

# “The Future is painted with fog”: A Study of Mediocre but Arrogant

<sup>1</sup>Pranjali Nagpal, <sup>2</sup>Abhijit Bhanduri  
<sup>1,2</sup>Guru Gobind Singh Indraprasth University Delhi, India

---

**Abstract:** This research paper attempts to study the perspective of a student regarding the Education System of India. Most of the times, students are pressurized either by parents or society in general to work hard and participate in the mad rat race. However, they tend to forget the ill effects of constant pressure and comparison on their kids. This paper includes the detailed analysis of the novel ‘Mediocre but Arrogant’ by Abhijit Bhanduri and throws light on the problems of India Education System of India. It also highlights the fact that constant pressure and competition in the educational institutions make the students either dull or over confident. Students tend to create shortcuts in order to deal with assignments and examination system. This paper also draws a parallel between novel and the movie ‘3 Idiots’ by Rajkumar Hirani and highlights the plight of students. Government of India can make few significant changes if they consider pupil’s voice while making amendments.

**Keywords:** Indian Education System; Knowledge v/s cramming; Grades; Rat race; Pressure; Society; Competition; 3 Idiots; Youth; Jobs.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### CRITIQUE OF INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM:

According to the latest survey on higher education system of India, there are 700 Universities including 35,000 affiliated colleges enrolling more than 20 million students; it also ranks India as the third country to have a large and complex education system after China on the 2nd position, succeeded by the US. These facts surely paint a rosy picture of higher education system in India, leading people into the belief that it promises a shining future for the youth. However, surveys of this kind fail to explore the drawbacks of the education system. With a plethora of universities coming up, the question of the hour is whether or not they provide a quality education.

Will their degree land them into appropriate places in future?

In order to be at par with the foreign universities, Indian Universities have made their course structure complex yet, weak. Reworking the course structure with changes such as the grading system and term papers which aim

To assess the performance of each student on various levels do them more harm than providing any benefit.

Acquiring knowledge takes a backseat when students aim to score good marks and that too under the pressure of the system. Our education system has become exam-oriented where a student crams up the whole syllabus just before the exams irrespective of his understanding of the concepts. This in turn has increased rote learning and memorising amongst the students where no scope for knowledge gaining can be detected.

It affects the psyche of the student, he constantly feels the pressure from his family and peer group who encourage the idea of winning the race and if he fails to do it then he should die under the baggage of shame.

That is where our education system seems hollow. Either it doesn’t engender a system well equipped for jobs, or it doesn’t aim for giving a finish to the amateur talents of students rather it puts them all together in a herd to be gone haywire.

## 2. A PRALLEL BETWEEN ‘MEDIocre BUT ARROGANT’ AND THE MOVIE ‘3 IDIOTS’

3 Idiots, by Rajkumar Hirani perfectly serve as a critique to the education system. Boman Irani playing the character of the dean of an engineering college propagates the idea of education being nothing but a rat race.

He simply says:

“Life is a race, if you don’t run fast; you will be like a broken egg”

3 Idiots also critiques the idea of education having no scope for talent or hard work. Talent bares no money.

It is given no importance. Joy lobo, a character in the movie commits suicide of not been given a degree because he wasn’t able to finish a project he was working so hard for. The character Rancho aptly says:

“These engineers are very smart sir; they didn’t invent a machine which can measure the pressure of the brain.

If they had, we would have come to know that this was not a suicide but a murder”.

The murderer is no one but the education system. That murders the aspirations, talents, skills and personality of the students. Moreover it embarks upon giving little or no attention to the talent that every individual possesses. The character Farhan Qureshi is forced into doing engineering while his passion was photography; this is why he never succeeded in the rat race of scoring marks.

## 3. SMART WORK V/S HARD WORK

### HIGHLIGHTING THE ISSUE OF USING SHORTCUTS:

Abhijit Bhaduri’s novel ‘Mediocre but Arrogant’ highlights this issue. The protagonist Abbey enters the Management Institute of Jamshedpur to pursue MBA in Personnel development. Within a few weeks he discovers that the agenda of students should be to juggle between the grades of D’s and F’s. I quote from the novel, “the focal point of our life was to worry about our CQPI (Cumulative Quantitative point Index) and to ensure that we are scoring at least 6+ on an 8 point scale”. This remark by Abbey shows that the sole function of education system was to judge students on every level through term papers and assignments. It failed to care about providing quality education to the students. The end result is that the students are trained to memorise few concepts rather than actually understanding them.

