

# Gifted Disadvantage in Education Safety Net: a Reality Check

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## Abstract

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*Although the notion of giftedness is a reality, yet it swings along the pendulum of equality and excellence. At times, nurturance of gifted abilities becomes a struggle of better catchment of resources and facilities. Those from affluent set-ups are blessed with better support system whereas gifted children from disadvantaged group suffer from submissive upbringing. In developing countries like, India, with diverse demographic profiles, socio-cultural diversity and economic disparity, the very concept of equality in education faces severe challenge. The present paper presents the dichotomy of ideology of equality and excellence in education practices. It highlights the need of wider vision, better policy making and decentralised implementation services to allow gifted children to enjoy what they are; dream what they can be; and promote what they will be.*

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### **A day in Garima's life.....**

Garima is a seventh grade student in a Government School. Her father is a clerk; mother is a homemaker with four children to look after. Garima gets up at 5 O'clock in the morning, helps her younger siblings to get ready for school, combs their hair, ties up their shoes, checks their school bags, helps her mother to pack the lunch for herself and her siblings, fills the water bottles, clears the room and rushes for school.

In school, Garima is a high achiever, and easily understands everything being taught. She mostly helps the teacher to assist the slow peer of her class. She enjoys every minute of her school time. She tries to finish most of her homework in school itself so that she can learn playing the *guitar*, her music teacher has gifted her seeing her music abilities.

Once back home, Garima eats her lunch, takes rest for half an hour and

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sets off for her helping role. She helps her siblings in their homework, does reading for the youngest one who is just five years old, takes their revision lessons and also, mediates when they fight. Once she finishes with their school work, she cleans the room. Her younger siblings go out to play.

Now, this is the time to join her mother in the kitchen work. She takes charge of the kitchen and allows her mother to go for an evening walk and do some necessary shopping as this is the only time when her mother can get some relief from tedious household chores. She quickly winds up cooking and spends sometime playing guitar. She had choreographed a group dance for her class which was selected for zonal competition. This is how she meets the demand of her creative needs.

She consciously makes an effort to spend some quality time with her mother and both mother-daughter share a close bond. Garima takes a break for the day only after cleaning the kitchen with her mother.

#### **Garima in her inner world.....**

Garima is a happy, well adjusted, sensitive, caring and highly able child who is growing beautifully taking up household responsibilities, at the same time doing justice with her studies. But the highly demanding home environment and non-challenging school environment is not able to provide any opportunity to optimally facilitate her potential.

Once in her inner world, Garima wants to become a space scientist. She loves to read and discuss about space science. Her curious mind is full of questions about space facts, theories

and discoveries but she has no source to get her answers. She struggles with herself on such issues. Given an opportunity, she dreams to buy a reflective telescope and explore the space.

She wants to be a working woman, but only in a career which her parents can afford for her. She does not dare to make her dream of space scientist a reality. She is very well aware of her financial limitations. Although she always scores above 95 per cent in science, she does not want to pursue science as a career as she feels that higher education in science is expensive and also very demanding, which she may not afford due to family responsibilities.

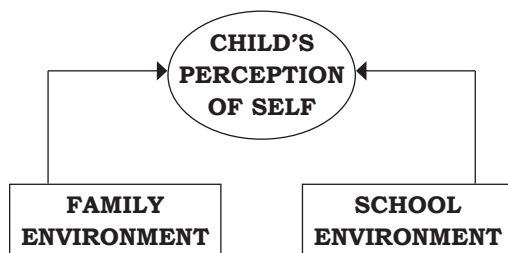
#### ***In spite of all the limitations, Garima faces the world with a smile***

Garima is an example of million of children in economically disadvantaged families where parents, dream to educate their children but can not provide them appropriate support to maximise their potential. Although these children are safely placed in education safety net, even schools fail to provide them appropriate enrichment, resources and guidance to channelise their potentials. In such a struggling system, where lack of facilities joined with lack of awareness, force these children to slip into a system of adjustments, restrictions and limitations.

Socio-cultural forces play dominant role in shaping gifted child's perception about self because no conception of giftedness or talent works in a cultural

vacuum (Freeman, 1998). Family, teachers, peers and other social forces influence child’s belief in self abilities. According to research findings, families play one of the most significant roles in development of their gifted children (Bloom, 1995; Csikszentmihali and Csikszentmihali, 1993; Freeman, 2001). They not only have a crucial influence on children’s academic performance, but also central to the facilitation of social-emotional development (Feldman, 1999; Moon, 2003; Oiszewski-Kubilins, 2002; Silverman, 1993).

In India, families act as a natural authority to make choices about career options for a child. In many cases, these children are either first generation learners or parents have very basic education and thus, have very little or no knowledge about career options or education facilities.



