disconnected with, and not skilled enough for the demands of the real world. This lack of emphasis on practical knowledge and on specialisation is a serious flaw in our system. India is a complex web of distinct realities, none of which adhere to foreign ideas from yesterday. Comparative cost advantages and liberal reforms can only take a developing

nation so far. So Tokyo was what Shanghai is today, what Prague will awake to tomorrow. Sooner or later it takes structural changes for real concrete growth to take place. Thus, a true vision must look deep into, and then, beyond the superficial winds of change. That is to say that our educational system must start churning out bold entrepreneurs and skilled graduates. We must seamlessly merge classroom work with social and market place demands. India needs the large private companies to operate on its shores. In return we must provide them with skilled men. A symbiotic relationship is required. Still we cannot stop at that. Rather, we cannot even start with that point. We need to start in

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the 'Other-India' which surrounds us; sprawling slums and barren tracts, connected to our glass and steel dreams by an insignificant trickle. The plan is to turn this 'Other-India' into a practical classroom, where the aim of students will be to develop innovative, socially useful solutions. This practical education will be the new foundation for students. This new educational system will create an abundance of skilled graduates for the fields of business, government, administration and social service. The only thing we have to change are our attitudes and approaches towards learning.

### **This is how it can be done. This is my vision...**

Winter had finally arrived, and a soft chill accompanied a light maturity that seemed to settle over things. The College campus was a buzz with plans for the holidays. We still had to attend a series of lectures entitled- "Sparks; Change and Productivity", presented by our teachers. The lectures focused on various self-sustaining developmental projects from around the world; plastic wastes used to make high end fashion accessories in Buenos Aires, exportable aromatic fruits cultivated in war torn Afghanistan, medicinal seed farms in Tanzania. Slides carried the message across powerfully. The message

from the teachers was simple-projects which identify a local advantage, and use it to create a product for a market with strong demand, have the best chances of success. At the end of the lectures, our college principal announced the changes in our curriculum for the coming academic session. Regular classes would be held just four times a week. The remaining two days were reserved for creating and building developmental projects of our own. The new system was compulsory for B.A., B.Com and Computer students. On regular class days, students had to attend a greater number of honours classes. As for the project – it started off with a list put up by the teachers. "1. Passion Fruit Cultivation and Juice Making. 2. Strawberry Initiative. 3. High Quality Tea". The list mentioned the areas in the state where each project seemed feasible. Only one from the list would ultimately be implemented, the other two being eliminated after the debate that would follow the initial research phase.

With the holidays over, a new year had begun. We were all assigned specialised tasks corresponding to our honours subjects. We were to visit the prospective sites and put our findings into record books, that would later be graded, and then uploaded to a college database.

Geography students had to find data related to climate, soil, transport links of the areas, so as to create reports on whether the respective projects seemed possible. Economics students looked for potential markets for each project, while Sociology prepared social indicators for the people living in these places. All of this required students to visit the sites, several times. They did so under the guidance of their teachers. Teachers gave students assignments related to the prospective projects which further enriched the learning process. The Debate came next.

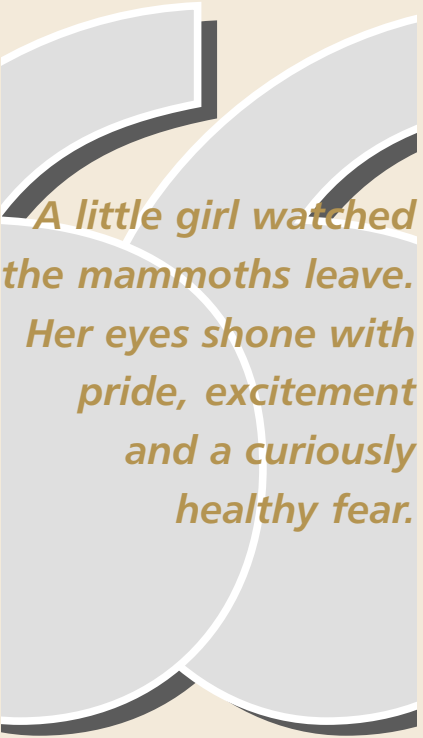
Three groups were created, each representing the project they supported. It was upto the English honours and Mass Communication students to prepare, and present the respective arguments. After days of debating, and a round of voting, the teachers chose the 'Strawberry Initiative'. Strawberries command a good price, which would grow well in the warm, moist hills in several parts of the state. Demand for the fruit was high as well. The Database was then created by the Computer students. It would record every piece of data and information on the implementation, the hurdles and finances of the project.

The usually quiet village of Duban was soon engulfed with activity. Initially, the farmers were

reluctant to hear us. They had heard enough of the magic crops that were promised but never came. The breakthrough came when the English students developed simplified visual models to get our points across. It also helped that we paid off some of their debts. We agreed on a co-operative setup under which the farmers would be paid even if there was a poor crop in the first year. Our record books were checked regularly and all the students could for once, see the sense in the methods we learnt in the class, and how we were using them in a remote village. The Commerce people kept regular accounts, and their main task was to cut costs and spending. All the accounts were uploaded onto the database as well. They also collaborated with Economics on the funding process. They found all possible sources and after a debate, finally settled on funds from SBI, EXIM BANK and local businesses. Local businesses bought 'charitable bonds', which gave back low returns but came with a guarantee of preferential supply of our product. Back in Duban, the strawberry runners were spreading fast in the dark-manured soil. Dark plastic sheets awaited the fruit to come. Farmers and their families waited anxiously. We waited anxiously. Still there was work to be done; a literacy and health program initiated by Sociology. The History department was slowly

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creating a picture of the district's last fifty years. Then, suddenly the first berries appeared. Sparks of stand-out red dotted the landscape. Soon the trucks would be here. Strawberries from the earth would flow out of dusty Duban, and prosperity would flow in. Then watch as this new berry fever spills into the adjoining areas. Our database continues to manage this project.

The process did not end there. We have implemented several such successful projects since the Strawberry Initiative. Our database is open to colleges across the country for free. Several colleges have used our extensive online library to start their own initiatives. In return they feed in their findings into the database. So that it is no longer our database, but something that is nation-wide in scale. It is now time for the vision to enter the next level- joining hands with corporate India. Our proposal is simple. Funding

and expertise from private companies so that we can find new export markets, manage our expanding operations and information infrastructure. In return they will have access to our skilled graduates, with experience in the real world. Products from our initiatives will strengthen their supply chains. Finally, our projects will bring prosperity to backward areas. More prosperity, means a larger potential market for Corporate India's products.

The first batch of strawberries was loaded into the trucks. A little girl watched the mammoths leave. Her eyes shone with pride, excitement and a curiously healthy fear. Just as if to say- "She felt no anger toward anyone on earth. The things she had endured had now receded into some outer fog." The eyes no longer wept, they no longer reflected any stunted beauty. Only a bright brilliance of things to come.



While growing up in Himachal before moving on to Chandigarh for better educational prospects, knowingly or unknowingly, I had a queer linkage with politicking.

Many among our relatives were disguised sycophants under the patronisation of my father's maternal uncle, who happened to be a well known parliamentarian.

Later after his sad demise, his grandson became an instant cynosure of our relatives' eyes.

We soon witnessed the callous youth, with no university degree, being elevated to the political scene of the state out of his dormancy. For his political triumph was made possible not merely through securing plain votes but what we would

call 'sympathy' votes, a noun characterizing his grandfather's cult of personality rather than his own merit or contribution to the society.

### **It left me with three core questions:**

Is political lineage a modern day metamorphosis of monarchy?

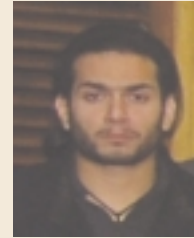
Do political affiliations upstage individual's credentials in politics?

The following one made me meticulously ponder over:

Is politics a profession or a selfless service?

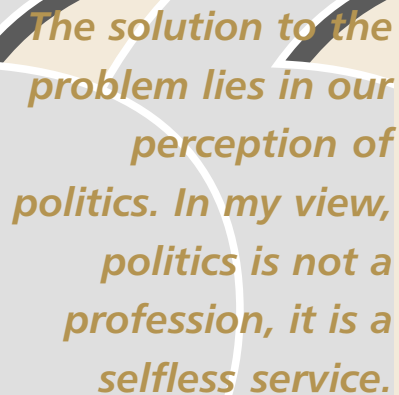
We seek an answer to the above questions but haven't they been discussed before?

**Saahil Chauhan**  
*Hindu College, Delhi*



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*For his political triumph was made possible not merely through securing plain votes but what we would call 'sympathy' votes*



*The solution to the problem lies in our perception of politics. In my view, politics is not a profession, it is a selfless service.*

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Gobbledegook suggesting alternative political recourses to mould out a new India, are found abound in black and white papers. In gravest of jargon, they bespeak adoption of unicameral legislature and adherence to bi-party system, wittingly or unwittingly, considering multi-party system a bale, which holds no water.