“Joy how does one get through these frigging QT quizzes? I just don’t seem to get it. More importantly, I don’t think I will get it in the future either. I am unlikely to get a kick out of figuring out the difference between a Type I error and Type II error. Frankly, I don’t care.”

Abhijit Bhaduri has depicted the idea that the mindset of students is set in a single direction where they only care to get good marks in order to ensure that they get degree at the end of the course. Whether they have learned anything significant or gained any knowledge is not on their minds. First of all, students are judged on the basis of grades they get at the end of each term. It fails to include the skills of a student and also leave a deep mark of shame on their psyche who start giving themselves the tag of ‘dumb’ or ‘weak’.

“Every second day we were subjected to surprise quizzes that proved much to our surprise how little we knew about anything especially anything taken by surprise.”

The question which Bhaduri raises through these incidents in the novel is whether a one hour or a three hour examination can really test the knowledge and understanding of a particular student. The complex marking scheme and grading system does nothing but crushes the originality and creativity of the student. Even if tries to express his own ideas and thoughts, he is asked to shut his mouth.

“The marksheet for each subject seemed to prove that I was anything but brain I had been momentarily deluded into thinking I was. It indicated that at the end of first semester, my self esteem would be like a stubbed out cigarette butt.”

Another drawback of the higher education system in India is that it somehow forced the students to focus on cramming the system, find easy ways to complete the course and get a degree. It trains their minds in such a way that they start applying shortcuts in their course of study. At a point Rusty, the genius friend of Abbey tells him about his own idea of cracking up the system.

“I concentrate on finding ways to understand the system and then explore ways to do that with least efforts. To do well in life, you have to understand which system you are part of and then figure out how to beat it.”

And the series of applying shortcuts and choosing the smarter options above working hard continues during their two year course. That is where people now concentrate on the alternative term ‘smart work’ rather than ‘hard work’

For example, Abbey sits in the library confused about what to write for his term paper on Labour laws for Professor Kamini Mishra. Within a few moments, he is seen sitting around a pile of various volumes of Labour Law Reporter, seeing this Rust comes to his rescue and suggests him the easy option. He explains him the ritual of handing over assignments and term papers to a freelance typist, Banerjee Babu. I quote, “Banerjee Babu keeps a copy of each term paper that he has typed for any students over the years. For a small fee, you could get him to re-type a paper that was graded an A+, B+ etc. depending on what your wallet permits.”

Rusty proved very helpful to Abbey during his MBA course at Management Institute of Jamshedpur; whether completing term papers or giving interviews for summer jobs, he always provided him with the smarter options through which Abbey could complete his work on time as well as take time out for other things. Even so when Abbey attended an interview for summer trainee assignment and was asked to explain the reason he chose Personnel development as his course of study, he answers exactly what was in his mind. I quote, “I don’t know sir, getting into MIJ and this course on personnel development was all just one big act of serendipity” After that he discovered that he wasn’t selected for the job as he didn’t provide them with usual answers which are repeated by every student at various interviews. Novelty on the level of talent is never encouraged by the system. Again Rusty explains Abbey the main criteria for conducting this interview was to select dumb students devoid of any originality who could make the interviewee appear genius in contrast to them. Do students really join these colleges to learn these tricks to get away with anything in their life? Does it serve the purpose of the education or it just trains them to behave in certain manner which is accepted in the college or beyond that? The need of the hour is to re-consider the functions of education, whether it really provides them with quality education or makes them robotic employee for the future. They are simply trained to present a particular solution to any given problem but if a different situation arises then they fail to resolve it in their workplace. This herding of students like sheep’s into confined pastures ultimately lead to chaos, crowd and most of all depletion of the grass itself. That is, when more students are driven into the same field, like the engineering and MBA students generally are, not only crowds the field with ‘more manufacturing and less demand’. But the demand too fades away slowly. This then leads to what we call Unemployment.

