

that the easiest way to settle down to a comfortable and 'respectable' job is through a degree related to computers. No wonder, it is the first choice.

In the hierarchy of motives defined by Abraham Maslow³, the ambitious middle class Indian is forever struggling at the level of 'esteem'. He cannot aim higher. The obsession for a 'white-collar job' has been the consequence of social upheavals in the context of a caste-ridden society. In the West, people switch from one profession to another with facility and freedom. Such dynamism thrives in the West because their esteem needs are already met in good measure. Even average careers operate at a relatively higher level in Maslow's hierarchy.

In USA, a student aspiring for a university degree is supposed to prepare and submit a statement of purpose. It is supposed to spell out the reasons for pursuing a given field of interest. If an ambitious plus-two student from India is asked to submit a statement of purpose, it would be simple and almost universally similar: 'I want to get into an IIT. The course does not really matter. If that does not work out, I should study medicine at AIIMS. If

that too does not work out, I shall do a degree in economics at JNU or some such place and pursue IAS'. And he/she would add helplessly. 'That is what everybody tells me!' Anything is acceptable as long as the degree guarantees a job of high social rank. It is the 'job' and the 'perks' that matter, not the 'work' and duties associated with it.

Ironically, we had first-rate scientists during the British rule when caste system was in place. Raman, Ramanujan, Bose, Ramachandran and others were born into a caste-ridden society. None of them studied in an IIT. They never needed to prove their social ranks by earning degrees. They pursued knowledge in its pure form and were creative. They operated at the highest level in the Maslow hierarchy. They pursued self-actualization through excellence.

Western education is eclectic. It nurtures individuality, promotes genius, tolerates eccentricity and is divergent in purpose. Quite by contrast, our education is hopelessly exam-oriented, our curriculum is oppressive, convergent and conformist. Naturally, the West is more successful.

Feudal sentiments and caste feelings continue to run deep in the Indian psyche. That is why our students are after power and position, not knowledge or skills. Even the conduct of the Indian Science Congress⁴ has often betrayed the feudal attitude of the scientist community. Democracies have proved themselves better at doing science. Excellence and creativity are inescapably linked to the freedom of the mind.

1. Prathap, G., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **87**, 1494–1495.
2. Dave, R. H. and Hill, W. H., *Comp. Educ. Rev.*, 1974, **18**, 24–38.
3. Wehrich, H. and Koontz, H., *Management and Global Perspectives*, McGraw Hill, 1994, pp. 468–469.
4. Unnikrishnan, M. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **84**, 484.

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Millennium development goals and biodiversity

Attempts to conserve biodiversity are of paramount significance for every nation and accordingly, different steps are being taken by many countries. The local, regional and national scenario is that each habitat is unique and possesses specific groups of microorganisms and other community structures, and endemism is quite pronounced. Specific attempts are being made to locate, identify and screen these organisms for novel qualities in some dedicated laboratories. The geological and geographical variations in the landscape and waterscape, and variations in the edaphic and climatic factors support many diverse organisms.

The need for screening, documenting and conserving these unique life forms is now focused due to the novel characters that they may possess or the genomic structure that they have, which could be used for application of technology for human welfare or productive purposes. One of the main targets of millennium development goals is biodiversity conservation, com-

bating desertification furthered by sound water management to ensure environmental sustainability.

Policies and programmes to arrest loss of environmental resources and biodiversity loss for sustainable development have been initiated by many countries. But in our country, a lot needs to be done if we have to reach the goal by 2015. Already five years are over and India has to catch up with the targets. In this direction, many of the government organizations, corporate sectors and autonomous bodies like power plants, defence establishments, etc. have vast stretches of land- and waterscapes under their custody and protection. These are well-protected areas, which could be encashed to enrich our diversity. Being well-protected areas and also distributed at various locations in our country, they represent different ecological habitats and harbour different types of communities, thus helping perpetuate local and regional wealth. In other countries,

business and biodiversity are taken hand in hand and accepted as main interactions by many corporate sectors; many companies have come forward to support this venture. We also see the private sector moving toward greater corporate social and environmental responsibility and accountability. In India also, with a vision and commitment, some of these agencies should come forward, reorient their policies, motivate their personnel, and promote establishment of an indigenous biodiversity park. Commitment and involvement of the top management would yield results. Budgetary provisions need not be much, but with a little investment it can be their 'flagship' towards biodiversity conservation for sustainable development. Support from NGOs or academic institutions could also be used towards this goal.

