

'Colleges in India often fail to instil work ethics'



If one spends one's college life bunking classes and copying notes, how does one develop a disciplined work rubric or understand why plagiarism is frowned upon globally? Some of the basics that a serious college education provide are not instilled in Indian students who treat college life as an opportunity to have a good time with friends before joining the real world of jobs and drudgery. **NEERAJ BATRA**, chairman of OnCourse, a Gurgaon-based education consultancy firm, is from Shriram College of Commerce and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad. Despite being from the best institutions, Batra says he hasn't got real education in India. He says students leaving the country for higher studies – a drain on foreign exchange – is fundamentally good for the country as students experience cultural diversity, greater acceptance, learn some humility and gain networking opportunities. They learn the value of original thought and work. Many of these students come back and create opportunities for capital to be attracted back to the country. He thinks it's money well spent.

Batra spoke to Anjali Bhargava on some of the trends one sees with overseas education and answers questions on what makes sense and what doesn't. Edited excerpts:

Q&A

NEERAJ BATRA

Chairman, OnCourse

Is it true that a lot of students who leave the country for their undergraduate degrees are coming back. Why do you think it is happening?

Education in India is in the 1990s; not in 2016. Antiquated, archaic. The way of teaching is horrendously behind what it ought to be and the rate of flux due to technology has made things worse.

The reason people are going overseas is the firm realisation that entry into university here is completely driven by that single percentage which is not what an education ought to be. You get people who get 96 or 98 out of 100 marks in English who cannot speak or write the language.

We have failed to keep up with the demand and quality. So, children have no option but to leave.

ates opportunities for capital to be attracted back to the country as some of these people will go on to network and create symbiotic relationships with their peers at college. They can be more collaborative than if they were in a Delhi or Kolkata university.

At the formative age of 20, these kids experience cultural diversity, greater acceptance, some amount of humility and gain a lot of networking opportunities. You eat, sleep, live with someone who could tomorrow be the president of the World Bank, the head of a new exciting global start-up, the head of a Fortune 500 company, a economist or what have you. I think that is invaluable.

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be aware of all this.

These things are bereft in our Indian system. Plagiarism is not even an existent word or concept in India. So, there are some really good things that our India system is yet to wake up to.

We treat our college years in a very trivial manner and it is in fact the formative years for a human beings life. This builds the moral fibre and character for a country. If you let that get dissipated in bunking or lost in a meaningless existence of waking up late, going casually for one class, beating the system through plagiarism – you will never build a nation.

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Does it make sense for parents who can just about afford it to sell properties to finance their children's education in today's increasingly uncertain

environment?

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I would say many are coming back than in the 1980s-90s. The exception is the one who manages to find a job. It's not that everyone wants to come back but with the recession in the West, lack of economic or employment opportunity (there) is a reality. Luckily for them, the bright spot today is India.

In fact, we're reversing brain drain. Instead of your best seeking education abroad and staying abroad, you have them seeking education abroad but not staying back. This is a good thing for the country.

The country gains the entire exposure of four years "the cultural diversity, the exposure, the network they gain". India gains all of this. No doubt, there is a loss of foreign exchange but this cre-

is as much about intellectual curiosity and as much about divergence of thinking as about convergence of thinking. In India, we only encourage convergence of thoughts.

But here's something that is more worrying. How you spend your time in college as a young adult determines your value systems, your work rubric, ethics, your diligence - stuff that stays with you for the rest of your life.

A good college education teaches you the ethics of not taking what doesn't strictly belong to you. In India, we cut and paste stuff and call it research. You cannot take ownership of something if it's not original. All this manifests later into all kinds of things. India and China have got away with *jugaad* but the new generation, which will work in a new and different world needs to

**increasingly
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environment?

A four-year education in the US typically would be ₹1.8-2 crore, which is a large amount of money. I have a simple response on that. First and foremost if you are not getting into a top 30-40 colleges, you need to examine whether that money is being well spent. If it is financially stretching you, you need to have an even harder think if not the top 30-40 schools.

For students who are bright, getting scholarships is possible. OnCourse has got scholarships of ₹75 crore in the past two years (we send around 240 students a year overseas).

But, let me say here that education is probably a better investment than real estate for a parent to make for his child and can never be seen as an expense.