

Why Indian classics should be taught in schools?

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Two months ago I gave an [invited talk in IIT Kanpur](#) - one of the premier technological Institutes of India (and my alma mater) on how young budding engineers can help light up the lives of forgotten poor Indians. During the question-answer session I asked 250 + students, who were in the auditorium, on how many have read Indian classics like Mahabharata, Panchatantra, Jatak tales etc. Very few of them raised their hands indicating they had read them.

The same story is repeated in all the educational institutes that I visit and give lectures in. Yet the same youngsters have read the western fairy tales, other stories and nursery rhymes.

Similarly it is very difficult nowadays to meet youngsters who can talk one straight line in their mother tongue. It is a hotch potch of their mother tongue and English. Very soon we will be producing a generation of Indians who will neither know their culture nor their language!

Language, culture and history provide a pillar of psychological support to us and give us pride in our country. This could be one of the reasons why the youngsters are not proud of their country or have an attachment to it.

In the same talk at IIT Kanpur, at the end of my lecture, I asked the students that if I have the power to send them to U.S., how many would like to go and settle there - majority of them raised their hand. I wonder where we have taken our country that most of the youngsters going to elite institutions and coming from well-to-do families would not like to stay and work in India. I feel that they somehow do not have a bond with India by the ties of culture, higher thought of India and its philosophy.

Last week I attended a conference on [Consciousness](#) in Bangalore. A speaker talked about autism in children and how they are being cured. She showed a video clip in

which a young boy from a rural town in Karnataka was brought to the clinic in Bangalore and his mother sang western nursery rhymes to keep him occupied and engaged!

There is a craze in rural and urban areas to learn English and children are made to memorize western nursery rhymes, poems and ditties! Slowly and silently we are moving towards the time when we will completely forget our great Indian stories, tales and culture.

The brain of children in the school-going age is very pliable and capable of absorbing huge amount of information. The folk tales of India from all states, from our great books like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Panchatantra, Jatak Katha etc. should be taught in schools to inspire the children. There is a great wisdom in these books which needs to be distilled and presented in a form which can be easily understood by students.

Similarly the long history of India which has produced great leaders like Buddha, Ashok, Akbar, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Vivekananda, Gandhi etc. should be taught in schools and the lives of these leaders should be presented as role models for children. Thus short stories on their lives and their deeds should be taught in all classes.

During my own childhood my father presented me with a set of Tales from Panchatantra. They were in Hindi and were so fascinating and wonderful that I used to be lost in reading them. Later on these tales together with other Indian classics that I read, instilled in me the awe and pride for the country which could produce such a great thought thousands of years ago.

One can even conjecture that Mahatma Gandhi who laid great emphasis on Gita and Ramayana and quoted them extensively in his speeches was himself inspired by them and used these great classics to instill the pride and love for India. Similarly all great leaders in various civilizations have inspired their countrymen by taking recourse to the tales and history of their country's past and classics of that country provide an excellent backdrop for such inspiration.

Only when our children will be inspired by Indian thought, ethos, history and lives of our great spiritual leaders will they start taking pride in our country and our culture. Otherwise our culture will become Bollywood and Hollywood-based (as it is already becoming)! And we are creating a whole generation of Indians who can best be described by an Indian saying “*Dhobi ka kutta na ghar ka na ghat ka*”!

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