Part of the problem lies in an excessively hierarchical political tradition which, unsurprisingly, turns hostile to the new blood in politics, while it compels people like me to ponder as of what use is a political science degree if one's father/grandfather is a non-politician?

The solution to the problem lies in our perception of politics. In my view, politics is not a profession, it is a selfless service. It need not catch fancy of people with an unsatisfied appetite for wealth and leverage in the society.

Politicians are public servants, they need not be idealized. Political life should be kept as an arduous struggle demanding great sacrifice and selflessness than a privilege.

A refurbishment of our techniques of choosing our representatives along with

transcending the boundaries of religion, caste, and regionalism is the required modus operandi to clean our politics.

This alone would de-establish hierarchical traditions with rational statesmen emerging as the vanguard of a nation aiming at the establishment of an egalitarian society. A highest degree in particular discipline, as recognised by the state, shall be a sine qua non for a person's eligibility as a politician.

I propose a modus operandi where the credibility of our representatives would be checked at the entry level itself.

As per the new system aspiring politicians could either enter the political arena through 'College Legislative Units' (elucidated later) or through competitive examination, which shall be conducted on the lines of UPSE examination. The qualifying candidates would, apparently, be the ones instilled with patriotic fervour and profundity of thought. They would be prudent and judicious, above the shackles of religion or regionalism.

They would be given a choice to enroll themselves in any of the political parties with respect to their ideological compatibility with the

agenda and manifesto of the respective political party.

The enrollment wouldn't imply an instant ticket to the state assembly or the parliament. In the years following their enrollment, they'll make themselves well acquainted with the ground realities. They'll work at the grass root level, effectively voicing people's problems and working for the amelioration of the society.

Their devotion and quality of work would decide their future designation in the respective political party. During this period they could germinate confidence among the people and further enhance their goodwill, something that would measure their success as a politician of/ for the people.

The system would also ensure only seasoned politicians coming up as the impropiators of power. At the same time, we'll see considerable public welfare being done as the strenuous task would be in the hands of the young blood, with bounteous vigour and over-flowing dexterity and enterprise.

It would be interesting to note that the public work would be done by politicians-in-making

instead of burnished politicians; we'll witness their aspirations acting as a driving force for a better discharge of duties.

The concept of 'College Legislative Units' provides for another platform with the potential of producing competent future legislators for our nation. If sources are to be believed, the median age for Indians is 24.9 years. Such a dynamic population cannot keep itself aloof from the political happenings of the country. "Politics" goes an over-used saying "is a dirty game". Well, for that instance, which field game leaves us unsoiled?

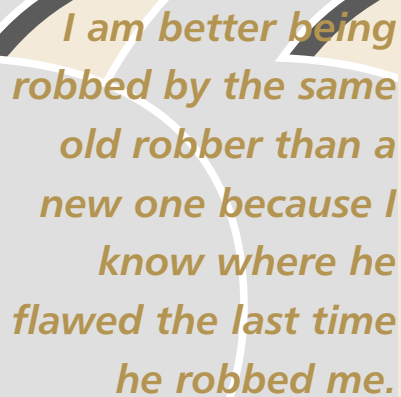
Of late, we have been scathingly labelling Parliament as the 'old pensioners club' and with homonymous vigour consolidating our beliefs in the advent of young blood into our Parliament to alter it into a delivering mechanism of enterprising polity.

To my dismay, my faith in young politicians was shattered to ground once I saw the actual politicians-in-making, during my under-graduate days in Delhi. For they were not the ones whom I wished could replace the former bunch.

Here I saw rich spoilt brats, doling out huge sums and channelizing their physical power in luring, nay, snatching votes.

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*I am better being robbed by the same old robber than a new one because I know where he flawed the last time he robbed me.*

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They saw politics as a means to attain vantage and popularity. I won't deny that I did see their young innovative minds in full application, but sadly only in formulating gimmicks to rope in political support for themselves.

Harking back, I fondly remember one of our ex-senior, re-enrolling herself in first year of under-graduation with the sole motive of being eligible to re-contest the student union elections.

If such is the realistic picture of our politicians-in-making, on whom we rest our fervent hopes for a better India then I am better being robbed by the same old robber than a new one because I know where he flawed the last time he robbed me.

The potential lies among the ones who hold intrepidity to voice their agenda but, somehow, pecuniary exigency renders their inception come to naught.

Our predicament demands of us the indispensability to elevate such youngsters to the political scene of the country instead of those 'goondas'.

Need is to instil interest among the students to embark on the valiant task of ameliorating

and shaping a better India. India's 17,189 colleges and universities give us an estimate of a strong well educated population, undeniably, capable of meticulous political comprehensibility and analysis. To initiate with, political interaction is to be inculcated in the curriculum of the college students. This would be accomplished with the establishment of 'college legislative units'.

Students already well versed with the political functioning and social conditions in the country, such as the students of politics and other relevant (as per the context) social sciences can shoulder the responsibility of establishing such units in their respective colleges across the country.

The units would convene regular sessions under the guidance of the learned professors.

It would involve elaborate discussions on national statute and policy implementation including containment of terrorism and disaster management.

One effective step would be assigning students case studies. This would encompass a group of students scrutinizing the functioning of a particular department under a portfolio minister.

Here, the aim among students is not procuring a position of power but untiringly working towards the understanding of the national polity. Consequently, the cynical brats and musclemen would be done away with.

Now, the real politicians-in-making will come into the picture. Entirely, on the basis of credentials, representatives from individual colleges and universities would be selected to form the “National College Students’ Assembly”, which I would name as the ‘Mini Parliament’.

As an apparent upshot, this would be a body comprising of enterprising students with a potential and a vision to shame many among our present day politicians.

The vision they’d be having would be that of the millions of students who would have, enthusiastically, brought government functioning under their scrutiny.

The most rewarding part of the process would be the one when the actual Parliament is made

answerable to the ‘Mini Parliament’ in special collaboration with the eminent journalist, social activists, political commentators and media personalities.

This would be done through a well organised programme which would be telecast on television and aired on FM stations. In each episode, a particular portfolio minister would be brought to questioning. An uncountable number of students would watch the programme with full zest, as they would find their own reflection in the Mini Parliament. Parents standing baffled at the sight of their ‘MTV-loving-kiddo’ sitting glued to some news programme pertaining to political discussion would themselves sit ensconced by their children. Political socialisation and communication reaching the very pinnacle would be an obvious result.

It’s the time we realise that remaining unmindful of our politicians swindling and dwindling away our economy would be to connive at the perpetuation of mass destitution, unemployment and a poor quality of life.

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*India once again  
heads the list of  
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firms had to spend  
most amount  
of time in dealing  
with Government  
regulations.*

*My Journey From the  
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**Sarah Cyriac**

*St. Stephen's College, Delhi*

I always tell others that I arrived at my decision to study economics purely 'by the process of elimination'. As Conan Doyle's most famous creation: Holmes would put it, once you eliminate the impossible, whatsoever remains no matter how improbable must be the truth. Having painstakingly and unapologetically compiled a list of subjects I didn't enjoy I was left with Economics-the most orderly of the social sciences, the most disorderly of the sciences. My shaky foundations and the consequent loathing for Mathematics notwithstanding, I learnt to love my subject for the endless possibilities it offered to analyse nearly every sphere of human endeavour.

Our classroom lectures on the state of the Indian economy dwelt at much length on the scale and rapidity of India's growth story. What

I soon found impossible to ignore was that this façade of increasing economic prosperity concealed the ponderous sloth of our governance structure- the unfortunate truth that our present economic growth has, to a large extent, occurred in spite of our government. This is not unempirical pessimism; it is amply established with solid, sordid, disappointing facts. India once again heads the list of countries where firms had to spend most amount of time in dealing with Government regulations. Or the fact that our government employs over 20 million whose salaries alone devour almost 90 percent of state revenues.

My vision for India, thus, addresses a very fundamental prerequisite of the nation's progress - the quality of its leaders and in particular, that of its bureaucracy. As a cosmopolitan Indian who

rarely skips an opportunity to lambast civil services aspirants who are attracted only by the promise of a lifetime of comfort and minimal effort at the taxpayers expense, I nevertheless find it necessary to acknowledge that while the bureaucracy has much to answer for, not all the blame for failing to meet public expectations can be laid at its doors. Imposition of impractical policies such as the present promotion system based on time-scale coupled with security of tenure are actually performance disincentives, making otherwise capable and dynamic individuals complacent.

My vision for India hopes to tackle the problems affecting this indispensable component of India's leadership and suggests that intelligent reform could enable the services to function with as much dynamism, efficiency and accountability as envisaged by the nation's founding fathers.

