



Indian Institute Of Idiots

Our education system creates a society of followers rather than change-embracing leaders

Chetan Bhagat



I avoid writing columns on the Indian education system as it is not good for my health. For days, my blood continues to boil, I have insomnia and I feel like hurting someone real bad. The Indian education system is a problem that can be fixed. It affects the country's future, impacts almost every family, everyone knows about it and it is commercially viable to fix it. Still, nothing happens because of our great Indian culture of avoiding change at all costs. And because change means sticking out your neck and that, ironically, is something we are not taught to do.

Still, with a movie coming on the education system, which came about because of a book I wrote nearly six years ago, it is important to revisit the issues. Soon, all the media will talk about is the anatomy, diet and romantic chemistry of the main actors. While that makes insightful breakfast reading, it is also important to understand the main problems with our education system that need to be fixed or, rather, should have been fixed 10 years ago.

There are two main problems: one, the supply of good college seats and, two, the actual course content and intent behind education.

The first issue is about the supply of A-grade institutions vs the number of A-grade potential students. With one crore students

taking the class XII exam each year, the top 10 per cent, the high potential population by any global standard, deserves a world-class institution. That means we need 10 lakh good, A-grade, branded college seats per year. Either the government provides them, or they work with private participants to make it happen. Until that is done, the scramble for seats will be worse than a peak hour Virar fast. No amount of well-meant advice to parents to go easy on kids, telling children to not take stress, will work. I'm sorry, if I have a child who I think is bright, I will fight to make sure he has a good college. If the number of seats is well below the required number, the fight is going to be bloody and ugly. And that is what happens every year.

What do we teach in school and college? And how much do you use it in daily life later? Ask yourself

What makes me most curious is: why doesn't the government fix it? Real estate and faculty are often the biggest requirements in creating a university. The government has plenty of land. And any advertisement for government teaching jobs gets phenomenal responses. After this, there could be running costs. However, most parents are happy to pay reasonable amounts for college. With coaching classes charging crazy amounts, parents are already spending so much any-



Red roses, college blues

way. I understand Indians send \$7 billion (over Rs 30,000 crore) as outward remittance for Indian students studying abroad. Part of that money would be diverted inwards if good colleges were available here. The government can actually make money if it runs universities, and add a lot more value to the country than, say, by running the embarrassing Air India which flushes crores down the drain every day.

Why can't Delhi University replicate itself, at four times the size, in the outskirts of Gurgaon? The existing professors will get more senior responsibilities, new teachers will get jobs and the area will develop. If we can have kilometre-long malls and statues that cost hundreds of crores, why

not a university that will pay for itself? This is so obvious that the young generation will say: Duh!?

The education system's second problem: the course content itself. What do we teach in school and college? And how much do you use it in daily life later? Ask yourself, has the world changed in the last 20 years? If yes, has our course content changed at the same pace? Has it even changed at all? Who are the people changing our course materials? Do they have real life corporate exposure?

I am not saying we study only to get a job (though many, many Indians actually do it with that main intention). However, even in the 'quest for knowledge' goal of education, our course materials fall short. We emphasise sticking

to the course, testing endlessly how well the student has revised his lessons. We treat lessons as rules to be adhered to, and the better you conform, the more likely you are to score. I hated it personally, and I am sure millions do too but they have no choice. Innovation, imagination and creativity – crucial for the country as well as more likely to bring the best out of any student – have no place in our education system. In fact, we actually ensure we kill this spirit in the child as fast as possible. Because innovation by definition means challenging the existing way, and that is just not something good Indian kids who respect elders do.

The cycle perpetuates itself, and we continue to create a second-rate society of followers rather than change-embracing leaders. I have hope that the current generation will break this norm and start questioning the great Indian way. I have hope that the current HRD minister will acknowledge this problem and do something. I have hope that Indians will start questioning any politician they meet on what they are doing about the education system at every place possible. I have hope that people will realise that making new states is less important than making new state universities. Maybe I am right, maybe my hope is justified and maybe I will live to see the change. Or maybe I've got it all wrong, my optimism is misplaced and I am just, as they say, one of the Idiots.

The writer is a best-selling novelist.