

Education



The President Shri K. R. Narayanan presenting the Bharat Ratna Award to Prof. Amartya Sen at a glittering investiture ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi on 16 February 1999

Introduction

India, China and Greece were the most notable knowledge societies in ancient times. Knowledge through education, training and research occupied the pride of place in the scheme of things in the life of the Indian elite. *Vidya* or education had a comprehensive and inclusive connotation in the Indian vocabulary. It extended to arts, sciences, skills, humanities and a ceaseless enquiry into the meaning of existence. As the ancient Indian seers put it, *vidya* is that which liberates (*saa vidya yaa vimuktaye*). It is remarkable that the aspiration for education remained an integral part of the Indian emigrant psyche. It appears that it is through education that the Indian Diaspora has progressed from strength to strength.

- 30.2. Every component of our Diaspora has major expectations from India in the field of education as it is regarded as the key to human development, both material and spiritual. All overseas Indians, both NRIs & PIOs are unanimous that education has the most crucial role to play in forging ties between the Diaspora and India and in developing ties between the different segments of the Diaspora. The High Level Committee, therefore, requested the Ministry of Human Resource Development to constitute an Expert Group on “*the Role of Education in strengthening linkages between the Diaspora and India*”. The recommendations of the Expert Group and their rationale are reflected and incorporated in the discussion that follows.
- 30.3. During its tours in both developing and developed countries, and in its interaction with the members of the Indian communities overseas, the Committee made it a point to discuss the role of education in bringing India and the Diaspora together. Specific suggestions and requirements of the communities in the field of education were also sought from our Missions and Posts abroad.
- 30.4. Education is also the key for India in the furtherance of its policies and objectives. It is through education that concepts are propagated and disseminated. Educational institutions play a vital role in creating the sense of belonging, cultural and linguistic identity and a balanced allegiance to both the host and home country. Education imparted by institutions of excellence can help develop a mature understanding of both societies. Thus, the aim of the educational institutions

should be to provide educational opportunities for skill development and academic excellence while satisfying the quest for heritage and roots and creating multiple but mutually complementary allegiances. Educational institutions and the education imparted by them are perhaps the most potent tools in the shaping of a human being as they mould the body, heart, mind and intellect. The friendships and associations formed during the period of one's educational career are usually the strongest. They penetrate all aspects of a student's psyche and shape his personality thereby becoming a strong motivating force in his actions, second only to the emotional commitment to the family.

- 30.5. The US, for example, understands the power of education in shaping and moulding the hearts, minds and skills of the people. It has also been one of the most important factors in Indo-US relations. Why did so many Indian professionals make the US their country of adoption? One important reason was, perhaps, that the US became one of the most important countries for higher education for Indians, replacing the U.K. Thousands of Indians studied in the United States after 1960. But it was not a one-way traffic. Extraordinary and extensive collaboration between India and the USA took place in the last over fifty-three years in spite of fluctuating fortunes of political relationship between the two countries. American assistance was used in projects to increase India's self-sufficiency.
- 30.6. From the point of view of educational requirements, the Indian Diaspora can be divided on the basis of their settlement in the following groups of countries: -
 - a) Countries in the Gulf region;
 - b) Countries where the migration had taken place because of indentured and plantation labour; and
 - c) Developed countries of North America and West Europe.
- 30.7. If India has to use education to meet the common aspirations of the Diaspora and our policy objectives, it has to adopt a multi-pronged strategy.
- 30.8. The school level deserves our greatest attention with respect to our Diaspora located in the three groups of countries identified above. Obviously, the need is greatest for the Diaspora in the Gulf region.

School Level Measures

- 30.9. **Setting up of residential schools** – Schools can be set up in India with at least 50% Indian children and 50% Diaspora children from Class VI onwards with infrastructural facilities, both academic and residential to meet their needs. These schools need to offer three streams of affiliation:
 - (a) International Baccalaureate

- (b) 'O' & 'A' level examinations
- (c) At least one Indian Board like CBSE or ICSE.

Commensurate fees need to be worked out in order eventually to make such schools self-sufficient. The advantage of such schools would be that even Indian children who may be planning to go abroad for college level education would want to enrol in them.

30.10. Being residential, such schools can easily run co-curricular programmes like (a) art appreciation and lessons in

- (a) Indian music and dance;
- (b) Indian literature;
- (c) Folk traditions of India;
- (d) Crafts of India;
- (e) Foundations of modern Indian society;
- (f) Oral traditions in India;
- (g) Indian films and media.

30.11. In the Gulf countries there are a number of people who can neither afford to take their children to the Gulf nor have the financial resources to send them to residential schools in India. Special reservation of seats ought to be made for the children in the Central Schools located in the Gulf region, and in Navodaya schools, or even good private schools in India. This would be particularly relevant in the case of States like Kerala and Andhra Pradesh because of the sizeable population of people from these States in the Gulf.

