

Mushrooming Institutions: The Whirlpool Of Dying Hope

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Everywhere one looks around, there is seems to be a surfeit of all kind of shops selling something... education seems to be one of the items on sale. You name it and it is there – institutes of so called higher learning with almost nothing of value to offer. It is just that

they are visibly there, providing dubious hope to the gullible that stand very little chance to get through to the handful of institutions of repute. The numbers are everywhere for us to see.

Take for instance, the case of a city in India which reports so many suicides of young kids who flock to the various teaching shops there, promising them nirvana in the form of admission to the most hallowed institution of engineering of the land. This aspired for success alas is so far away for most of them more often than not, that many of them in sheer hopelessness choose to end their lives rather than go back home and face their families. What do we expect, when more than a million applicants appearing for about ten thousand seats in the premier engineering institute of the country. Many of these kids prepare by studying more than ten to fifteen hours every day over two years of their last years in school, to eventually lose out.

To fill this breach there are vultures of all kinds waiting to snap up such victims promising them the sky. A large number of these schools are characterized by owner driven management focused at providing the bare minimum standards of teaching and learning. They ask for usurious fee in the name of being 'approved' by the law of the land. If many of the private players are characterized by their avarice, many of the public institutions are driven by their apathy and lethargy. Access is thus still not available to the teeming multitude of young Indians – to a minimum standard of educational opportunities. Right to education hence seems merely to be a platitude.

The lack of opportunity that most of our children face today is characterized by a very poor supply of quality centers of higher learning, coupled with a very limited horizon provided to them in the secondary and senior secondary schools. Parents and students keep looking for guaranteed career outcomes that are simply untenable.

Lack of quality teachers is the outcome of largely shoddy training, learning and assessment processes, characterizing our education system that churns out graduates and daresay PhDs with the minimum of fuss and filtration. Our process centricity is often characterized by 'jugaad', which allows short-cuts in the learning process that leads to degrees and certificates that sometimes are not even worth the paper they are printed on. Pride in doing things right, is so alien to so many of us.

Finally to top it all, we have all but destroyed whatever skill building tertiary training systems we had in the form of polytechnics. This has put even more premium on the so called university education and degrees which is so horribly misplaced and counter-productive. A case in point is the fact that in the handful of premier institutions and

colleges many times people opt to get admitted to programs just to get the name of the college on their resumes rather than their interest in that course of study or discipline.

We have to right this. Most probably technology driven free access is the way out, with regulators and employers agreeing to accept such non-conventional education/training processes and test the merit of the candidates based on what they can do rather than where they have studied.

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