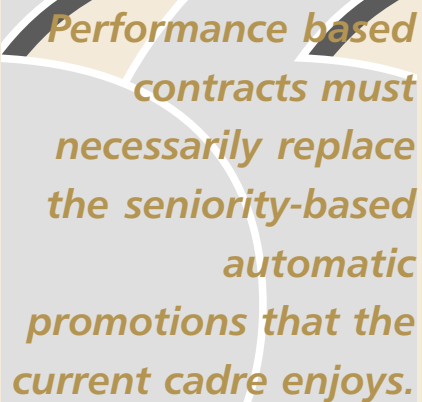
The Indian taxpayer has for decades unquestioningly financed the bureaucracy without examining the reason behind its lethargy. Bureaucratic underperformance can be explained by the simple fact that the elite Indian Administrative, Foreign and Central Servants constitute a rare India wide monopoly on administration.

What I enjoy the most about my chosen subject is that it often miraculously condenses the complexity of human behaviour into an elegant model, with the assistance of a few assumptions of course. Applying the basic economic model of the Principal Agent Framework to governance actually provides valuable insight into what the current structure needs in order to overcome its flaws. If we identified the government as Principal and government servants as Agents, we could address the question of how the government gets its employees to work efficiently, given the transaction cost limitations impinging upon it. Two aspects that immediately become obvious are the Agent's reservation utility and the Agent's incentive compatibility. Put simply, Government servants will only work at a salary that is above their reservation utility of working in a private organisation or of not working at all, and that they will only put in high effort if rewarded more than when they put in low effort.

Although the process of recruitment has largely remained free of controversy and is aimed at identifying meritorious candidates, salaries remain hopelessly insignificant by industry standards and no longer attract the

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*The Indian taxpayer has for decades unquestioningly financed the bureaucracy without examining the reason behind its lethargy.*



*Performance based contracts must necessarily replace the seniority-based automatic promotions that the current cadre enjoys.*

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brightest. Besides remuneration, in an atmosphere of prevailing corruption, the knowledge that the solitary bureaucrat who refuses to fall in line pays the price of his integrity and is either thrown out by the system or sent into orbit on the peripheries discourages the few who enter for reasons other than personal profit. Assuming then that none of this deters a candidate who derives satisfaction merely at the opportunity of seeing his skills applied on a broader canvas, the poorly conceived current structure of the services makes no distinction between him and other non performing officials and does not reward either his achievement or integrity.

India remains one of the few nations that is yet to implement reforms in this sphere. Most others have used the findings of Agency and Public Choice theory to design systems that reward expertise, leadership and ruthlessly punish bad performance. Both U.K, the country that bequeathed us its system of rigid cadres and exclusive services, and New Zealand, whose bureaucracy is much like ours, have introduced reforms over the last decade to allow competition and lateral entry into their services, with as many as one-third of new entrants being external recruits inducted through open competition.

In order to break the current monopoly of the IAS and IFS over top bureaucratic jobs I would support the oft repeated recommendations to allow for open market recruitment to each position coupled with market competitive remuneration to attract individuals with the necessary expertise. Performance based contracts must necessarily replace the seniority-based automatic promotions that the current cadre enjoys. This would put an end to the practice of incompetent senior officers holding on to positions only because they successfully competed in an examination two decades earlier.

A far more crucial issue is the urgent need for policymakers with specialisation in strategic sectors such as commerce and industry, external affairs, heavy industry, education, food and agriculture, whose absence often results in poorly thought out policy and sluggish reforms.

In the US for instance, the President is free to appoint the top experts of different fields into his Cabinet. Secretaries of State have often been top experts in international affairs while Treasury Secretaries have been top bankers, financial experts or economists.



In India, on the other hand, the Cabinet must be selected from among the Members of Parliament who, for the most part, are career politicians- rarely experts on policy. Under such circumstances, most Cabinet members look to their secretaries for guidance when it comes to policymaking. Since these bureaucrats and their subordinates also happen to lack the necessary expertise, we run the risk of the blind leading the blind.

What India needs then is lateral recruitment to tap into the large pool of available talent in academia, think tanks, private industry, the public sector, industry associations, NGOs and the NRI community. The process of selection will have to ensure timely and extensive publicity regarding vacancies and a transparent and politically insulated panel of experts who select the most eligible candidates for the post. This is not too farfetched an idea-the Fifth Pay Commission has already recommended that the rules be amended to limit UPSC involvement in the selection process for contractual employment of up to five years. The long-term objective should be to give members of all services as well as lateral entrants equal access to most medium and senior level posts in the central government,

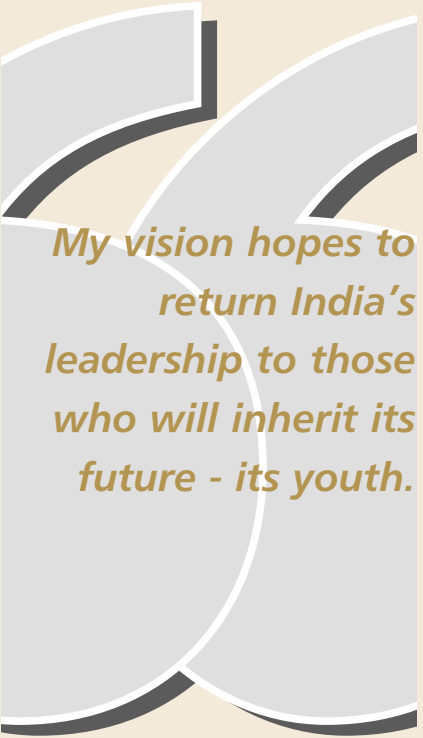
creating competition and putting an end to the rigor mortis of the existing setup.

Post recruitment, it is as imperative that performance standards and indices be set for the public servants as it is for private sector employees. Additionally, it is essential to avoid, at all costs, the possibility of unjust promotions and arbitrary transfers of officers at the whims of corrupt and meddlesome politicians. A statutory body Civil Services Board can be created to look into issues such as transfers and promotion and performance evaluation of Civil servants. This will help in reducing political pressures on the careers of civil servants and will help de-link civil service performance issues from politics.

The experiences of other countries offer insight as to how the system could be restructured. Singapore consistently promotes people entirely according to merit and it is common to see younger officers supersede more senior, but less competent, officers. Malaysia follows a system of promotion and annual salary progression based upon a new performance appraisal and remuneration system.

A vision cripples itself if it is excessively idealistic or naïve or impractical. My vision for India's

*This will help in  
reducing political  
pressures on the  
careers of civil  
servants and will  
help de-link civil  
service performance  
issues from politics.*



*My vision hopes to  
return India's  
leadership to those  
who will inherit its  
future - its youth.*

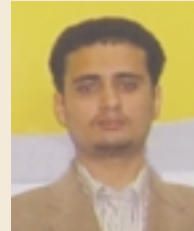
**My Journey From the  
Classroom to the Parliament**

leadership does not count on the integrity, professionalism and dedication of its public servants. On the contrary, it seeks to create a system that demands these qualities from those who lead, and ensures that there is room for neither complacency nor corruption.

Undoubtedly, the impact of such reform would be extensive—from fostering good policymaking to ensuring policy implementation, the absence of which is the chief reason behind the multiple crises we face today—gender

discrimination, child labour, crumbling public education and health services.

Yet, the reason I chose Civil Services Reform and not any of the countless other avenues of transformation and change is not merely its scope. It is the knowledge that numerous talented, educated youth opt away from a career in the Public Service only because they are repulsed by the rot of the current system. My vision hopes to return India's leadership to those who will inherit its future - its youth.



**Sayan Ganguli**

*Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai*

*"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern." – William Blake*

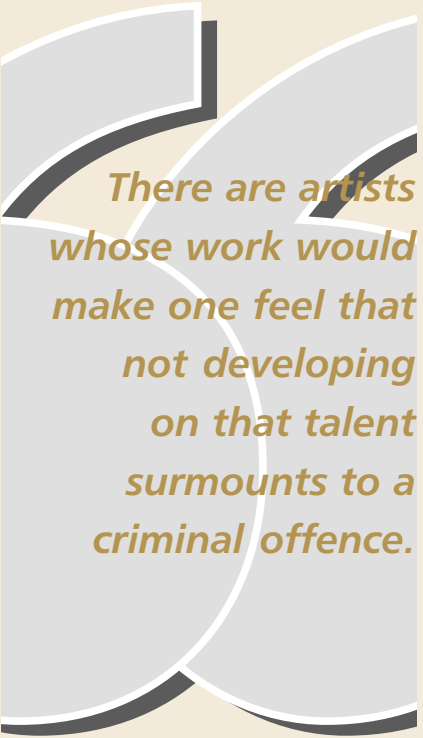
The future, they say, cannot be predicted. It has never been. Never will be. I started my schooling in the year 1989. The last 17 years of education I received is supposed to be in preparation for my career which will roughly last between 2010 and 2060. In short, I have been preparing for a future without any idea what challenges it holds for me and for the human race. Isn't it surprising?

The current education system in India as well as throughout the world is rooted in a nineteenth century mindset. The whole approach was such so as to meet the steady demands of industrialisation. No wonder topics

like mathematics and science are right at the top of the subject hierarchy. And dance and drama right at the bottom. And this trend continues even today. Especially so in India, where the insatiable hunger for manpower from the services sector results in the churning out of thousands of engineers and IT professionals. Among these thousands are quite a few brilliant dancers and actors and artists whose natural urges of creativity have been stymied by the narrow minded perceptions of their elders and society.

