

Indian Education System: A teardrop on the cheek of development

“The land of the free, the home of the brave, where opportunities lie and dreams are fulfilled”

-The American Dream

India is a country of contrasts. In Mumbai, our dialogue got to see the high wealth disparity, exemplified by the billion-dollar Antilia, a home for three, and Dharavi, one of Asia’s largest slums. Another contrast is the spiritual freedom of the soul as portrayed by yoga versus the cut-throat competition in the education sector. Growing up in Bangalore, I found that the education system was based on rote-learning, that heavily rewarded knowledge and stifled creativity, but I gradually acclimatized to the system during my childhood. I savored my test-scores over everything else, including my health, and spared no time for extra-curricular activities such as music or sports. My only goal was being at the top of my class and I was oblivious to the sages around me, like my parents, advising against it. I felt that it was a normal thing to do and I was having a great time competing with my peers.

My world turned upside-down during my teens. As hormones coursed through my veins and I turned into an adult, my values changed. My parents dismissed it as “teenage rebellion” and told me it was a passing fad. While asking god to grant me marks previously, I became an ardent atheist and began trusting my own abilities. I also began doing social service which exposed me to the various inequities that plagued my country, but I realized early on that I needed to focus my efforts on a certain issue, chose education, and began teaching at underprivileged schools. With a group of friends, I implemented pioneering experiential

education techniques at these schools. We taught students topics using theory combined with practical demonstrations and video lectures. Over the course of a year, we found that our teaching methodology incited an interest to study in the students and helped them radically improve their academic performance. The student movement combined with the teaching methodology became a non-profit called WISE which I lead today.

Thus, as a freshman at Northeastern, I found the academics, which stirs creativity and originality somewhat challenging. Emphasis was placed on real-world work experience and undergraduate research more than grades. I saw my Indian friends struggle to adapt to the new system but my transition was less bumpy thanks to WISE. What really astonished me was the extent of freedom and initiative placed on students. They were allowed to bring electronics gadgets to class, had flexible schedules, weren't pressed to do homework and most courses had a practical or lab component. The friendliness of the teachers also surprised me. In India, if a teacher arrived inside the classroom, all the students were supposed to rise and salute them. Talking, drinking or eating during class was strictly prohibited. Most of my classmates knew how to play multiple musical instruments and sports. I felt the entire culture was about free-thinking individuals who actively collaborated and have tried my best to foster a similar climate at the schools WISE serves.

Finally, I believe life is a continuous process of learning. When I arrived in the United States a year ago, I kept my mind open and immersed myself in the melting pot of many cultures and beliefs. I listened to the stories of people and their ancestors. I deeply thought about how

taking a risk and luck lead countless people to succeed and opened new avenues for others, eventually helping to create one of the greatest countries on earth. The global education program is a means for me to know more about the world and get greater insight into our civilization. I shall strive to learn, every day. Forever.