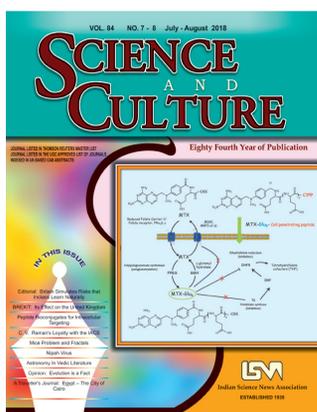


BRITAIN SIMULATES RISKS THAT INDIANS LEARN NATURALLY



As reported recently in The New York Times (March 11, 2018), an interesting placard was seen at the entrance of the Princess Diana Playground in Kensington Gardens in London addressed to the parents of the kids who use the ground. It mentioned that some risks have been “intentionally provided, so that your child can develop an appreciation of risk in a controlled play environment rather than taking in similar risks in an uncontrolled and unregulated wider world”.

Most of the advanced countries of the world were so far geared towards creating an environment with zero or minimum risk for the kids and Britain was no exception. Now in many of the schools in Britain some risks are being deliberately included by placing some trivial stuff in playgrounds like ‘stacks of two-by-fours, some crates and loose bricks’ so as to teach them how to avoid obstacles while walking. It’s not that the kids will falter on obstacles, fall and get bruised. The ground is covered with rubber paddings and bricks are made of materials which will not hurt kids in case they fall.

This news, I am sure amuses Indians who learn to deal with such obstacles from their very childhood. Walking on the pavements in India has never been an easy task. Uneven pavements with potholes, dumped sand or garbage, stacks of bricks forming a wall in the midst of the pavement are some of the common sights that we experience and we learn to deal with them throughout our life. And when one falters and falls it’s a real life experience, bruising one’s knees or even breaking one’s head. In India this is our way of life. By doing this from a very tender age, assessing risks and tackling them with intelligence, are ingrained in our brain automatically. We do not need special education to cope with such risks.

That Indians prosper wherever they go, in or outside the country, is not only because they are intelligent but also that they are capable of adjusting with tough situations better than many others.

So what has so far been looked upon as defect arising out of carelessness of the neighbors or callousness of law enforcing authorities has its other side too. This, in a sense, is a blessing in disguise for us. That Indians prosper wherever they go, in or outside the country, is not only because they are

intelligent but also that they are capable of adjusting with tough situations better than many others. I remember, while I was visiting Japan, my Japanese professor and colleague said in one of the get-togethers, probably jokingly (hard to understand from the innocent looking Japanese faces), “Finally there will be two races in the world to dominate: Chinese and Indians. They can survive anywhere and everywhere”.

Everytime I visit England, I notice how the parents allow their children to grow independently. I have never found parents rushing to lift their children when they fall in a park, neither do they start comforting them. Children around the world have the same behavioral pattern. Children when they fall, look around for sympathy, and if there is none available, they get up on their own and start playing. Tripping on the ground is very natural for toddlers and they automatically learn to undo the process. It has been proved that over protection in contrast to 'autonomy promotion' (grown in natural way) is not healthy for a child because it conveys to the child a sense that the world is a dangerous place to live in, and limits the child's opportunities to develop skills and confidence. No doubt, Indians are over-protective and there is an increasing trend of over protectionism by the parents. One of the main reasons is that the size of families is shrinking and many parents now a days have only one child which leads to overprotection. Of course there are other social factors also which promote over protectionism.

Britain is also showing a sense of increasing protectiveness to children lately. As reported by British researchers, the percentage of school children in England going to school unaccompanied by parents dropped from around 85% of 9-year olds in 1971 to around 25% in 1990. Educators in Britain are worried about the increasing trend of protectionism because they think that this protective culture is forcing healthy risks out of the childhood. I do not have any statistics about Indian students to vouch for any conclusive judgement, but I can cite my experience which may serve as a pointer to the issue under discussion. I live very close to the South Point School (senior section) that can boast of the largest number of day scholars in the city and to my distress, I notice that there is hardly any

student unaccompanied by a parent. And shamefully, most of the parents carry the school bags to let their wards free from the burden.

I remember going to school unaccompanied, walking with others, making friends, chatting all the way, sometimes fighting on some trivial issues. And as far as my memory goes, I can not remember any one coming to school accompanied by an elder. Social scientists argue that there are reasons to be so in India, which is true to a certain extent. Even then there is no doubt that Indian parents are guilty of over protectionism of their children. Do we see this as a serious issue?

In India the general perception is that keeping the city clean and all such issues is the responsibility of the state and not of ours. That we too have some responsibility to give back to the society, to lead a disciplined life and be a good citizen needs to be tutored by the parents and teachers from the beginning.

While Britain is willing to train their students to learn the art of risk tackling in daily life, can we learn something from Britain? The answer is emphatically YES. India should train its children from the very beginning to be more disciplined, to bring order from chaos. We can imbibe in our children some small virtues like not to litter the streets, not to cause

inconvenience to others, lend a helping hand to the needy etc. In India the general perception is that keeping the city clean and all such issues is the responsibility of the state and not of ours. That we too have some responsibility to give back to the society, to lead a disciplined life and be a good citizen needs to be tutored by the parents and teachers from the beginning. Children learn by example and pick up the traits from the activities of their parents than anything else. The social fabric of our society lacks in this respect. Instead of picking up practices from the West which are easy to imitate, we should welcome the things which are precious to our life and lead India to a state that will nurture life and the living. □

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