I can speak from my own experiences. In the Indian Institute of Technology where I have

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been for the last four years, I have been in the company of some of the most talented and inspirational people. But unlike the popular perception created, not all of them are brilliant engineers with incisive analytical skills and overwhelming logical prowess. Among the thousands residing in the campus, there are sportsmen who can join any state team and contribute significantly. There are artists whose work would make one feel that not developing on that talent surmounts to a criminal offence. There are actors who can fit into any top theatre group in the country and leave a mark. All of them do not find engineering and the sciences endearing. They are only here because of intense pressure from their families and societal expectations of them. And this is the greatest tragedy of modern India.

Education has always been viewed as the ticket to economic independence by the great Indian middle class. Since the economic liberalisation of the early nineties this precedence of education above all has taken a quantum jump. The lure of quick wealth and the awe-inspiring successes of young individuals who till the other day was your unassuming neighbour proved to be too much for the Indian middle class. The dreams of parents took shape in the

form of relentless coercion on their wards to do well academically. As a result all form of hobbies, talents, desires got suppressed under this crushing burden of aspirations.

On a comparison with the trends in the West or rather in any developed nation, one might realise how stymied our youth are by the choices they have for higher education. When people boast that Indians churn out more doctors and engineers than any other nation they conveniently look over the fact that India is only producing doctors and engineers. In our fervent race to call ourselves developed, we have forgotten what development means. It does not mean swanky office buildings comprising a globally attenuated workforce. It doesn't mean plush malls and multiplexes representing the increased expendable income. It is surely not forcing the children out of the playgrounds and hurling them from one class to another so that they can prove their worth as early as possible. These are but the first steps towards a half-baked society. A developed society is a complete society. A place where every profession is heralded equal and their contributions held in equal regard. The local theatre's actor walks with as much respect as the town's top doctor would.

Pride in one's profession and to boldly choose one's career are aspects missing from the Indian psyche. The majority of the blame lies in the education system. We cannot blame the society entirely for its constituents are after all a product of that very system. A system so flawed and obsolete that its repercussions have already begun to deform our society in an unredeemable fashion. It's true that we cannot have a bottom-up approach here. We cannot expect students from our villages to take up careers in sports and music though in fact if it did happen, nothing could be more wonderful. The primary intention at the rural level is to provide the basic education. Here making bold decisions might turn out to be luxuries they can't afford. But in the top tiers of the society that is not an issue. The burgeoning middle class enjoying the spurt of prosperity unfortunately hasn't been able to come out of their earlier mindset that their children can only progress through the engineering and medical profession. Its time they let go of their wards and let them choose their paths.

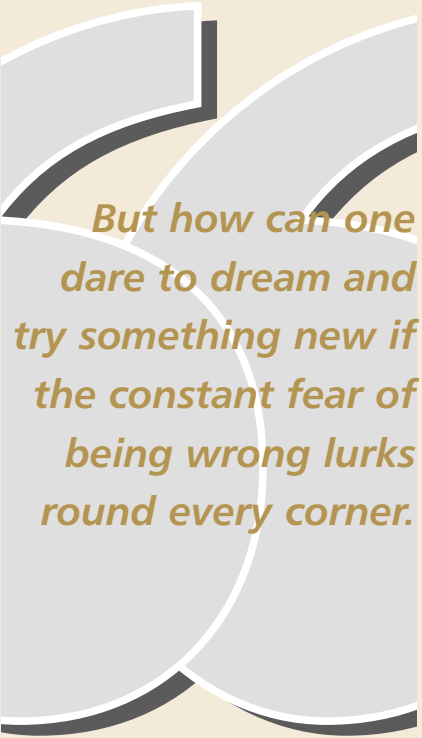
If I ever have a place in the hallowed halls of the Indian Parliament, I will make 'education reform' my primary agenda. Indian children in the cities and towns are losing their childhoods

which are turning into nightmares. The desperation to prove oneself has ruined so many lives. Parents, the government and the society have to realise that the time has come when the system should go easy on the future of the country. The paranoia regarding the boards, the exasperating preparations for entrance exams and the ceaseless series of inane subjects which are totally irrelevant has to stop. I, as a member of the Parliament, would like to set about trying to change the hearts and minds of the Indian middle class. Obviously that's where the things have to start changing. I yearn for the day that when a child proudly proclaims that he wants to be a film director or she wants to study Chinese culture, the parent should nod in acknowledgement.

Building more IITS & IIMs will not solve the problems of the future. It will only fuel the current crises and dilute the effect of few centers of excellence we have. Interestingly in these very institutions the students are offered a dizzying array of choices. A student has complete freedom to do what they like and unsurprisingly many engineering students do more well in fields which are not supposedly their core competencies. This is the exact model which should be extended to the rest of the country.

My Journey From the  
Classroom to the Parliament

*If I ever have a place  
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*But how can one  
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The government should create and fund proper avenues which give a fillip to higher education in diverse fields. A career in sculptor should be as exciting as one in investment banking. And if a student wants to study foreign policy right after school there should be institutions which offer that opportunity. Finally the society should learn to respect the fact that all professions are equal and contribute to its development. Let's free the power of imagination and talent which has been jailed in our children for so long.

If we continue on this current path, we stand to lose an unimaginable amount of human capital. More people are graduating now than ever before in the history of the human race. Academic inflation is rampant. Suddenly degrees have become worthless. It's high time we move away from the present system of education as evidently it is not suited to the needs of the twenty-first century. Now we must value creativity at par with literacy. The current system is such that the worst thing one can do is to make a mistake. But how can one dare to dream and try something new if the constant fear of being wrong lurks round every corner. Children have an extra-ordinary capacity to be inventive. We adults have lost that capacity. Right now we are educating people out of creativity rather than

it being the other way round. The current system rewards one's academic ability. In that case, the superlative human would be a university professor. But we know that's not the case.

We have to stop equating intelligence to academic ability. There are innumerable cases where brilliant and highly talented people think they are not so. That's because what they are good at is not valued by their schools and teachers. We need to reconstitute our view of education which should be based on harnessing the immense human ability which surrounds us. We need to incorporate the fact that intelligence is diverse, dynamic and distinct. The current system mines our mind for something very specific. This method will not work for the future.

Let us create a new concept of human ecology which celebrates human imagination. Let's work towards a system where a child can dance and sing if he wants to. Instead of suppressing his natural talents, let's educate his whole being. Let's open their doors of perception. And then as Blake mentioned, the possibilities are infinite.

*"Every child is born an artist. But very few remain one as they grow."- Picasso.*

**उत्कर्ष अमिताभ**  
**दिल्ली कॉलेज ऑफ इंजीनियरिंग**



**म**हान रूसी लेखक, गोर्की ने फुटपाथों, सड़कों, रैनबसेरों और गलियों को जिस अर्थ में 'मेरे विश्वविद्यालय' कहा है — उसी अर्थ में मैं कहता हूँ कि मेरे महाविद्यालय अनेक हैं ! एक महाविद्यालय तो वह है जो मुझे डेढ़ साल बाद देश का एक विशिष्ट (यांत्रिकी विशेषज्ञ) अभियन्ता बना देगा ! बाकी जो तीन महाविद्यालय हैं (मेरा थियेटर, मेरा परिवार और जमघट) — वे मुझे प्रशिक्षित कर रहे हैं — आत्माओं के अभियन्ता के रूप में और मेरे लिए यह प्रशिक्षण और भी ज्यादा महत्वपूर्ण है क्योंकि मैं दिलों के बीच रोशनी का पुल कायम करना चाहता हूँ, पुल बनाना चाहता हूँ, दुनिया की सब बाइनरीज (ध्रुवान्तों) के बीच, वह पेदोनुक्रम तोड़ना चाहता हूँ जो स्त्री और पुरुष, गरीब और अमीर, गाँव—कस्बा और शहर, अवर्ण और सवर्ण, हिन्दू और गैर—हिन्दू, पूरब और पश्चिम, विकासशील और विकसित के बीच अर्से से कायम है ! मैं बचपन से कलाकारों को

"engineer of the souls" मानता रहा हूँ और इस रूप में मेरा प्रशिक्षण सम्भव किया है मेरे परिवार और मेरे थियेटर (रंगमंच) ने ! इनके अलावा 'जमघट' नामक उस एन.जी.ओ. का भी अत्यन्त ऋणी हूँ जिसने झुगियों में मेरे दोस्त बनाए और एक वृहत्तर बंधु—परिवार (family of friends) के लॉज—बेस्ड/समवेत जीवनयापन का सपना मुझमें जगाया ! यह सपना साझा करने का जो आपने अवसर दिया है, उसका भी आभार मैं मानता हूँ !

