

Asha Kiran

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CSIR Director General R A Mashelkar delivered this presidential address at the 87th Indian Science Congress in Pune in Feb. 2002.

Our education has not been child centered by R A Mashelkar

Indian science and technology have contributed its mite to the building of post-Independent India. Never before in the history of mankind, did a country with democratic dispensation had to feed so many poor and teach so many illiterates and also simultaneously compete with the most advanced nations for a place under the sun. Our achievements of the green revolution have led us to the self-sufficiency of food. Our white revolution has helped us reach the status of the highest milk producer in the world.

But we must also not lose sight of the several formidable challenges that remain. Broadly, they include: exploding population, widespread poverty, illiteracy, ruptures and cleavages based on region, religion, language and gender which threaten our social fabric, urban congestion, wounded ecosystems and a critical power and energy situation. In this respect, five fundamentals need to be set right: Child centered education; Woman centered family; Human centered development; Knowledge centered society and; Innovation centered India. All five of them flow into each other and all of them have to be taken together.

It is predicted that by 2015, over half of the Indian population will be less than 20 years old. Youth represents national strength, vitality and vigor. If properly molded, the youth can become the champion of our culture, custodian of our national pride and a trustee of the freedom of the country. But, the process of such molding requires the right education at an early age. Are our education systems geared to meet this challenge today?

The way science is taught in our schools will determine as to whether or not we will have a society which is capable of developing and absorbing technology creatively as well as giving a scientific foundation to our cultural, political and economic fabric. Young minds are not turning to science, to an extent that some science departments are getting closed down. Our education has not been child centered; it is centered around text books, rigid unimaginative curricula, ill-designed class room teaching and an outdated examination system.

We have to remold the school science education to the mode of learning by discovery and learning by doing in contrast to the prevailing method. The child has to become an active participant in the process of learning science. Rather than memorizing the products of science, the child needs to understand and appreciate the process of science. The curricula must relate

closely to the science and technology experiences of everyday life.

The Internet has already made it possible to take education to the home of the learners, with self-learning programs with the creative use of multimedia. Education can be potentially brought to the home, including to those, who have been unreached so far. The impact of creating content in local languages will be phenomenal in increasing the spread.

Sharp gender inequalities with unequal pay for equal work, discrimination in the labor market and so on are grim realities. Harsh statistics stare us in the face. Over 70 per cent of the Indian women are illiterate. Over 90 per cent of family planning operations are tubectomies. Over 60 per cent of primary school drop-outs are girls. The emergence of information technology will play a great role with education reaching the home with the access of women to higher education becoming easier.

The same flexibilities are available for working too. The emerging IT connectivity offers women the freedom to work from home and at hours that suit them. Home and office have ceased to be contrary pulls. However, to fully benefit from the IT revolution, we need fundamental changes in the archaic employment rules with a far more liberal view of the work place, work function and working hours. Advances in life sciences have placed in the hands of women opportunities that were unheard of earlier. We must promote pro-woman technologies that exist in their creative participation in agriculture linked activities, micro-propagation, plant tissue culture, health care systems etc. Developing and enhancing a woman's entrepreneurial skills and giving her economic freedom will alone restore her rightful place in the family and society.

In the new human centered development, the balance of the five Es -- ecology, environment, economics, equity and ethics -- will have to be achieved. Mere economic development without regard to equity and ethics will take us nowhere; just as economic development disregarding ecology and environment will be fatal. It is time that in India we look at our approach of top-down planning, which has met with mixed success.

"Surely the intention of education is to make us look, observe and learn about the various aspects of life and grow in understanding. Education should continue to encourage the spirit of enquiry in a child"

- Chitra Krishnamurthy from "Vikasana Rural Center for Education"

Participation of local institutions through new technology will need emphasis. Promoting a job-led economic growth strategy based on pro-nature, pro-poor, and pro-woman orientation to development of technology and its dissemination will need a new impetus. Mass production and production by masses will have to co-exist in India. The first will lead to global competitiveness and the second of jobs, where they are wanted.

Only those nations will survive in the new millennium, who builds knowledge-centered societies; others will vanish into oblivion. The Indian society was indeed a leading knowledge centered society in the distant past, but we lost our way in the intervening period. In the coming years, it is important that every Indian becomes a knowledge worker, be it a farmer, a rural woman, a media man, an artisan and so on. Here a knowledge worker is simply one who knows why he is doing what he is doing. A farmer can be a knowledge worker, provided he understands the soil that he is sowing his needs in, the why of the micro nutrient and pesticide addition that he makes.

Experiments for creating such knowledge workers are already on the new knowledge with its goal of the empowerment of rural women, men and children with information relating to ecologically sound agriculture, economic access and utilization. The farmers are trained to build soil health cards. We need to multiply these to cover the entire Indian populace. It seems difficult to achieve unless we turn to IT again. Continuous knowledge renewal becomes more important than ever before. The process of continuous learning, especially through the tolls of modern information technology will, therefore, be absolutely essential.

