

PARTH J. SHAH

Founder, Centre for Civil Society
Director, Indian School of Public Policy

Former Professor, University of Michigan
President, Centre for Civil Society
Director, Institute of Public Policy

During my graduate studies in economics in the U.S., it became clear that what India needed was not better rulers but better rules, maybe even a better Constitution. The political society was very dominant in every aspect of life in India in 1990s and we thought we should promote civil society as a counter. While teaching at the University of Michigan, I was able to save enough to take the plunge to fulfil my dream, and this led to the birth of the Centre for Civil Society, and more recently, the Indian School of Public Policy that offers India's first programme in Policy, Design and Management.

The core point that drew back to India, the first was the scope and scale of change that could be achieved in India. Secondly, I felt that I could bring a new approach to social change, not the typical one of grassroots work but of policy work, in the form of an independent, non-partisan think tank. There were hardly any such think tanks in India at the time. It also suited my academic mind-set well – combining academic rigour of research with an activist approach to policy change.

We want to create a 'learning by understanding' module in schools. It is, actually, quite simple: no teachers, but caring adults; no text books; and no board exams – a radical suggestion, but could serve well for the improvement of our education system, leading to its transformation. The 'Gurukul' model was something similar to this.

I feel the key requirement to improve the system is the segregation of functions. The focus should be on quality of execution through expertise. The second point is: well defined and high quality learning outcomes. Thirdly: the funding of students, and not schools, as explained above.

There are many models of schooling, including alternate schooling. I think the latter are doing much better than the CBSE, ICSE, State Boards etc. They are building 21st century ready students – this should be our goal. 

“Focus should be on quality of execution through expertise”

