Educational institutions need to be strengthened

More than a century ago, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), the great Indian philosopher, reformer and spiritual leader noted that the real cause of India’s downfall was the neglect of its masses. The immediate need was to provide food and other bare necessities to the needy; to teach the masses improved methods for developing agriculture and village industries. Vivekananda advocated infusing faith into the minds of the downtrodden. For this, a life-giving and inspiring message was needed. And only through education could this message be spread. Proper education, that was what Vivekananda meant. Education, that is “the manifestation of the perfection already in man”. The goal of mankind, according to the Swami, was knowledge; knowledge that is inherent in man and which is only rediscovered through education. Educational institutions thus have a huge role in shaping the future of any society.

The positivism of Vivekananda influenced many. Years after the Swami’s death, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the Nobel Laureate Bengali poet said, “If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative”. Vivekananda inspired Jamshedji Tata (1839-1904), the great industrialist to set up the ‘Indian Institute of Science’, one of India’s finest research institutions.

India is today independent and a thriving democracy with an ever increasing middle class intelligentsia. According to the United States (US) Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) world factbook, on 01 January 2009, India ranked 5th in the world in gross domestic product purchasing power parity, only below the US, China, Japan and Germany. There are many other issues to be proud of, particularly within a year of a world cup victory in cricket (a game which unfortunately very few nations play seriously at the highest level). Alas, I have to end this positivism here as I am more concerned with the field of education; and the education system or at least a part of it, particularly in small towns and villages in the district I reside and those surrounding mine, has not been in perfect condition. (This region, also known as ‘Gour Banga’ refers to the two Dinajpur and Malda districts of West Bengal, India). It’s very common to hear that a teacher was beaten or threatened for being honest in the examination hall. National highways have been blocked by angry guardians whose school going progeny were prevented from cribbing in the board examinations. The controller of examinations was not spared in one incident. I have been gheraoed many a times. Even my motorbike was assaulted on 12 July 2011. I do not, however believe that the students were offenders; logically speaking, they (errant students) are the product of a system that had learnt to live with cheating and when they (errant students) were prevented (rather unusual event for them), they could only but protest.

In such condition, instead of adhering to strict principles that supports flourishing of proper education, most authorities are interested to somehow manage the system. Politics and
influence of politicians can create nuisance; there are ample examples of outsiders creating havoc in educational institutions. One possible way out is doing away with the home-centre examination system. This can restrain the unscrupulous elements from within the administration who support systematic cheating.

Truly speaking, research activities and documentation are neglected in the region. Hopefully, the ‘Raiganj- Gour Banga Research Forum’ will encourage research activities in the region through conducting some student-level seminars/workshops, etc., student-teacher interactions and publishing the ‘Indian Journal of Social and Natural Sciences’ (originally planned as ‘Journal of the Gour Banga Research Forum’). We intend to make this a truly international and peer-reviewed Journal. The editorial board members cover a wide array of expertise in subjects of natural and social sciences. As the Chief Editor of the Journal, I thank all the authors, reviewers, the guest editor, editorial board members, forum colleagues, sponsors, printing personnel, prospective readers and well wishers for making the beginning a success. I am looking forwards to working with you. I am also indebted to Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, one of the architects of the ‘green revolution’ in India, who took time out of his busy schedule to pen down a very encouraging message for the inaugural issue of our Journal.

Back to the question on the role of educational institutions in the society. In an article published (on 13 April 2011) in the english daily, ‘The Statesman’, Swami Sandarshanananda of the Ramkrishna Mission Vidyapith in Deoghar mentioned, “we can assert our national identity only if we make effective contributions to building one, and to do that, honesty and integrity are indispensable”. Educational institutions need men of high integrity and caliber, men who would encourage character building. The Indian nation needs good educational institutions. There cannot be any excuses. To end, I quote selectively from Swami Sandarshanananda: “Vivekananda compared our nation with a ship which has been plying for ages, carrying a civilization and enriching all with its treasures. Today, the vessel may have sprung leaks but as a nation, we must learn to plug them. And, our success will redeem India”.

JAI HIND.

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