मेरा परिवार एक प्रथम पीढ़ी विस्थापित (first generation migrant) परिवार है और हमारा घर एक बड़ी—सी अतिथिशाला जहाँ गाहे—बगाहे 'गाँव' या 'कस्बे' से कोई—न—कोई आया ही रहता है : रोजगार, शिक्षा और सही इलाज की तलाश में ! मेरा बचपन उन्हें देखते—समझते और सुनते ही बीता है ! साधनों—सुविधाओं के विकेन्द्रीकरण में मेरी आस्था हर दिन

मेरी जीवन-यात्रा:  
महाविद्यालय से संसद की ओर

**यह सपना साझा करने  
का जो आपने अवसर  
दिया है, उसका भी  
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पर्यावरण के हित में भी  
सोचकर देखिए – जिन्हें  
छोटा काम कहते हैं,  
अपने-आप में कितने  
रंगीन, कोमल और  
सुमधुर हैं।

मेरी जीवन-यात्रा:  
महाविद्यालय से संसद की ओर

सघनतर हुई है ! जीवन के बीस वर्षों में प्रथम पीढ़ी विस्थापित परिवार ने एक संघर्षसिद्ध युवक के रूप में जो मेरे अनुभव या अनुभूतियाँ हैं, वे मुझे यह भी मानने को विवश करते हैं कि पुराने ढंग के परिवारों के दिन लद गये!

अब नये ढंग के परिवार विकसित होने चाहिए जहाँ रिश्ते रक्त-सम्बन्ध या यौनसम्बन्धों के आधार पर तय नहीं हों ! हर मुहल्ले में एक नयी तरह के हॉस्टल विकसित हो जहाँ क्षेत्र के सब अनादृत बूढ़े, अनाथ बच्चे, संघर्षसिद्ध युवक, बेसहारा स्त्रियाँ और विस्थापित एक छत के नीचे परिवार-भाव में रहें ! थोड़ा-सा सरकारी भत्ता मिले, थोड़ा रोजगार-प्रशिक्षण जिससे अपने पाँवों पर खड़े होने और एक-दूसरे का सहारा बनने में आसानी हो। बूढ़े बच्चों को पढ़ाएँ या किस्से-कविताएँ सुनाएँ, स्त्रियाँ करुणा-सम्बलित न्याय-दृष्टि; e.g. (emotional quotient) से सम्बलित अहिंसक और उदार स्त्री-दृष्टि बच्चों और युवकों में विकसित करें !

इस घर को 'दूसरा घर' कहा जा सकता है ! सांसदों-विधायकों और सेठों के बड़े बँगलों और 'सामुदायिक भवन' – जैसी जगहों के अतिरिक्त स्पेस का इससे बेहतर उपयोग क्या होगा कि वहाँ बेघरों की वैकल्पिक आवास-शृंखला खड़ी हो। आखिर

मेट्रो-परियोजना, बाँध-परियोजना आदि विकास कार्यों के लिए सरकार वैयक्तिक, सम्पत्ति कानून में हस्तक्षेप करती ही है !

वैकल्पिक रोजगार-योजना (self employment scheme) के आधारभूत प्रशिक्षण के वक्त विशेषकर युवकों के मन में यह बात बिटानी जरूरी है कि कोई काम छोटा या ओछा नहीं होता। पर्यावरण के हित में भी सोचकर देखिए – जिन्हें छोटा काम कहते हैं, अपने-आप में कितने रंगीन, कोमल और सुमधुर हैं। जीवन और प्रकृति का सारा रस-रंग इनमें समाया है। कपड़े बुनना, रँगना, सीना या धोना, मूर्तियाँ गढ़ना, इमारतें उठाना, लकड़ी, लोहा, सोना तराशना, चने भूनना, मवेशियों से सुसुम-सुसुम दूध दूहना, भेड़ों से ऊन निकालना, रूई धुनना, अनाज, फूल-फल-सब्जियाँ उगाना, माला गूँथना, मिठाइयाँ बनाना, नमक निकालना, साफ-सफाई – कौन-सा काम इनमें ऐसा है जो मौका पड़ने पर आदमी खुद करने बैठे तो एक अनुपम रस-संचार से भर नहीं जाता ? कभी-कभी करें और अपने लिए करें तो ठीक, रोज करें और दूसरों के लिए भी तो वही काम एकरस और उबाऊ हो सकता है – पर हीन ? हीन किस तर्क से होगा ? फिर इन्हें छोटा काम क्यों कहते हैं ? इनमें कौन-सा काम ऐसा है जिसके बिना आदमी का जीवन चल निकलेगा – सहज-सरस ढंग से ?



दूध मशीनों से पैक होने लगा है पर क्या उसमें गुनगुने फेन का वह उजास, वह प्रगाढ़ मिठास शेष है जो तुरंत दुहे ताजा दूध में होती है ? मशीन से रँगें-बुने कपड़ों पर कलात्मक हैण्डलूम भारी पड़ता ही है, मशीन की सिलाई-कढ़ाई-बुनाई पर हाथ की सिलाई-कढ़ाई-बुनाई भारी पड़ती है। आदमजात के स्पर्श में ही एक खास बात होती है — कौन नहीं जानता ? फिर यह छोटे-बड़े का चक्कर क्या है ?

पारम्परिक साहित्य में चर्चित कृष्ण के नंद-गाँव का सरस संसार और टॉमस हार्डी, टाल्स्टॉय के उपन्यासों की दुग्ध-धवल वैकल्पिक दुनिया, लेविन आदि की दुनिया अपने-आप में कम आकर्षक हैं क्या ? आवश्यक नहीं कि जातिविशेष या लिंगविशेष के लोग ही खास-खास काम करें। आत्मबल से भरा हुआ कोई युवक अपनी रुचि के हिसाब से इनमें से कोई काम चुन सकता है — फाइलों पर कलम घिसना, बड़ी कम्पनियों का सामान इधर से उधर बेचते चलना या फ़ैक्ट्रियों में लोहा खटर-पटर करना ही जीवन के सिद्ध विकल्प क्यों बनें ? दिमाग लगाकर अपने मन का कोई भी काम किया जाए तो काम अच्छा होगा, और अपने-अपने दायरे में हर व्यक्ति मन, देह और दिमाग लगाकर जो काम करे — धरती की छाती जुड़ा जाएगी, हरी हो जाएगी उसकी तबीयत ! अब तक तो केवल जख्म ही हरे हैं !

एक बात और याद कीजिए — मार्क ट्वेन का टॉम दीवार पोतने की अपनी सजा भी सेब खाते बच्चे के सामने इतनी ग्लैमरस बनाकर प्रस्तुत करता है कि पोचारे के एक मौके के एवज में अपना पूरा सेब दे डालना उसे बिल्कुल नहीं अखरता ! यही आदमी का स्वभाव है — ग्लैमर की ओर खिंचना। और अपने छोटे-से-छोटे काम को ग्लैमरस बना दे — यह आदमी के अपने हाथ है। दरअसल जो छोटा है, महान वही है। परमाणु की शक्ति कौन नहीं पहचानता। रस लेकर किया गया कोई भी काम ग्लैमरस है और जब जो काम हाथ में रहे — उसे पूरे मनोयोग से, शान्तचित्त होकर कर लेने का जतन ही जीवन का मूलमंत्र है शायद।

‘दूसरे घर’ से लगा एक बड़ा-सा स्कूल भी हो — ‘अपना स्कूल’ और यह कानून पारित कर दिया जाए कि उस मुहल्ले के सब बच्चे जब दाखिला लेंगे — उसी स्कूल में — बच्चा चाहे सरकारी अफसर का हो, मंत्री का, व्यापारी का या सफाई कर्मचारी का — पढ़ना उसे एक ही स्कूल में होगा। सरकारी महानुभावों और संप्रदायों के बच्चों का प्रवेश मुहल्ले के इस सरकारी स्कूल में अनिवार्य बना दिए जाने के अगले ही माह जादू की छड़ी से स्कूलों का स्तर सुधार दिया जाएगा, पलक झपकते सब अनुदान मिल जाएँगे, देखते-देखते सारी अंतर्व्यवस्था (infrastructure) एकदम से कायम हो जाएगी ! जाके पाँव न फटी बिवाई, सो का जानै पीर पराई।

मेरी जीवन-यात्रा:  
महाविद्यालय से संसद की ओर

रस लेकर किया गया  
कोई भी काम ग्लैमरस  
है और जब जो काम  
हाथ में रहे — उसे पूरे  
मनोयोग से, शान्तचित्त  
होकर कर लेने का  
जतन ही जीवन का  
मूलमंत्र है शायद।

एक प्रस्तावना मेरी यह भी है कि स्कूल के बाद हर छात्र को एक साल का ब्रेक दिया जाए। बोर्ड की परीक्षाओं के तुरंत बाद हर परीक्षार्थी को तीन महीने के लिए मुफ्त रेलवे-पास इशु हो — भारत-भ्रमण के लिए !

