

Must our students seek higher studies abroad?

There is a need to bring back the best talent into teaching, so that the next generation of students can train at home

Centuries ago, India was the global centre of learning. People from other countries came to Taxila (now in Pakistan) and Patliputra (currently Patna) to benefit from higher studies. Even Chinese scholars like Fa-Hien and Hsuan-Tsang travelled across the mountains to study at these universities.

Having lost that pre-eminence, one would presume that India would endeavour to become a global centre of learning once again. Instead, during the past five decades since Independence, India has been destroying one centre of learning af-

fees. Add another \$15,000 towards living expenses. That is why, education counsellors advise parents to set aside around Rs.20 lakh per student per year for higher studies abroad. This means that the total annual outgo from India to just these four countries is as high as Rs 24,000 crore. This is the subsidy India provides, year after year, for teachers teaching in those countries; because foreign students generally pay two to three times the fees paid by local students.

By subsidising teachers' salaries overseas, India encourages the drift of teaching talent. Without good teachers, eager students, who can pay the costs, will travel abroad to improve their lot. Since teaching as a profession in India does not offer good salaries, most of these students — when they return — will seek jobs in other professions. Consider, for instance, how today even the IITs cannot get good teachers.

India's teaching capabilities are therefore getting crippled. But numbers conceal this malaise.

Total enrolment for higher studies in India went up from 0.2 million in 1947-48 to well over 10.5 million in 2005-06.

Yet, consider the quality. Advertise for the post of an office assistant, and you will get more than a thousand applications. Start interviewing them, and you will find that barely 10% of them can read and write a sentence properly. Give them an elementary mathematical quiz, and just around 20% will get the scores a graduate ought to have.

Without good teachers, even the best of talent withers away. The masses remain uneducated, though literate. Eventually, this destroys the entire nation. If India cannot retain its best teaching talent, and attract better teachers, it could suffer from intellectual colonisation, with far-reaching adverse consequences.

So is there a solution?

Yes. India needs to re-focus on bringing back the best talent into teaching, so that the next generation of students could be trained at home. That is what China has been doing diligently.

To bring back this talent, it is essential to pay teachers the salaries they would have earned in developed countries like the US or Singapore. Today, however, India refuses to pay its teachers more. Not surprisingly, many Indian teachers have moved away from teaching to better jobs in India. Some have even opted to teach overseas.

To revive good teaching, teachers must first regain the dignity and the pride of place in society that they once enjoyed. That alone will augment the number of good teachers, strengthen existing educational institutions, restore quality education and encourage the best of students to study at home.

Who pays for the teachers?

Indian students abroad

Country	2003-04	2004-05
USA	79,736	80,466
UK	11,000	15,000
Australia	17,853	22,279
New Zealand	2,405	2,567
Total	1,10,994	1,20,312

Source: WENR, IDP Australia, IIE; Ministry of Commerce, Govt. of India

Centre cannot hold

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ter another, often at the altar of populism. Phrases like 'affordable higher education for all', 'teaching is a noble profession', and 'people should not profit from education' have together, in their various transmutations and incarnations, succeeded in destroying education in India.

Watch some figures. Last year, at least 1.2 lakh Indian students enrolled for higher studies in just four countries, states the discussion paper of Union ministry of commerce on 'Trade in education services: higher education in India and GATS - an opportunity'. If one includes countries like Canada, France, China, Russia and Singapore among scores of others (like those in the Middle East), the number could be at least 50% higher.

Consider the implications. Each student ends up paying anywhere between \$15,000 and \$30,000 annually for tuition