

# Edu system doesn't allow out-of-box thinking



**ANIL GUPTA**

*The author is a professor at IIM-A*

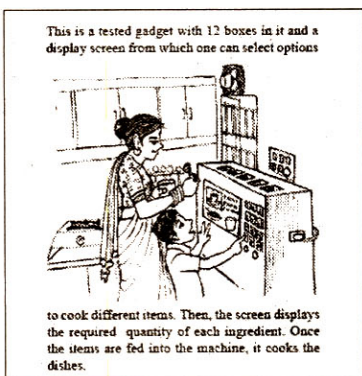
**R**ecently, we announced 'Ignite-09' awards on the eve of Oct 15, 2009, the birthday of APJ Abdul Kalam, celebrated as Children Creativity and Innovation Day by the Honey Bee Network. Despite having received more than a thousand ideas and innovations and traditional knowledge practices from various schools in 82 districts of 18 states, we realised that the number of entries were still too small. May be parents still believe that the best they can do for their children is to help them get more marks in exams. If a child is very creative but not good in academics, then his future is bleak in India. And this, to me is the strongest indictment of our current educational policies and systems. Let me illustrate.

Sushant Pattnaik of Orissa has won a national award for developing a working model of breath-controlled navigation and communication system for physically challenged children. Merely by changing the pattern of breathing, a sensor activates and communicates the needs of the person and also helps move the wheelchair as per his wish. It is an extremely complex and innovative idea. While there are some patents abroad on breath tube-based control systems, they are quite different from what Sushant has done. He is not extraordinary in studies. Will he ever get access to high-quality mentors and labs of IITs? No, will he ever qualify for National Science Talent Search? No. For that, he needs to be good in remembering lessons and regurgitating them in exams. If he cannot apply any of those concepts to real-life problem, how does it matter. And we claim that India wishes to be innova-



**Sushant Pattnaik**

## MINDS ON THE MARGIN



This is a tested gadget with 12 boxes in it and a display screen from which one can select options

to cook different items. Then, the screen displays the required quantity of each ingredient. Once the items are fed into the machine, it cooks the dishes.

tive. What a joke!

There are many more examples of children who are equally creative. Yathartha of class five, from Utrakhand, conceived of triangular wheels with castor wheels at each end for pulling a strawler on the stairs. Abhishek of class X, Advait Mission School, Bhagalpur, developed a working kitchen machine in which various ingredients of a dish can be mixed in the cooking vessel in the predetermined sequence and proportions. Anurag Rathore, from DAV School, Jullandhar, conceived the idea of gait of a person as a password of cellphone since no two people walked alike. Honey Bee Creativity Club, Sri Sathya Sai Lok Seva Vidya Kendra, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka sent as many as 200 entries for 'Ignite-09'.

The issue is that the educational system is completely indifferent to the ability of children to think out-of-box, conceive new ideas and innovations, and develop a practice-oriented outlook in life. I am sure some children will continue with their creative streak in spite of our educational system. Next week, I will share the way we can redesign the school education systems. Can we ensure that in spite of what govt may or may not do, teachers will help children, with a spark in their heart, illuminate our world, like a lamp of Diwali. Let there be light in every heart, hope in every mind.