मेरी जीवन-यात्रा: महाविद्यालय से संसद की ओर

इसी तरह न्यायालय की एक शाखा भी हर मुहल्ले में हो ताकि ज्यादातर झगड़े वहीं-के-वहीं निबट जाएँ — घरेलू हिंसा की वारदातें भी ! इस न्यायालय से लगा हुआ एक पुरुष-प्रशिक्षण भी होना चाहिए जहाँ स्त्रियों की सूक्ष्मतर मानसिक-शारीरिक-आत्मिक जरूरतों के प्रति हर पुरुष को सेंसेटाइज किया जाए — अच्छी फिल्मों, अच्छी किताबों और जीवन-प्रसंगों पर सार्थक बातचीत के द्वारा ! 'स्त्री-दृष्टि' पर यहाँ से एक सर्टिफिकेट कोर्स किए बगैर किसी को विवाह की इजाजत न हो ! यहीं विवाह-योग लोगों का एक गुणसूत्र-सूचकांक (Compatibility index) भी तैयार मिले जिसके आधार पर दोस्ती या विवाह के प्रत्याशी मनलायक साथी चुन सकें।

मैंने आस-पास जितने विवाह टूटते हुए देखे हैं — उसके मूल में रही है स्त्री-देह और स्त्री-मन के प्रति पुरुष की असम्बेदनशील दृष्टि ! यह हमारी मर्दानगी को भी बड़ी चुनौती है कि हमारी शालीनता, हमारा सॉफिस्टिकेशन लेवल स्त्रियों से मैच नहीं करता ! इसके अभाव में ही हर औरत किसी भैंस के आगे बजती हुई बीन दीखती है — 'भैंस के आगे बीन बजाओ, भैंस रहे पगुराई !' छोटा-सा क्रिमिनल, एक छोटा-सा आतंकवादी हर पुरुष में बैठा है। कितनी भयानक भाषा बोलते हैं हम ! कितना अजीब है स्त्री-शरीर के प्रति हमारा नजरिया, स्त्री-शरीर जो

प्रकृति की तरह ही चतुर्दिक दोहन का शिकार है और उसके शोषण की प्राइम साइट भी ! मारपीट, गाली-गलौज, पर्दा, सती, डायनदहन, पोर्नोग्राफी, घरेलू बेगार, प्रेमहीन, यांत्रिक सम्भोग, बलात्कार, दूसरी तरह की यौन-प्रतारणाएँ, साफ-सुथरे और सुरक्षित प्रसव का अभाव, रही-सही कसर शिक्षा और आर्थिक सशक्तीकरण की कमी पूरी कर देते हैं। यदि यह भी नया नियम बना दिया जाए कि बूढ़े माँ-बाप लड़की के घर ही रहेंगे तो उनके नाम कम-से-कम आधी सम्पत्ति लिखते वे तरह-तरह की असुरक्षाओं से नहीं गुजरेंगे — वैसे भी तो बुढ़ापे का सहारा लड़कियाँ ही होती हैं।

एक प्रस्तावना मेरी यह भी है कि स्कूल के बाद हर छात्र को एक साल का ब्रेक दिया जाए। बोर्ड की परीक्षाओं के तुरंत बाद हर परीक्षार्थी को तीन महीने के लिए मुफ्त रेलवे-पास इशु हो — भारत-भ्रमण के लिए ! एक उम्र के लड़के-लड़कियाँ अलग-अलग जीवन-संदर्भों के साक्षी बनेंगे। साथ देखेंगे दुनिया तो उनमें सहज और सार्थक सम्बन्ध भी विकसित होंगे। वहाँ से लौटने के बाद कुछ दिन 'दूसरे घर' में सार्वजनिक जीवन जीते हुए और तरह-तरह के वोकेशनल-प्रशिक्षण लेते हुए या बच्चों को पढ़ाते हुए ही व्यक्तित्व के सकारात्मक और नकारात्मक पक्ष का पता चलेगा, यह भी पता चलेगा कि किस क्षेत्र में मेरी गति ज्यादा है,

किस राह पर चलकर दुनिया के काम अधिक आ पाऊँगा और खुश भी रहूँगा !

अंतिम बात यह कि राज्य पर अंकश जरूरी है – सिविल सोसायटी का – प्रेशर-ग्रुप्स की एक कारगर श्रृंखला का भी जिसमें शामिल हों श्रमिक-परिशद, उपभोक्ता परिशद, कम्यून सभाएँ, क्षेत्रीय संगठन आदि। इन सबके प्रतिनिधि चुने जाएँ ब्लाक और ज़िला स्तर पर स्थानीय भाषाओं में भी 'यंत्र विजनरी' जैसी प्रतियोगिताएँ आयोजित करके।

स्थानीय भाषाओं पर मेरा जोर बहुत है। जो जीवन के भौतिक दबावों के कारण चकाचक स्कूलों में नहीं पढ़ पाए, जो धुआँधार अँगरेजी-हिन्दी बोल नहीं सकते, योग्य तो वे भी हो सकते हैं ! गरीबों और दलितों को किसी भी अवसर से विरत क्यों रखा जाए या दूरस्थ, पिछड़े क्षेत्रों से रोजगार या शैक्षिक सुविधाओं की तलाश में महानगर आने वाले अथवा वहीं रहकर जीवन की जद्दोजहद झेलनेवाले प्रत्याशियों को ? यह मेरा अपना भी अनुभव कहता है कि भाषा अपनी हो तो विचार की उछाल अनन्त हो जाती है, अन्यथा सहमकर रह जाते हैं भाव भी।

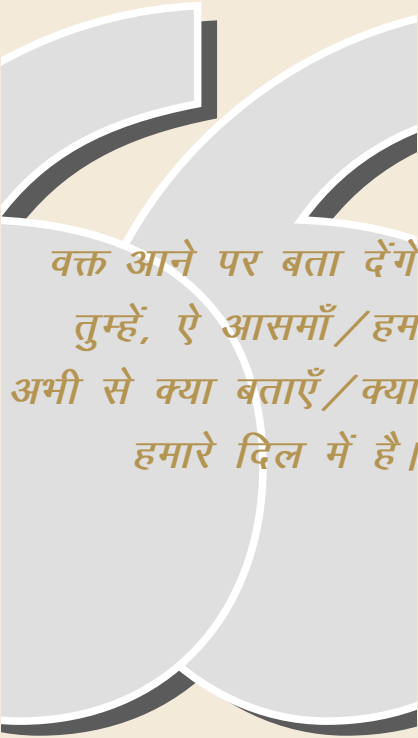
भूमण्डलीकरण (या भूमण्डीकरण) के बाद भी वाणिज्यबहुल दुनिया संस्कृति-बहुल भी हो, इसलिये

उसका भाषा-बहुल भी होना जरूरी है। एक नई तरह का भाषिक गणतंत्र बनाना जरूरी है जिसमें 'क्लासिकल' और 'पॉपुलर', 'पूर्वी' और 'पश्चिमी', 'ग्रामीण' और 'नागर' का पदानुक्रम तो मिटे ही, सभी भाषाओं, बोलियों, लोकसाहित्य और मिथकों से संदर्भ और चरित्र उठें, और नए प्रजातंत्र की जो नई भाषा बने – उसमें अलग-अलग स्रोतों, अलग-अलग व्यक्तियों, रंगों, सुगंधों के चिकने-खुरदुरे, लाल-पीले और भूरे शब्द एकदम निर्द्वन्द्व खेलें जैसा अनामिका की इस कविता में जो प्रथम-पीढ़ी-विस्थापित की मनःस्थिति झक से उजागर करती है –

मेरा भाई मुझे समझाकर कहता था – 'जानती है, पूनम – तारे हैं चुटपुटिया बटन – रात के अँगरखे में टँके हुए।' मेरी तरफ प्रेस बटन को चुटपुटिया बटन कहा जाता था, क्योंकि 'चुट' से केवल एक बार 'पुट' बजकर एक-दूसरे में समा जाते थे वे ! वे तभी तक होते थे काम के जब तक उनका साथी – चारों खूँटों से बराबर – उनके बिल्कुल सामने रहे टँका हुआ ! ऊँच-नीच में उनका कोई विश्वास नहीं था !

मेरी जीवन-यात्रा:  
महाविद्यालय से संसद की ओर

जो जीवन के भौतिक  
दबावों के कारण  
चकाचक स्कूलों में नहीं  
पढ़ पाए, जो धुआँधार  
अँगरेजी-हिन्दी बोल  
नहीं सकते, योग्य तो वे  
भी हो सकते हैं !