#### 4. PUSHING THE STUDENTS INTO RAT RACE

On the surface level, it may appear that the design of the system instils the spirit of competition amongst the students. Since, they have to compete with various students for the limited jobs; they need to be sharp and focussed on their studies. Agreed, that a healthy competition brings the best out of each individual but what happens when this competition takes a dangerous turn and becomes a burden on the life of a student? One never ponders for a moment about the way a student finds himself when dealing with the pressures from his peer group, family and studies. What happens when he starts associating recognition and respect with the kind of job he is offered? When his family pressurises him to look for jobs with huge salary packages and incentives, do they look for their child’s happiness or just want to maintain their social status? In one of the famous scenes of 3 Idiots, Aamir Khan is asked to teach a few concepts in the class by the Dean of the institute. Through a 30 second quiz he educates the students and the Dean too, on the purpose of education which lies in development and encouragement of creativity and originality. I quote,

“aaj jab class shuru hui toh kisi ne ye socha ki kuch naya seekhne ko milega? Maza aayega? Nahi! Sab race mei lag gye jaise koi pressure ho sar pe... aur ye college hai, pressure cooker nahi! Arey chabuk ke darr se toh circus ka sher bhi chalang lagan seekh jata hai but use hum well trained kehte hain, well educated nahin!”

This remark compels us to think that the kind of pressure a student undergoes can actually harm him in many ways. This idea is creatively shown in the novel ‘Mediocre but arrogant’ where all the students become part of the hustle and bustle once the placement season arrives in the campus. Bhaduri depicts the psyche of the students engulfed in the tension and anxiety of giving interviews. According to Abbey, campus was converted into a warzone, a dreadful place wherein the students passed sleepless nights till the time placement process continued. From arranging blazers, to spending hours reading Business magazines in the library, gradually students had become a part of the rat race where only winning had become necessary. The winning prize was to walk out of the institute carrying a recruitment letter in hand. I quote Abbey

from the novel, “The same MIJ that had been so relaxed and laidback seemed to be picking up the last lap of marathon. Everyone wanted to breast the tape before others- only winning mattered. Anything and everything could be sacrificed and would be.”

One by one every student gets the placement offer except Abbey and Sethu. The author has captured the bitter reality of these institutes through the characters of Abbey and Sethu where in students experience huge amount of nervousness and anxiety related to jobs. If they do not get a job offer then they go on a receding path onto the loss of self-respect and ego which further stamps them with shame and guilt. On one hand there was Sethu who was the topper of their batch and was expected to get a placement offer in his first interview; contrary to this he doesn't get any offer and starts avoiding his batch mates in order to guard him from their questions. Abbey's self esteem too had hit low and nothing could make him happy, not even the prospect of free drinks offered at success party of his batchmates. I quote Abbey from the novel, “Sethu must have been dying a hundred deaths too, like me. It was not easy celebrating somebody else's success when it poked a million holes in your ego.”

However, both the characters react differently to the situation; while Abbey awaits his placement offer, Sethu takes a false step of burning all his certificates from school to college. According to him those certificates were of no use to him as they couldn't provide him with any job. Such incidents compel one to ponder over the fact that there is very little correlation between academic brilliance, employment opportunities and employability. The questions raised in one's mind are: Does completing a particular professional course provide one with great job opportunities? Does it even guarantee a job? I quote, “Sethu came to no bodily harm but his ego and his world were shattered along with his confidence. He got into, what in management jargon is called, a ‘downward spiral’. Since his confidence was low, he did not perform well in any of the subsequent interviews and thus was rejected each time. The lowered his self esteem even more.”

Rajkumar Hirani has been able to capture this issue in his movie 3 Idiots, where a character Joy Lobo takes his own life when he is unable to deal with the pressure and submit his project according to the given deadline. Another character Raju tries to commit suicide by jumping from the college building when he suffers the fear of being rusticated from the college. Such incidents make people wonder that the pressure of studies, job and marks can do much harm to the students and each student has its own way to handle this pressure.

