

Where can we go to find God if we cannot see Him in our own hearts and in every living being.

-Swami Vivekananda

## INDIA'S GENEROSITY WORKED

There is no doubt there is acute shortage of different medical equipments and other facilities in our hospitals during the time of ongoing crisis. We can observe long queues of needy persons outside oxygen filling plants, hospitals and other medical facilities, waiting for their turn to get medical facilities for their loves ones, suffering from the contagious infection. Further, the production of anti-COVID vaccine is not sufficient to meet requirements of our population. After first wave of COVID infection, when a fall was observed in its spread, we exported COVID vaccines to other needy countries. No doubt on humanitarian grounds that was our duty and generosity, but now during ongoing second wave of COVID, entire country is grappling with shortage of vaccine to keep the infection at bay, but people are not receiving the same. We have exported approx 600 million of doses across different countries. Now in this vaccine crisis, some people are misinforming that Govt should have not exported the vaccine to other nations, when there is acute shortage of same in the country itself. At that time, many people were engaged in a propaganda and were against the Govt. They also questioned the efficiency of vaccine and deliberately remained away from health centres in the country. Even now also, some people are saying that it was a wrong move by the government. But we should keep in mind that it is the duty of every responsible state to take care of others at the time of need and emergency. No doubt priority must be given to own people, but at that time nobody was aware about such kind of COVID surge.

We must not forget that other nations have not forgotten the generous step of India and now, in the hour of need, are providing a lot of medical equipments and other facilities, for welfare of people. Many nations came openly for our help in this crucial hour of crisis. We are continuously receiving oxygen concentrators, PPE kits, raw materials for our vaccines from different nations of the world. Think if we had not supported them in their crisis, then who would have helped us today. There is popular saying that you can't clap with a single hand. International relations are strengthened only when we understand each others' needs. And in difficult times of other, we must cooperate with them as per suitability and capacity. Now we are living in a global village. We can only get success if we think globally and act globally. No nation can achieve success by ignoring concerns and interest of others. COVID pandemic is a global issue for all. We can eradicate this problem from the world when we cooperate and work collaboratively in this direction. Our nation has a beautiful history that we helped humanity in difficult times. Our identity has been of a country which once gave the Panchsheel principal. We are the exponent of the philosophy of 'Vasudeva Katumbkum'.

No doubt at present, we are running the biggest immunisation programme against this viral infection and there is need of billions of jabs for this purpose. But we should also not forget that it will take some time to vaccinate such a large population. Some patience and perseverance is needed in this direction. Also there is need of proper collaboration from all stakeholders and citizens at this crucial juncture. It is not an apt time for blame game and criticism. We are facing an historic crisis of modern era. Everyone should forward for cooperation, then only we can stand strong against this pandemic. It is not an appropriate time to criticise the policies and initiative of government at international platform. Entire world community is giving assistance to us for our generosity. Helping someone in a difficult time and later falsifying it, will not change the situation. Now we have seen that our recovery rate is improving day by day with our cooperation in this direction. Soon we will recover over from this bad time and common man will get a good chance to live again.

Shyam Sudan

ST

OFF 'D' CUFF

### You can change outcome of your narrative

Everyone has a Story, made up of several chosen stories, that we repeatedly tell ourselves about ourselves, and tell others too; it hinges on how we want to be seen. This narrative plays a role not only in shaping our own self-concept, but also in how we approach situations, relationships and decision-making.

One's composite personal story contains events or aspects of our history which may be factual, but the way we select some and leave others out, subjectively interpret them and thread them into our main personal narrative reshapes and alters the bare facts.

How we feel about our lives right now is a matter of the stories that we tell ourselves repeatedly. What are these stories? How do you make sense of who you are? Does your composite personal story paint you primarily as victor or victim, popular or lonely, successful or unsuccessful?

Realise that none of these on their own can be wholly true. Yet for many, these one-sided stories repeated over time can become so distorted and damaging that they hamper any ability to live balanced, happy lives.

Rebecca Solnit writes: "We think we tell stories, but stories often tell us; tell us to love or hate, to see or be seen. Often, too often, stories saddle us, ride us, whip us onward, tell us what to do, and we do it without questioning."