30.12. There must also be courses given in Indian schools which are designed to create awareness relating to the Indian Diaspora through:

- (a) diasporic literature;
- (b) formation of diasporic societies;
- (c) diasporic music and dance;
- (d) syncretic diasporic culture and identity; and
- (e) contributions of the Diaspora to the host country.

30.13. In addition, intensive Indian language programmes should be designed and implemented in schools where children from the Diaspora are enrolled. All these should be taught through a hands-on approach and the use of several modes of teaching, apart from books.

- 30.14. **Setting up institutions like the United World College (UWC)** – Their overall structure and philosophy could be the same as in the UWCs, except that such schools would only cater for grades XI and XII. One such school has already begun to function near Pune. Such institutions would be useful for the Diaspora in all three categories of countries identified in para 30.6 above.
- 30.15. **Facilities should be enhanced in existing schools** to accommodate children of parents who are based in countries of the Gulf region since they, in any case, have to send their children back to India for higher education. Such children would therefore need to be given hostel facilities.
- 30.16. **Student exchange programmes should be organised during summer holidays or other long vacations ranging from two weeks to eight weeks:** Such arrangements could be explored with NGOs who are already engaged in sponsoring volunteers to work with rural communities, and also have funds to meet travel costs, even partially. Gurukul programmes of the kind attempted by SPIC MACAY could be augmented to enable some diasporic students to stay with, and follow the discipline of gurus like Kelucharan Mahapatra, Bhimsen Joshi and others. Such initiatives would benefit the children of the Indian Diaspora in countries of category c) of para 30.6.

College/University Level Initiatives

- 30.17. The Indian Diaspora in countries belonging to a) and b) of para 30.6 is interested in undergraduate, technical or professional education for their children, as well as greater specialization to be eligible for post-graduate programmes. A small number may be inclined towards research. In this context the Committee suggests the following measures: -
- 30.18. **Expansion of the number of seats in existing colleges and universities** – In addition to the reservation of 5% of seats for NRI children, the Government has recently reserved another 15% for foreign students, including PIOs, in our higher educational institutions. Such students face several practical difficulties because of an insufficient awareness among teachers with regard to the special need to treat them with understanding and consideration. Teachers should be specially made aware of this requirement. Some students have, in the past, gone back with bitter experiences. All foreign students should be provided with information on local living conditions, banking procedures, modes of shopping and other such matters. The admission process should be streamlined and made much smoother. Campuses should welcome and integrate them with the rest of the student community. Teachers and others should be encouraged to invite them for major festivals and social events. The national days of students from diasporic countries should be celebrated. Adequate hostel facilities, that is, more international students' hostels should be set up.
- 30.19. **For those coming from the developed world** – The University of Hyderabad has already started an excellent Study India Programme. A similar programme has been proposed by Hindu College of the University of Delhi. We are of the view that every institution, which has diasporic

students, should develop, as far as possible, a Study India Programme for the benefit of those students.

- 30.20. **Short duration orientation programmes** – Institutions located in cities, which have a sizeable diasporic student population, should pool their resources together and provide a common orientation programme for them. This should be mandatory if they are not in a position to offer a full semester programme as in the University of Hyderabad, or as proposed by Hindu College.
- 30.21. **Universities of international standards in the Export Promotion Zones of India:** Such institutions should be established with programmes of study in key subjects like Management, Information Technology, Media, Agricultural Research, Medicine, Food processing, etc. They should be self-sustaining institutions of excellence. Both the student fees and the staff salary structure should be commensurate with that objective. Indian students should also be eligible for admission. This would serve the needs of students who are presently trying to join as full fee-paying students in foreign universities, many of which are aggressively promoting their institutions in India.
- 30.22. **Setting up of offshore campuses of Indian universities in collaboration with host countries in key subjects:** Institutions should be set up to provide middle level technological skills in subjects such as Industrial Training. The “community college movement” is strong in Canada and the USA. It serves a useful purpose by providing courses that are a good mix of academic inputs and skills development, like our undergraduate vocational courses. Institutions for training in fields like media, nursing, etc. should also be set up. Offshore campuses of high-level academic institutions like IITs, IIMs and medical colleges may be set up in collaboration with governments in host countries, or organisations like foundations and institutions. These would be very useful for students in the first category of diasporic countries.
- 30.23. **Devising syllabi and papers on diasporic culture, literature, contributions and other subjects, both at the undergraduate level and right up to specialised research.** At the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, diasporic authors, history, popular culture and sociology should be included among the subjects for study, or as optional subjects. The approach would have to be interdisciplinary. The services of the authorities concerned with curricula and other organisations relating to these subjects should be utilized for the purpose.
- 30.24. **Setting up of Centres for Diaspora studies for specialized research.** One or more interdisciplinary centre for Diaspora studies should be set up to promote chosen branches of study relating to the Diaspora.
- 30.25. **Strengthening of existing cultural centres:** They should be encouraged to collaborate with neighbouring countries.
- 30.26. **Utilisation of special expertise of the diasporic visitors to India:** Considerable expertise is currently available among PIOs, especially in developed countries in various fields of technology, medicine, academics and others. Diasporic visitors to India could be requested to deliver lectures and talks and conduct short-term courses while they are here.

