

and equally surprising, that she finds the teacher's inclusion of superstitious Hindu beliefs as a positive example of meta-academic work. Gupta may be right in observing that the teacher education programmes through which her teachers acquired their professional degrees may not have provided them with resources to practise, and indeed may have left them untouched cognitively, and that one must. It is not clear why she attributes their espousal of 'activity methods' to the influence of the internet and not to the curriculum of their courses. If she had probed more, she may have found that 'play-way' and 'activity-based', 'joyful learning' are very much elements of nursery school teacher training. One must note in addition, Gupta's easy dismissal of B.El.Ed curriculum in teacher preparation. If she had made an effort to interact with any of the current students or alumni of the programme she would have encountered an empowered teacher who has 'tamed' the 'horrible sounding names' into cognitive, significant frameworks and ideas to think about children and teaching.

'Culture' is an important influence—but surely in the case of India it merits a layered interpretation rather than the uni-dimensional and simplistic one drawn by Gupta, which links it almost exclusively to a rosy middle-class Hindu lifestyle and superficial reading of ancient Indian texts and 'Sacred Space' from *The Times of India*. The only reason for Vygotsky in the title seems to be because this is one, very current acceptable name which begins with 'V' and can serve as a proxy for the Western tradition—there is nothing Vygotskian in the analysis, theorising or recommendations. Thus an exploration which could have been a powerful study of how Indian culture of the middle class comes to constitute the theoretical resources of teachers and how teacher education curriculum and media portrayal of children and education have interplayed to produce the teacher practice, is reduced to an account that is both trite and excessive. One cannot end this review of a thoroughly dissatisfactory book without recognising that contrary to this reviewer's views, academic scholars in the West have not only found this book to meet its standards of scholarship, but have also found it worthy of awards and endorsement. I do not want to speculate on the reasons for this.

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Krishna Kumar, **A Pedagogue's Romance: Reflections on Schooling**. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008. Rs. 450 (Hardbound)

A *Pedagogue's Romance: Reflections on Schooling* is a book on education, which illuminates the Indian educational scenario and its socio-historical and political background. And, it does this with 'lightness,' a term used by Prof. Krishna Kumar while referring to Mahatma Gandhi. The origin of the term is explained as being the first of the *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* written by Italo Calvino with reference to the values that define Literature. Lightness is not triviality but involves rising above gravity and is opposed to stodginess. This characteristic of good writing is amply demonstrated by Prof. Krishna Kumar in the twenty different essays that form the three sections of the book.

The brief introduction aptly makes a point about generalised comments on education that one is repeatedly exposed to even in Education classes. An interesting quote by S. Harris in this regard comes to mind, "Nothing can be so amusingly arrogant as a young man who has just discovered an old idea and thinks it is his own." Such commentators (and one has met a few) are absolutely certain they know what the real educational problems of India are, and often have grand or

simple solution/s to offer too. As the author suggests, such commentators acknowledge no sense of responsibility and also lack awareness that they may themselves be a part of the problem.

The first section, “Colours and Shades” intersects and makes connections with life experiences and schooling. The first essay, “A Pedagogue’s Romance” is a delightful and entertaining one that focuses on the habit of spitting in public and draws our attention to our attitudes to hygiene, and filth in public places, and to those who clean this filth. These aspects are neatly co-related to school education, where ‘spitting’ is included under health, but this does not necessarily effect a behavioural change.

The other essays in this section, which are equally absorbing, are titled, “Teaching Peace,” “A Child’s Swaraj” and “Remembering Earthworms.” While I value “A Child’s Swaraj” for introducing me to the books of Astrid Lindgren, “Remembering Earthworms” helps me recall my childhood, when nature seemed to be a part of people, and people were closer to nature. Nostalgia grips us now, when we think of the missing sounds of insects in the night and earthworms in bathrooms. However, this feeling of oneness with nature is not propagated by schools or by textbooks. Instead, under the guise of bringing children closer to nature they are perhaps forced to inflict greater violence on nature. A case in point is the practice of assigning school projects like building a terrarium, which textbooks suggest, result in students developing scientific skills of observation. It is argued that taking care of the needs of the animals and plants will help students develop a sense of responsibility towards other creatures. However, placing insects/small animals in captivity in an alien environment, to observe and to study their behaviour and food habits, often results in either death of the animals or severe ill-effects on them (Chunawala et al. 1996). Its stated goals are not realised and it either de-sensitises children to animals or de-moralises them with respect to Science and Environmental education.

Other essays in this section span the spectrum from “Freire’s Legacy” to “Future Girls” and include the interestingly

titled essay, “Let us all blame the teacher.” Teachers are often accused of being, lazy, incompetent, unmotivated, or motivated only by financial or even communal rewards. The title successfully evokes the imagery of “blaming the victim” and helps us realise how a teacher, who is ‘A meek dictator’ as the author suggests in another article (2007), is also a victim. According to Prof. Kumar, we are on the road to educational recovery only when we regain our faith in our teachers.