Tremendous scope exists for building partnerships among the governments, private sector and NGOs to address environmental sustainability and biodiversity conserva-

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tion in a collaborative manner because of the scale and complex challenges involved.

Some of the institutions have a small wing for environmental sustainability provided with a small budget, but it is rarely used for the purpose for which it has been earmarked. Such institutions are satisfied with bringing up ornamental plants and exotic species around their place. But apart from the aesthetic sense and faster greening of the area, sincere approach

for conservation of biodiversity could be taken up at least by some of the establishments. Expertise to initiate this noble cause is available within our manpower itself. A few in the private sector have taken up this task. But, it is time for the major players to initiate this activity in right earnest as a mission and use vast expanses available with them towards wealth generation and as an 'investment for the future'.

Manipulating foreign hands

The editorial on 'The Foreign Hand' by Balaram¹ raises interesting and important issues regarding the future of India. However, in my opinion the editorial underestimates the dangers of foreign influence in Indian affairs.

First of all, behind the idea of inviting so-called foreign 'experts and consultants' are two tacit assumptions, the first being that these foreign individuals and institutions are interested in the welfare of Indians or are at least impartial. A brief analysis of world history and of contemporary political landscape clearly leads to the conclusion that this assumption is simply wrong. To the contrary, foreigners are interested in keeping us subservient to their interests. Organizations with high sounding names such as UN, WTO, FAO, World Bank, IMF, etc. have been created to consolidate the grip of some countries on the world economy and enable them to manipulate the world economy to their own advantage with obvious results. The second assumption is that the advice of these individuals/institutions is better than that locally available. This again is not necessarily true, as problems of their host countries amply demonstrate.

Therefore, it is foolish and dangerous to invite these foreigners to help plan our future. Those in official positions unable to carry out their assigned tasks without foreigners should acknowledge their incompetence and resign from their posi-

tions, opening the way for those who are competent enough. A one-billion plus population is capable of creating its own competent leadership, if foreign meddling is minimized! Perhaps inviting foreign advice has little to do with advancement of India. Rather, it may be a deal between some Indians and foreigners to open up India for foreign exploitation in exchange for some crumbs from the foreigner's table.

It is next to impossible to learn to manipulate the foreigners as the editorial suggests, specially when they occupy influential positions in national organizations. After all, foreigners have been in India from around 950 to 1948. Has India been able to manipulate them to her own advantage? Recent history of India teaches us that all attempts of local rulers in India to manipulate European presence to their own advantage, have, without an exception, led to their downfall, with the foreigner gaining an upper hand. It is almost impossible to manipulate a militarily superior power to our advantage.

As the editorial correctly points out, it is the lack of direction and purpose not only in national institutions but also at the national level which constitutes the problem. Such direction and purpose can come only from Indians, not from foreigners.

Contrary to the impression created by the editorial, foreign hands have become bolder than ever, thanks to the political 'literacy' of the Asian populations and

the 'great strategic insight and vision' of Asian political and intellectual leadership. They no longer bother to operate covertly. In the West and Central Asia, former foreign clandestine organizations are appointing their former employees as heads of states and are also openly engaged in 'peacemaking'. Although these countries are practically run by foreigners, their fortunes are visibly dwindling day by day, while the foreigners drain the resources and continue to destroy them.

Is it not surprising that a big country like India let herself to be pushed around in the world arena? Just as India was extensively used in the centuries preceding the 20th to finance the industrialization of Europe and the colonization of America and Australia, today attempts are being made to use Indian manpower to counter industrial competition from East Asia.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **87**, 723-724.

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