वक्त आने पर बता देंगे  
तुम्हें, ऐ आसमाँ/हम  
अभी से क्या बताएँ/क्या  
हमारे दिल में है।

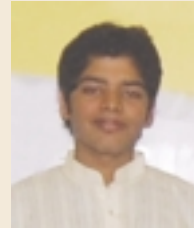
मेरी जीवन-यात्रा:  
महाविद्यालय से संसद की ओर

बराबरी के वे कायल थे !  
फँसते थे, न फँसाते थे – चुपचाप सट जाते थे !  
मेरी तरफ प्रेस-बटन को चुटपुटिया बटन कहा  
जाता था,  
लेकिन मेरी तरफ के लोग खुद भी थे  
चुटपुटिया बटन की तरह 'चुट' से 'पुट' बजकर सट  
जाने वाले !  
इस शहर में लेकिन 'चुटपुटिया' नज़र ही नहीं  
आते –  
सतपुटिया झिगुनी की तरह यहाँ एक सिरे से  
गायब हैं  
चुटपुटिया जन और बटन।  
ब्लाउज में भी दर्जी देते हैं टाँक यहाँ हुक ही हुक,

हर हुक के पीछे विराजमान होता है फंदा !  
फंदे में फँसे हुए आपस में कितना सटेंगे –  
कितना भी कीजिए जतन, चुट से पुट नहीं ही बजेंगे।

धूमिल का प्रसिद्ध संकलन है – 'संसद से सड़क  
तक' ! आप चाहें तो मेरे सपनों की इस पाण्डुलिपि का  
नाम' कक्षा से संसद तक रख लें। चौसर की एलेगरी का  
नाम है 'पॉर्लियामेंट ऑफ द फाउल्स' (पक्षियों की संसद)  
! किसी भी पक्षी के रूप में मैं संसद तक जो उड़ा – यंग  
विजनरी के रूप में या वृद्ध सुग्रीव के रूप में – ये मेरे  
सपने चरितार्थ होकर रहेंगे – वक्त आने पर बता देंगे  
तुम्हें, ऐ आसमाँ/हम अभी से क्या बताएँ/क्या हमारे  
दिल में है।

**Vishes Kothari**  
*St. Stephen's College, Delhi*



I was nervous. Nervous about how my speech and my ideas would be received. It was my maiden speech. Manohar Singh finished his speech. The Speaker mentioned my name. Or he seemed to, at least.

I stood up and began my first speech as the Minister for Education in Parliament. "The entire problem with our school level education system till now has been its focus on mass education rather than class education." A few eyebrows twitched. Faces contorted. My apprehension increased. Wiping a bead of sweat forming on my brow, I continued.

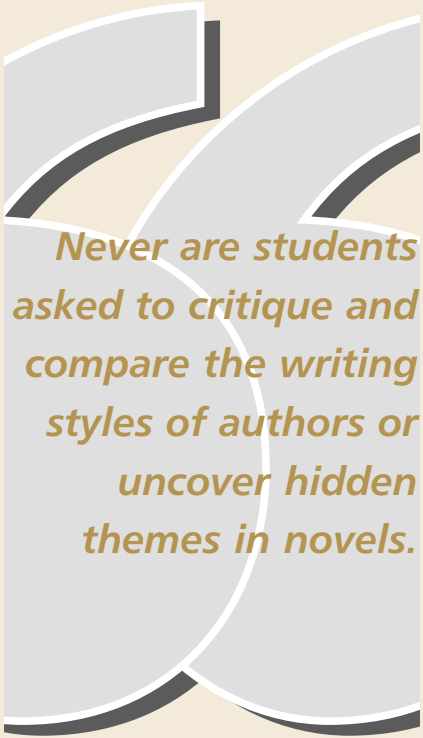
"From day one children are taught to follow instructions. All knowledge imparted is a tool which has to be used according to set patterns. Deviations from set patterns are discouraged.

Perhaps it is the remnant of the colonial system of education whose aim was to create a class of skilled civil servants and clerks which would help them form a pool of cheap labour.

"The long term effects are profound. Mathematics has become the most dreaded subject at the secondary and senior secondary level. Indeed it is shocking considering that ancient and medieval India produced some of the greatest mathematicians ever. Why? Because after years of approaching mathematics as a subject which involves solving "sums" using certain formulae, when the time comes to actually understand where the formulae came from, how they came and under what conditions do they evolve, students are absolutely clueless.

"The decline in the humanities is even starker.

*Indeed it is shocking considering that ancient and medieval India produced some of the greatest mathematicians ever. Why?*



*Never are students asked to critique and compare the writing styles of authors or uncover hidden themes in novels.*

My Journey From the Classroom to the Parliament

In Kolkata, which has been one of the foremost centres of education in our country, almost none of the elite boys' schools offer arts at the plus two level! History has been the worst hit. History question papers contain questions like "Mention the dates on which the following occurred" or "State two clauses from so-and-so Treaty". Questions about the significance of an event in history, notions of history are never dealt with.

Next on the casualty list is English. Students are bombarded with questions like "who said this to whom" or "what is his response to her question" and so on. Never are students asked to critique and compare the writing styles of authors or uncover hidden themes in novels. While studying Shakespeare no attempt is made to familiarize the reader with the Elizabethan audience or the theatre setups used. Instead students are asked "while this was happening who all were present at the scene."

Of course, the state of the fundamental sciences is probably beyond repair. The worst sort of mediocrity has crept into everything associated with it-text books, teaching methods used and the "projects" assigned. In fact recently, one of the National Boards gave the following question in the Physics paper "State the nine digit value

of the speed of light"! The question to be asked is: what does knowing the nine-digit value of the speed of light have to do with one's scientific abilities?

The list goes on. But then of course, one asks that how come, then, that Indian students are doing so well. The IT Sector is booming, et cetera.

Even here the trends are remarkably profound. All the streams which are booming are those which are essentially application-based (rather they are the only streams booming). While interest in the basic sciences declines rapidly, the thirst for an engineering degree (which is essentially an application of basic science) seems to be growing beyond bound. Students who take up History and English quickly appear for the Indian Administrative Services Examination.

Then, of course there is the insatiable desire for an MBA. Why are we Indians doing so well in the corporate sector? Because our education system, however unwittingly, trains us for it. We are taught to follow instructions and set patterns. The spirit of innovation is never inculcated. So a corporate career with relatively higher pay packets is just the thing.

On the other hand, fundamental research declines. Fifteen years ago India was producing about twice as many research papers as China was. Today China produces twice our number. The brightest students never align themselves to the academia. Most run abroad. Those who do take it up, do so more out of compulsion than by choice.

What I am saying needs to be understood with a great deal of caution. The growth of application-based streams isn't necessarily an indicator of a flawed education system. Instead it is the growth of *only* these application-based streams and the decline of the fundamental ones that displays the shocking nature of our education system.

So what are the problems at hand which I seek to address? The problems could be broadly categorised as: standardisation, mechanisation and compartmentalisation. And at the core of this lies the problem of an education system which focuses only on mass literacy without any class education.

### **What, then, is the solution?**

I have five solutions to offer. Firstly, our pattern of board examination papers needs to be almost

wholly restructured to solve the problem of an entirely mechanical approach.

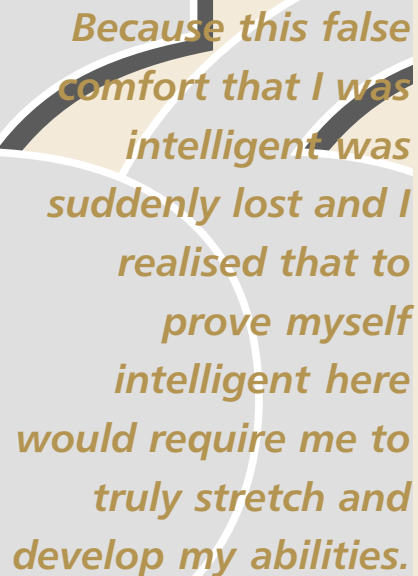
Ideas can be taken from a large number of foreign boards which are widely recognised throughout the world. While our Economics question papers contained questions like 'define the marginal rate of substitution' the A-Levels question paper carried a forty mark essay on 'the impact of the attacks on the World Trade Center on British Airways'. There are also some pioneering institutes in India whose recommendations can be taken. For example the Indian Statistical Institute has developed a beautiful pattern of highly conceptual entrance examinations.

Secondly, to tackle the problem of standardisation, papers must not follow the same patterns every year. Today students preoccupy themselves with "expected questions" and certain "answer formats". Instead a certain amount of unpredictability would ensure that students learn how to deal with the unfamiliar and do not become mechanical.

Thirdly, we must tackle our mediocrity-driven approach by coming up with an education system that brings about some kind of sedimentation.

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Institutes of higher education, both in India and abroad, refuse to accept our standards and chose to conduct their own tests. Why? Because our examinations with questions like “state”, “prove” and “define” following one after the other, lull and dull students into a false sense of security: a false sense of security that they are intelligent *because* they are doing well in school (which is not to say that they are not intelligent). Instead institutes of higher education recognise the fact that what they are actually looking for has not been tested by the boards and hence feel the need to test students in a way they feel is truly a test of competence. As a student with high marks in the board examinations I was in for a huge shock when I was confronted with various entrance examinations which truly tested one’s intelligence. And I ask myself today: why was I so shocked? Because this false comfort that I was intelligent was suddenly lost and I realised that to prove myself intelligent here would require me to truly stretch and develop my abilities.