The second section, “The world around us” describes the social context of Indian education, its pulls and pressures. While education (often defined as deliberately organised instruction with the aim of transmission of cultural values) is a complex organisation, it is a part of socialisation and yet, distinct. Formal education that was available only to small elite groups a few centuries ago, has now spread to all sections of society, with the tacit aim of providing the minimum skills of literacy and numeracy. Yet, the forces shaping present scene of education, are diverse and complex, especially with regard to what is to be considered as valid and valued. The emphasis on the Three R’s has pushed several areas of human skills and knowledge out of the domain of education. There is no place for, or even tolerance of, different forms of human expressions including skill-based expressions within education.

The first two essays in this section, “Democracy without Democrats” and “A Memory of Coming to Life” describe the commoditisation of the media and use of the educational system to influence thinking. Aldous Huxley in his book, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) states, “The early advocates of universal literacy and a free press envisaged only two possibilities: the propaganda might be true, or it might be false. They did not foresee what in fact has happened, above all in our Western capitalist democracies - the development of a vast mass communications industry, concerned in the main neither with the true nor the false, but with the unreal, the more or less totally irrelevant.”

Today we are faced with an onslaught of the trite and the irrational that occupy our minds and anything non-trivial is either considered boring or disturbing and, therefore, to be

avoided. Herman and Chomsky suggest in *Manufacturing Consent*, that despite the attempts to manipulate our thinking through language and media, the propaganda system is not all-powerful and there is hope that common people can act as a counterforce (1994). However, Prof. Kumar warns that turning the educational system into a propaganda machine will result in unimaginable disasters.

In India, another associated problem is that the hegemony of English language has been strengthened by an educational system that was envisaged only for the transmission of restricted functional knowledge- to be of service for colonial administrative needs (Dias, 2004). The privileged continue to use the colonially inherited language and this leads to the dominance of the language itself. The result, according to Prof. Kumar, is the creation of a tribe of 'intellectuals' totally disconnected from the ground realities of India.

A theme that recurs in the book is gender and two essays are devoted to this socio-cultural aspect of Indian life and how it impacts education. The educational system and the process of participating in it as a student, play important roles in the formation of gender identity. Schools, teachers and textbooks are instrumental in communicating gender roles and expectations to girls and boys. A major issue in this regard is the stereotyping of males and females to rigid traditional roles that denies them a diverse range of possibilities. Layton (1993) suggests that "[...] 'gendering' of experience is nowhere more obvious than in technology." Both, technology and education are products of social forces and hence, gendered. The perception that what women do is not in any sense technological, persists, despite their involvement in survival technology since the dawn of history (Wajeman 1991). It is interesting to link this theme to an essay on crafts at school that appears in the last section "A matter of detail."

The craft tradition has stayed outside schools in India, where the general social outlook views vocational education as an inferior form of education. The divide between the mind and the hand is acute and the mental often overrides the manual at everything. While such attitudes are perhaps found across the

world, the Indian socio-cultural background privileges the intellect to a larger extent. The dilemma that educational policy-makers face is that they are accused of vocationalising general education and making vocational education too generic and irrelevant to employment.

Enriching school curricula with explicit opportunities for authentic problem solving and multiple expression modes, valid in a variety of classroom contexts, could help develop future technology innovators. Design, which is at the core of any technological activity, is a way of seeing the world, that is quite distinct from the way the Sciences or the Humanities see the world. Hence, technology, with an emphasis on design, deserves a subject status in Indian general education. It is important to note that technology education is not merely education in information technology.

A well-planned design and technology curriculum, especially in mixed ability and multicultural classrooms, can be an inclusive rather than an exclusive endeavour, for the children of the rich as well as the dispossessed, for those in the indigenous or the modern mould, for girls or for boys (Choksi et. al. 2006). It has myriad teaching possibilities that imbue the subject with ideas of inclusivity and equity, creativity and critical thinking, ecology of thought and action. This is also what makes it an empowering school subject.

A book, an article, a talk, a movie or a play tend to be reviewed and appreciated (or not) by different people for different reasons. The reasons cited for appreciation range from being aesthetically pleasing to being thought-provoking (forces you to think about some issues), to providing new information, to throwing light on some newer dimension or motivating the reader/audience to reach for other information through resources that it mentions. The last is especially important because the book (film etc.) in question is not an end in itself, but an inspiration for the reader/ audience "to become a better person," as Jack Nicholson suggests in the film, *As good as it gets*. Prof. Kumar and *A Pedagogue's Romance: Reflections on Schooling* achieves all this and more.

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