- 30.27. **Courses through distance learning.** Organisations like the CBSE, IGNOU and other bodies which impart education through distance learning bodies should be requested to design and present courses through the internet, television and printed material for meeting the needs of various segments of the Diaspora.
- 30.28. **Dissemination of educational material through teaching/learning aids** like CD ROMS, audio and video cassettes, films for both formal and informal education: Such a programme could cover all aspects of India, including subjects like Environment, Science & Technology, Art, Culture, History, Law, Philosophy, Languages and Law.
- 30.29. Institutions conducting these courses through distance learning organisations should award degrees and diplomas for acquiring knowledge and proficiency in such courses after appropriate evaluation.
- 30.30. **Setting up of prestigious institutions for professional education.** In addition to the existing system of reservation of seats in professional colleges in fields like medicine, engineering and dental science, private organisations and foundations should be encouraged to set up quality institutions of international standards.

Sourcing the Potential of the Diaspora

- 30.31. Indian teachers and academics have earned a name for themselves. They are highly respected for their abilities and hard work. Indian academics occupy senior faculty positions not only in English speaking countries but even in a number of non-English speaking countries of the world. In the U.S., many Indian academics have achieved notable eminence. Some of them have become Deans and Professors in the most prestigious institutions. The Dean of the Kellogg School of Management is for instance, an Indian. The achievements of Indian academics in professional institutions are particularly noteworthy. At school level also, a number of Indians have become Principals of schools in countries of their settlement, including advanced countries. A number of first generation Indian academics, teachers and Principals have now retired. Many amongst them feel that it is now payback time and that they must do something for the country, which educated them at virtually no cost. They are particularly well inclined to do something for their *alma maters*. Many serving academics share the same feeling. Indian academics have also played a notable role as opinion makers for India. Senior Indian academics with the help of second-generation members of the Diaspora have also organised India clubs or India study groups in well-known institutions. Such clubs and study centres organise seminars and workshops on wide ranging topics relevant to India. They are thus an extraordinary resource for dissemination of India related information to business and political leaders, academics and young students. In fact, academics in almost every English speaking country, and many of them in non-English speaking countries, are rendering yeoman service to the country of their origin.
- 30.32. The NRI and PIO students are also very active in organising India-focused events in their institutions. The functions of Indian Students' Associations are popular in most of the universities

in North America. By celebrating a number of Indian festivals like Diwali, Holi and other such events these associations provide exposure to Indian culture not only to the members of the mainstream community but also to fellow students from other countries. A number of second-generation NRI/PIO students are also keen to know more about their civilisational heritage. They want to get a first hand experience of India through short study programmes as well as voluntary work in India.

- 30.33. It is obvious that the Indian school teachers, university academics and students are an extraordinary asset for India. As stated earlier, a number of retired school and university teachers are keen to do something for their motherland, particularly by contributing to the study of their field of specialisation in Indian institutions. It is, therefore, important that suitable programmes are drawn up to convert their goodwill and desire to do something for India into reality. However, they find the bureaucracy and red tape in India a serious impediment. The serving academics are also happy to provide guidance to Indian research scholars as well as work on joint projects with their counterparts in India.
- 30.34. In the Committee's interaction with academics in North America and Australia it was repeatedly mentioned that they would prefer a single point of contact. In order constructively to engage the diasporic teaching community and research scholars in the field of education in India, it is absolutely essential to have a good data bank about them, with brief CVs including their field of specialisation. A website should be developed which could be accessed by members of the academic community abroad who want to volunteer their time and services in India. They could post their particulars on this site. A mechanism could be worked out to identify appropriate institutes and organisations that could utilise the services of such volunteers. The proposed data bank would also be of immense help to Indian academics who are interested in pursuing higher studies and research abroad. This would, no doubt, also facilitate collaborative projects and research. The proposed mechanism would also facilitate contacts among academics of Indian origin in different parts of the world.
- 30.35. The Committee has reached the considered conclusion that the education sector can and should be enabled to play a vital and wide-ranging role in strengthening linkages between NRIs/PIOs and India. Education has the potential of making an enormous bridge-building contribution and of being an important Indian export. It can also contribute to promoting ties between various segments of the Diaspora. While on the one hand, NRIs and PIOs can make an important contribution to the development of education in India, on the other hand, the Indian education system can help NRIs maintain their cultural and civilisational heritage.

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