Family being the first school of child is considered to be the closest. Parents have strong influence on child, as family culture, parents’ beliefs and available resources set the foundation of child’s future development. Even the choice of school depends on family’s reach as well as beliefs. School as formal institution, expands child’s limited exposure and unlimited curiosity. School environment includes school culture, curriculum, teachers, peers and overall social set-up

of the school. These two agencies act as prime institutions to guide and nurture the child.

In economically disadvantaged families, choice of school cannot be asked as a right; rather access of school is a luxury. Even coming to school does not guarantee provisions for ability-based curriculum. So, struggling parents wish for nearest possible career, which can permit the child for a decent-earning future.

**The possible reasons for submissive parenting are**

- Financial limitations
- Lack of resources
- Lack of knowledge about funding agencies
- Lack of knowledge about available subject options and careers
- Prejudices
- Social barrier
- Lack of social networking
- Limited exposure of the parents.

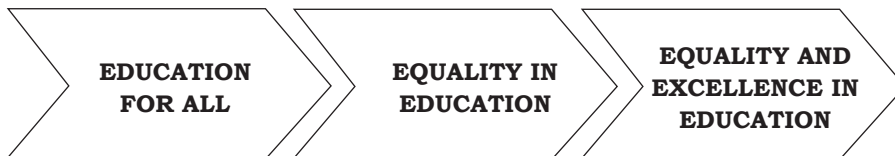
Within this complex scenario, reading the minds of our children, picking up the right talent and protecting this talent with appropriate mentoring is a challenge. Another important factor in such cases is absence of well-placed identification and nurturance programmes to identify potentially able children. Education system of modern India borrows vision from democratic values of its constitution. It reflects the inherent democratic values and sanity. It aims to provide easy access of education services to all children between 6 to 14 years. It spreads umbrella of protection to children from disadvantaged section

of society but does not give much thought to potentially-gifted children. Although there are some programmes / schemes such as National Talent Search, National Level Olympiads, KVPY and INSPIRE available to identify academic talent among school children but average about these programmes are available to many children.

All these schemes are initiated at government level and target children above 13 years. By this age, most of the innocent, natural talent is already being lost. In most of these programmes, efforts are being made to reach to the exceptionally potential child, but, in-between, we lose so many promising

potential children. These programmes demand more comprehensive planning and better execution to reach to every possible child. In developing countries like India, sharp discriminatory variables such as complex social profile, demographic diversity and economic disparity strongly effect children's understanding of knowledge. In such a pluralistic system, we cannot think of one uniform set of criteria of giftedness, as the very idea of giftedness must be culturally rooted.

At the same time, it demands to widen our vision from *Equality in Education to Equality and Excellence in Education*.



The education system in India aims for achieving *education for all* by implementing the Right to Education for children between 6-14 years. All possible efforts are being planned to make this dream a reality. Education for children with special needs is also an area of concern. Rehabilitation Council of India, a statutory body of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India, runs certificate, diploma, degree and master's level courses in the field of special education and disability rehabilitation in collaboration with universities and NGOs to educate and rehabilitate children with disability. This is how an attempt is being made towards equality in education.

At this historic juncture, we must confront our belief in system of equality. A system which ignores the sentiments of gifted minority cannot claim to be fool proof. A system which adopts and implements a common policy for gifted education, ignoring socio- cultural and economic diversity cannot achieve equality. The notion of equality in education will remain just a theoretical layout unless it is well-placed across the range of abilities, liberal policies and willingness to work for betterment of every child. India's democratic ideology and spirit, that *every child is potentially gifted*, does not encourage special schools or pullout programmes for gifted children. We need flexible, multidimensional, in-built curriculum

which is differentiated in nature and allows every learner to stretch to the maximum.

At the same time, what we require is a thoughtful analysis of our beliefs in the very conception of giftedness and how to prepare ourselves to secure the rights of every gifted child. The vision of education for all should be defined very objectively so that gifted children don't feel isolated and discriminated in regular system. The very spirit of equality in education should be truly sensitive to the needs of gifted minority in schools. The presence of gifted children in our classes should be acknowledged and respected. Diversity of their abilities should be celebrated. We as adults, teachers, parents, policy makers, educationists and society, as a whole, must open our hearts and minds to embrace these children so that they don't become victims of our ideology clash.

### **Some major considerations**

- Widening our vision on equality and excellence in education.
- Preparing safety net for potentially able children through proper identification.
- Sensitising and empowering regular teachers for the needs of gifted children.
- Decentralising existing policies and practices for better implementation.
- Mobilising parents and community.
- Preparing pool of mentors.
- Making education available to children from deprived segments of society.

I may conclude my paper with a hope that a sensitive and far sighted approach towards our fundamental conception of giftedness, will definitely benefit gifted population in schools, particularly, gifted disadvantaged who don't have access to resources.

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