Knowledge without innovation is of no value. It is through the process of innovation alone that knowledge is converted into wealth and social good, and this process takes place from firm to farm. Our programs in strategic areas, green revolution, and white revolution are indicative of our successes. Incremental innovations take place in industries which continuously innovates to create products which displace their own products with the fear that otherwise their competitors will do it for them.

Innovation is generated and sustained through the efforts of its people. We need to take to an environment, in which innovation flourishes. Otherwise the innovators will either play safe or not innovate, or they will leave to become a part of other innovative societies, which encourage innovation, as India has seen to its dismay. We must vow to reverse this process as we enter the new millennium.

Asha is involved with a campaign to re-instate the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Program - an innovative science curriculum which was implemented in the Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh. This innovative program is being shut down due to political reasons and will deprive children of a wonderful opportunity of learning. You can read more about this program on <http://www.cisl.columbia.edu/grads/presi/EKLAVYA/> and also sign a petition to re-instate this program via the same website. Please do take a look and participate."

Our Upcoming Events....

All profits from these events go to Asha's projects in India.

Asha Picnic

Asha-Seattle cordially invites you and your family to a **Summer BBQ Picnic and Kid's Carnival**

at

Juanita Beach Park, 9703 Juanita Dr. NE, Kirkland

On

Saturday, 3rd of August, 2002 @ 10.30AM.

Join us for a fun filled, relaxing afternoon at the park, enjoy good food, play fun games (Volleyball, Musical chairs, Treasure hunt, Tug-of-War...) and soak in the sunshine - what a way to support the cause of education in India!

Moms and Dads! While you are searching for clues to our treasure hunt, your little one(s) can enjoy our very first outdoor **Kid's Carnival**. Lots of activities such as - face painting, watercolor competition, basketball throw, play dough sculpture contest and many more.....it's fun, fun and fun all the way. For more information, please contact **Jayshree Krishnan** at (425)401-0080 or gopalan@msn.com.

Event Tickets - Student- \$10, Regular- \$15, Family- \$25
Directions: <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/picnic.htm>

To help us organize the picnic better, please include the number of people, preference of Veg./Non-Veg. and **RSVP** ahead of time to **Archana** at (425) 882-1899 or archanasoy@hotmail.com

Asha Hikes

Asha-Seattle invites you to join us in exploring the beautiful Northwest. Mark your calendars for **Saturday, the 17th of August**. We have a second hike planned in September—you can contact the people below in mid August for more details.

Ticket- Student-\$10, Regular- \$15 (Inclusive of food)
Come, enjoy the pleasure of hiking with a group of fun loving people. What a way to support education in India!

For more information, please contact Kalpana at kalpanas@microsoft.com or Amarpal at sea_amor@yahoo.com

We had the good fortune of being visited by Chitra Krishnamurthy, a teacher at Vikasana Rural Center for Education in June. Chitra akka (as she is affectionately called) gave a wonderful talk about education and what it should mean to a child. Vikasana is an alternative education school for children of migrant laborers that attempts to engage people's intelligence in creative rather than mechanical ways of learning. Chitra akka covered the inadequacies in the present day education system which merely ends up introducing information in a rote manner to children. She talked about the alternatives being explored in various schools such as Vikasana. Vikasana is described in detail at <http://www.ashanet.org/seattle/proj/vikasana.htm>

Asha-Seattle is pleased to present

Music Show
by
AllGoRhythms

Saturday, September 7, 2002 @ 6PM
Kane Hall, University of Washington

Tickets: \$12, \$10

For More Information and tickets, please call **Jayashree @ (425)868-9819**

Formed on the doorsteps of the third millennium, AllGoRhythms has been performing quality live Indian music in and around the Seattle area. AllGoRhythms brings together some of the top talent around the area to provide the local South Asian community a sense of belonging and closeness to music and culture.

AllGoRhythms always offers a selected mix ranging from chart busters to the golden oldies, the hip hop to the folk tunes, and essentially caters to all ages . AllGoRhythms is all about bringing out your nostalgic self about the times and the music you loved and still continue to cherish.

Come, relive the tunes of Hindi Film music from the 60's to the present, "LIVE" in your neighborhood.

Dates:

English: Saturday September 21st, 2002
Tamil: September 28th, 2002

Exact venue and time are yet to be decided.

Tickets: \$50, \$25, \$15, \$10 (students).

Buy your tickets now for the best seating

For More Information and tickets, please Call

Jayashree @ (425) 868-9819
Shiva Bala @ (206) 528-0767

Asha-Seattle

Presents

Slaves

(Adimaigal)

A play in Tamil and English by Sujatha
(Produced by VIP Productions, Seattle)