## 5. DELVING INTO THE TITLE OF THE NOVEL

Another idea is brought to the surface by Abhijit Bhaduri through the usage of the title- ‘Mediocre but Arrogant’. He has shown how the protagonist of the novel refers to himself as ‘mediocre’ as he wasn't offered any job unlike his batch mates. His self confidence had been crushed during the placement process and he started considering himself as good for nothing; someone for whom cracking the system had become the sole aim. He had failed to achieve excellence or to gain knowledge during his two year course at MIJ. There was no place for originality or creativity and even his degree in MBA wasn't sufficient to provide him with a guaranteed job. And the word ‘arrogant’ because spending two years at a reputed institute frustrated him as he went under extreme pressure to grab a career. I quote,

“I reflected upon my past, present and future. What had it given me, a little knowledge of management to cover up my mediocrity? A lot of savoir that Rusty had drilled into along with millions little tips on how to beat, not cheat the system, the professors and even myself.”

## 6. BLIND APEING OF THE FASHION

In order to be economically sufficient youth tend to follow the path most trodden. It is thence that youth today isn't able to answer the question of what next?? He would know the right way if he had ever thought about what actually he should do. He never pays heed to his dreams and aspirations because that may sound ‘a road not taken’. Nor does he prefer to find a way on his own. With no set goal rather than ‘a job’, he awaits the next step by a suggestion or a replica of another model of a successful person. He runs blindly after a degree so that it helps him find a respectable job which in turn will provide him a status symbol. The same happens with Abbey who had decided to follow his neighbour Vikram Gupta for he was considered a role model due to his sensible career choice. Though Abbey joined Economics Honours at SRCC because of Vikram, he experienced a dilemma at the end of the three year course. Absolutely confused about what to do next in his life, he simply filled the application form for MBA because his friend Kapil had brought an extra form for him.

Thus he considers the whole act of joining an MBA course to be 'serendipity'. I quote, "Going for an MBA is the second major national pastime among college-goers, some survey had proved."

Badal Sircar too has creatively shown in his play '*Evam Indrajit*' how youngsters try to follow the fashion and blindly accept the societal notions without ever questioning them. Sircar shows the situation in a metropolitan city where running a blind race has led to the dehumanization of the man. The protagonist of the play, Indrajit is trapped in a vicious circle where he is forced to act like everyone and the power of questioning which he had in the initial stages of the play is snatched from him towards the end of it. From a unique identity of Indrajit, he gains an identity of a common man that is Nirmal. Through the character of writer, Sircar brings home the idea that every individual is born with a unique purpose in life but societal norms and pressures forces him to forget it in the mad race. The purpose of life is to find one's own unique purpose of existence rather than simply following the others and this is depicted in the scene where The writer gets frustrated on being forced for marriage, his mother asks him to get married to which he replies :- "Why should you love? Why should you hate?"

Why should you suffer and blame it on fate?

Why should you weep and why should you cry?

Everybody does it. That's why, that's why."

## 7. CONCLUSION

Studies when become a burden tend to lead to unburdening somehow by finishing the task at hand. That is where the students simply tend to cram the books of their syllabus and second thing they learn is to crack the system they are part of. They are moulded right from the childhood with the idea of 'perform or perish' lest they lose the race and become the target of the endless taunts by the relatives. According to population census of India 2011, youth in India account for 253 million which makes the Adolescent population of India more than the total population of 18 Western Asian Countries in 2011. Doesn't it sound quite weird? India which is repeatedly announced as a country with young population is still remarked as a developing country when the social and economic growth dominantly depends upon the youth? Why? The youth in our country are either committing suicides or are unemployed. When they aren't giving their share to the GDP (thanks to the education system). How then could India progress from developing to develop? Why still students prefer to study abroad, work abroad while India with such a huge population shouldn't be in dearth of jobs? This is where "Mediocre but Arrogant" serves as a remarkable insight into the hollow system of education which is producing either corpses or drug addicts due to depression. The society is increasingly heading towards alcoholism and other seditions only to fight depression. This is found among the increasing number of youth into the pit of self-annihilation by alcohol and smoke, as a source of evading the pressure.

Thus the novel serves the education system heads with a sour treat. It showcases the reason for India's social and economic digression that lay deep beneath the grounds of education.

## REFERENCES

- [1] M I Hussain, "The education system: a critical review", New Delhi, 2012.
- [2] Thomas Manuel, "Demystifying Higher Education in India: first of a series", 2015
- [3] Wikipedia: Education system in India, New Delhi, 2016
- [4] Wikipedia: Mediocre but Arrogant, New Delhi, 2016