

Grooming geniuses: Shunning mediocrity

A few years ago, we were in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir as part of our Shodh Yatra when a young school student Farid asked us a question, which I think needs reflection by every educationist. He asked, "Why do I have to study and excel in all the subjects, when I actually like only two subjects?" Answer to this question will determine whether in the future India will produce geniuses or just mediocres.

It is natural that most people resonate with only a few subjects or disciplines of knowledge.

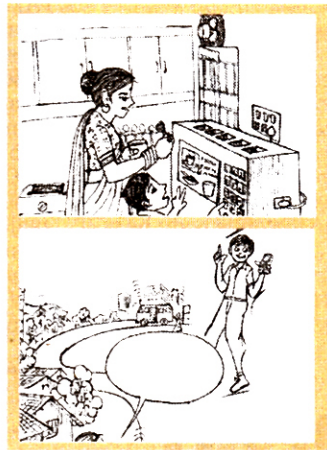


ANIL GUPTA

The author is a professor at IIM-A

If somebody wants to go further in just a few subjects while remaining average or below average in others, the person will have most of the doors shut on him by our current education system. Actually when I was in higher secondary, way back in 1968, I lost my first division with near distinction marks in maths and science but just pass marks in drawing and English. The future seemed very gloomy. My father went with me to one institute but I did not get admitted there. He then almost abandoned me. He was rather upset and angry. He left me on my own to find a way through and go to Hisar and try my luck there. Rest is history. I somehow managed to work hard and find my way through. But

MINDS ON THE MARGIN



Clockwise: Illustrations by Praanshu Goyal, Kitchen King and Pallavi & Anurag

then the system had rather marked me to backtrack from my aspirations. There are a million students who are creative, innovative or are very good at a few subjects. But, they may not be good in English or some other subjects. Why should making a difference in life be contingent on being good in all subjects? When Dr APJ Abdul Kalam gave away the Ignite 09 awards on Monday afternoon at IIMA, he reminded us all about the larger than life goals, which should drive us in our lives. Several of the students whom we met there may not have been brilliant in all the academic subjects. Does it mean that Indian society will not let them become outstanding innovators or entrepreneurs? I hope not.

We need patrons and mentors who will track the future growth of such children and help them fulfil their potential. Anurag Rathor from Punjab re-

alized that no two people walked alike. He thought why not convert gait of a person into a password of a cell phone.

If I want to use your cell phone, it would not work without your authorization.

Abhishek Bhagat from Bihar developed a food-making machine in which different ingredients can be dropped into a fry pan in the right proportion and in the pre set sequence to cook desired recipes. Praanshu Goyal sent a very interesting idea that every time we get our phone card charged, a small amount would be deducted and deposited as a micro saving into a mutual fund or some such scheme to promote savings.

We met them all on Monday.

We need millions of such ideas to make India different, diverse and get rid of the shackles of mediocrity. Will parents let children pursue their idiosyncrasies? Let us hope that our children will be empowered to excel in whichever field they wish.