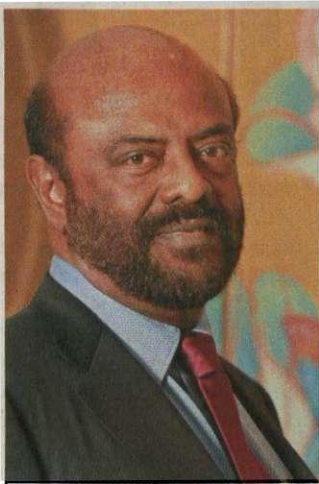


Cover Story

guest comments

# Teaching Value

by shiv nadar



NO DOUBT INDIA'S ECONOMIC growth has been grabbing headlines. Continuing to grow at 7 per cent despite present turbulences in global economy, India has the world's attention. We also seem to have an advantage in our demographics. The BRIC report expects that the percentage of India's population in the productive cohort would rise to 64 per cent by 2028 — the largest in the world.

But the question is what would be the quality of that pool? There is already a

shortage of skilled manpower, from doctors, engineers, scientists to teachers. The gaps in our education system don't lend themselves to a well-rounded talent pool. Of 1.13 billion Indians, about a third (or 400 million) is illiterate, which prevents a large part of our population from entering the mainstream.

Not only does most of our population not have access to education, it is also mostly our rural population that suffers this disadvantage. Almost 90 per cent of all students who make it to the IITs are urban. What is it that we are cultivating — urban employable youth to fill job vacancies? This is only symptomatic treatment; it is very myopic. What we need today are transformational programmes that can alter the lives of our children with relevant education.

The 21st century Gurukulam model in Andhra Pradesh is one such beginning. It brings remedial education to rural students through capsule-like modules delivered by world-class professors such as Raj Reddy. It serves to ensure understanding of the basics and to build the confidence and aptitude to deal with information Technology as a subject in English. Its purpose is to provide remedial education and IT training leading to a postgraduate degree in IT for the top 1 per cent of rural youth. Today, students brought up in an urban envi-

ronment have a clear advantage over their rural counterparts. I am deeply involved in our VidyaGyan school project that aims to close this gap and begins this year across Uttar Pradesh. The schools will offer free education to bright but economically challenged students and equip them with skills needed to be at par globally. Just the very idea that you don't need to go to a large city to get a good education is both aspirational and inspirational. The SSN (Sri Sivasubramaniya Nadar) institutions in Chennai are similarly providing over 400 merit-cum-need based scholarships — enabling students from across socio-economic strata to get world-class degrees.

Not only do we need such transformational models qualitatively, we also need to scale them up to match the need for education for a population as large as ours. The government is playing its role too. We have a million schools running because of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. However, even this is far from adequate. Neither the government nor industry can solve the problem alone. The onus rests on all of us.

I can think of three ways to achieve this goal.

First, we need some radical thinking in education policy and governance. The government needs to open up the education sector to private enterprise and make it a profitable sector. There are models in our own country that have been successful in acting as regulators, watchdogs and enablers. There are the TRAI (The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of India) and SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India), on the lines of which the government can monitor the education sector as well.

Second is people. In a country where teacher absenteeism is about 25 per cent, the need for teacher supply is urgent. There are lacunae in teacher training, incentives and accountability, which need to be tackled if teaching is to emerge as a more sought after profession.

And third is technology. Technology can escalate the impact of existing programmes in education both by enhancing quality and quantity and at a lower cost. It would be very relevant to have virtual education improve several-fold the quality of input that reaches rural schools.

Former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam once commented that, "There are more than 300 million children in India on whose shoulders the future of the country rests. You can ignite the minds, light the fire, and become a burning candle to light another candle."

So, the time for action is here and now.

The author is founder of HCL, and Chairman & Chief Strategy Officer of HCL Technologies

**India needs transformational education models to meet its education needs**