Till now our examinations have always been set keeping the “mediocre” student in mind. The restructuring should be such that the intelligent student is also kept in mind. Though this sounds elitist, it would in practicality be immensely

helpful. As of now both a mediocre and an intelligent student would get 90+. If our education boards can come up with a gradation system, then no more examinations would be required to test intelligence. The entire need to have multiple entrance examinations to colleges would vanish. This would help us save a large amount of resources and reduce the pressure on students manifold.

Fourthly, a system which gives credit to innovation must be adopted. At the moment whatever projects are made by students essentially comprise material downloaded off of the Internet and the presentation is given undue importance. We should encourage the ability of students to create. This could involve giving equal weightage to projects requiring genuine research, as to written papers.

Fifthly, we must adopt the notion of a liberal education. Education must never be rigidly compartmentalised. Branches of knowledge are not discrete. Instead they reach out to each other in the most magnificent ways. An example is the deep correlation between physics and philosophy. I distinctly remember that in our college’s philosophy faculty, all the professors were actually graduates in physics! And who can forget



Bertrand Russell, the philosopher and mathematician who won the Nobel for Literature!

Greater flexibility must be adopted. Students must be allowed to take up courses outside prescribed “syllabi”. A course in Logic for example should be available for everybody. Who says only philosophy students must understand logic?

Greater exposure to all fields of knowledge must be provided and the option to change streams should be available. This would ensure that students do not continue in a field out of mere compulsion.

These are, in brief, the solutions I have to offer. The truth is that our fundamental approach must change from a mechanical, consumerist one to one which creates an environment for intellectual

development. Rather than creating machines, we should be able to train people capable of creating machines. Rather than consuming knowledge, one must be taught how to create it.

Any country, in fact any society, can progress only through the development of fundamental ideas. Progress cannot be parameterised only in terms of the number of investment banks coming up or the number of MBAs being produced. It was only when the steam engine was developed that society could transcend from the medieval to the modern. It was only with the humanism of the Renaissance period that the Dark Ages ended. Ultimately, progress has to be fundamental in nature for which mankind needs to venture out of known realms into that which is unknown. For this, the stimulation needs to come through an education system which tests not just diligence but intelligence too.”

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**Xyna Elizabeth Prasad**  
*Women's Christian College, Chennai*

During the college days, many political, economic and social issues disturb and challenge students for which we seek solutions. One such issue relates to the inclusion of mentally challenged people into the country's social fabric. At present, steps have been taken to include many vulnerable sections of society in the development process by including those living in rural areas, senior citizens, women, those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Other Backward classes, Economically Weaker Sections, Minorities and physically handicapped persons. But the mentally challenged remain excluded.

According to the Census, 2001, there are 2.19 crore persons with disabilities constituting 2.13 percent of total population of which around 2% have mental retardation and seventy five percent

persons of them live in rural areas. According to the National Sample Survey Organization, 2002 report on 'Disabled Persons in India', 55 percent of them were illiterate. There are more than 3,000 special schools. The Government is providing scholarships to students with disabilities. The Disability Units established under the Scheme of Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs are to ensure that the physical and educational environments are conducive to disabled students.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995, the Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 as amended up to 2000 and the National Trust Act 1999 are comprehensive in spirit. The Government offers concessions to the disabled in the areas of travel, postal and communications, customs duty and Income Tax.

But the public are unaware of these. India is a signatory to the Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region, the Biwako Millennium Framework for action towards an inclusive, barrier free and rights based society for disabled persons and recognise the World Programme on Action and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. India participates in the UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. Currently, rehabilitation services are largely available in and around urban areas.

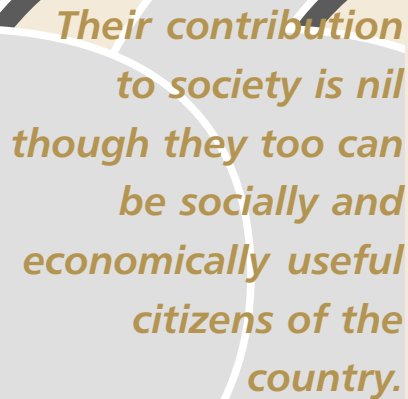
According to World Health Organization, while all these are very encouraging initiatives not more than 5-10% of the affected is currently being served by the existing services. They are today the 'hidden ones', the ones who many wish are not part of the so called 'mentally sound society'; the forgotten ones, the marginalised, the disadvantaged, the less spoken ones; the ones that need to be out of sight and out of mind to be put in asylums, hospitals or sent to the streets to beg for their livelihood. But actually they are 'special' as these differently-abled people too have something to contribute to society. They give unconditional love; they teach us to be

simple, straight forward and honest; they do not hide behind masks; they have no ulterior motives, when they deal with others. Their big gift to us is to challenge our selfishness, expose our fears and pound at our heart's doors to love and give.

The mentally challenged persons are least understood and most excluded in society. Therefore there are very little support systems for them. Parents of such children feel sad, humiliated, helpless and excluded from family and social activities. They tend to institutionalise, mistreat or neglect them. There are very few institutions that train people to work with such children. The institutions that look after these children are ill-equipped both in physical infrastructure and intellectual skills of teachers and helpers. Children do not benefit much from them as they are given no social and vocational skills except that the parents of these children get some respite during the hours they are at school. Society at large does not know how to treat the challenged. They call them 'mad' and stone them, run away from them in fear or treat them with contempt or sympathy or give them alms. They roam the streets, get into street fights, take to drugs, indulge in petty crimes and are susceptible to dreadful diseases due to lack of hygiene and malnutrition. Their contribution to

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Mentally challenged, refers to those whose IQ is below 70-75 and who lack proper adaptive social behaviour. As a group, mentally retarded children walk and talk later, are slightly shorter and are usually more susceptible to physical problems and illnesses than other children. They also generally score lower on tests of motor ability and physical fitness, although this is more due to neglect and lack of opportunity to improve than their disability.

A few suggestions as they relate to facilities and improvements required at home, public places and Government to help the mentally challenged persons to lead a near normal life and contribute to society are given below:

Research has shown that the best place for children with mental retardation to grow in is their own families, where they can be nurtured with appropriate stimulation. The first requirement is for appropriate facilities for a good and accurate medical/health evaluation. Doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers can make a big difference to parents by correctly explaining the condition and the options for treatment as well as by clarifying their doubts,

providing emotional support and guidance. Once the parents get a grasp of the condition, they need to learn appropriate ways of rearing and training the child. Parents continue to need such assistance, guidance, and support as the child grows up, especially during adolescence, early adulthood and during periods of crisis. They should also be networked with parents of similar children. One such association is the National Federation of Parent Association and this must have local chapters at district headquarters and at state capitals. Parents must also take steps to integrate the child with the society by first treating the child like other child and by allowing other children to appreciate and accept the challenged child. At no point of time should that child be humiliated, hidden or excluded from any family activity. This initial acceptance will help the child to face the world with confidence.

Depending on the level of retardation, decision is to be taken to put the mentally challenged child in special schools or normal schools. All schools and colleges must be encouraged to have disabled friendly physical infrastructure, which should at least have a ramp with railings to enter their premises either on a wheel chair or on foot and special toilets. Schools should also employ one or two specially trained teachers to handle

such children. 'Normal' children from young age must be taught to accept children who are not like them physically or mentally. They should be shown documentaries on challenged children. Visits should be organized to special institutions which teach such children. These exposures will help them to accept and appreciate them and remove any unhealthy fear in dealing with them.

Public buildings (functional or recreational), transport amenities should be made accessible to the disabled in a phased manner within a specific time frame by at least providing ramps and special toilets. Security personnel must be given special training in handling disabled and mentally challenged persons. Time bound steps need to be taken to ensure disability-friendly IT environment. All institutions must be encouraged to support the mentally challenged persons both financially and physically. A day may be designated as 'kindness day' to encourage staff to visit institutions that cater to mentally challenged persons. This will mutually help the 'normal' and the 'challenged'.

The law making body must play a great role in this 'inclusion' venture. The three acts passed by the Parliament are initiatives in the right direction. Yet more needs to be done. There is a need to create a data base of mentally challenged

persons by ordering a special census with proper categorization- deaf, dumb, blind, polio affected, mentally retarded etc and another data base on institutions both medical and educational institutions catering to them. On the basis of the information collected, brochures may be prepared for interested persons. All Special Schools must include vocational courses for mentally challenged persons to make them economically independent. All universities must offer graduate and post graduate courses in 'Special Education' with liberal scholarship to encourage and enable students to prepare themselves for that vocation. Public Sector Institutions may be encouraged to use products like greeting cards, covers etc made by these disabled persons. Once a year there must be a press release detailing in brief the facilities challenged people can expect from the Government in all local and national News Papers

India will be a better place when we include all people of our society in every man made institution and places of work and play. The need of the hour is to be aware of the presence of mentally challenged persons, appreciate them and assimilate them in our society. Only then, will we have an India, where all of us, with or without a disability, can live with dignity and honour.

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