The key to personal

■ DR WAHIED KHAWAR BALWAN

For many centuries it was considered that language is the source of the expression of human thoughts and ideas. Ralph Waldo Emerson1 wrote, 'Thought is the blossom, language the bud.' However, psycholinguists in the 20th century started grappling with some new questions. Thoughts and ideas, even when not spoken out aloud, need to be expressed in some way within the mind itself. When we think, we may not be speaking to others, but we are speaking to ourselves. In most cases, a human being 'speaks to himself' in the language where his comfort level is highest, and this is usually, though not necessarily, the mother tongue. But what about those who do not know any language? For instance, babies in infancy stage cannot speak, but surely they also have thoughts and ideas in their minds; their minds do not remain blank until they acquire speech skills. Similar is the case of deaf and dumb people. Though they cannot hear or speak verbal languages, they must surely have ideas in their minds. Helen Keller became blind and deaf, when she had an attack of meningitis at the age of one. She could not hear or speak any verbal language and only when she was about seven years old, she learned to communicate her thoughts by pressing signs into palm of her tutor Anne Sullivan. Those were not the days of hearing aids or even of Braille or sign language. Yet, it is beyond credence that a fertile and intelligent mind like hers could have been a vacuum until she learnt to communicate ideas! The question with language and thought is, as with chicken and egg, which comes first? But be that as it may, language is a uniquely human gift and plays a big part in our experience of being human and it is worthwhile attempting to understand its role in shaping our mental construct.

Does language shape thought, and if so, to what extent? Does it influence the way we think, the way we live, the way we see the world, the way we interact with other human beings? Well-known critic Elaine Showalter, analysing the difference between the writing of men and women, says that language plays an important role in the cultural construct of a person. Patriarchal social conventions allow lesser and more limited linguistic territory for women, which reflected in their writing

and ideas too, till in later years more and more women broke relatively free of these conventions resulting in the enrichment of ideas in women's writing. It is an unresolved controversy whether language is merely a tool for expressing our thoughts or whether it actually shapes our thoughts.

Piaget the famous psychologist and known for his research on cognitive psychology, is quite definite about the relationship of language to concept formation. He is of the opinion that there is no need for language to precede the acquisition of concepts. Before the child learns to speak, he is already using symbolic thought in which one object stands for another. A child that opens and shuts its mouth, while working out how to open any box for example a lunch box or a matchbox, is representing one action by another even if he cannot speak. Language is only one of the symptoms of this level of development, not the cause. Some use of symbols is found before speech occurs, and some use of non-language symbols co-exists with speech. Language is only part of the child's development and does not play a crucial role. Its only major difference from other symbolic systems is that it is not personal and idiosyncratic but is shared with other speakers of the language. The proof of the minor role of language comes from studies of deaf and blind children. Their conceptual development is delayed by between one and four years. Yet in the end, they acquire more or less the same concepts as the normal child in spite of their language handicap. So language only greases the wheels, it does not drive them. Piaget's advice for the teacher seems to be that language must not be treated in isolation but as part of the general development of the child; the teacher must not expect to influence conceptual development greatly through language teaching.

From the point of view of the linguist, Noam Chomsky is far from convinced that language is simply part of the growth of symbolic thought. In a recent lecture he dismissed this with the remark that 'Since only the vaguest of suggestions have been offered, it is impossible at present to evaluate these proposals.' Most of those studying children language at the moment agree with him that the dependence of language acquisition on more general learning processes is not proven. Many aspects of

language development appear to have no parallels in other areas of development. Syntactic structure has peculiarities of its own. For instance, early in the development of speech the child forms sentences by combining two different types of words, usually known as 'pivot' and 'open'. Examples of these are sentences such as 'Ball there', 'Spoon fall' and 'See Doggy'. Why he should do this and how this leads on to more complicated structures is as yet uncertain. Yet this stage is found in a variety of languages and may perhaps occur in all human languages. As a developmental stage it seems unique to language. The linguist's advice to the teacher is then to be wary of subordinating language to concept as this will not teach those aspects of language that are unique.

Though there are differences between these two approaches, there are also similarities. They both recognise that language acquisition is not the same thing as the development of concepts. They differ over the degree of independence they grant to language. Piaget sees language as essentially no different from other uses of symbolic thought. Chomsky sees language as having its own specific qualities not shared by other aspects of development. The difference between concept and language has been shown in several experiments. In our effort to validate this theory, we found that children are able to discriminate spatial relations at an earlier age than they can understand the language that describes these relations.

In a study carried out by Krishnan and Mukherjee on working with a group of children in the nursery age-group (4-6 years), they showed them different geometrical shapes placed in different positions to each other. For example if they were shown a picture of a triangle inside a square, they could pick out a matching duplicate picture much easier and quicker than if they were given a verbal order 'Show me a picture of a triangle inside a square'. In another example, some of the children were instructed verbally, 'Throw the ball into the bucket'. The others were shown manually what they had to do. No verbal instructions were given to this lot. It was found that the children who received the visual example comprehended and performed the action much quicker than those who received the verbal instructions. Thus we found that

concept precedes language.

The way in which languages differ from one another may give credence to the belief that language does indeed shape thought. Lera Boroditsky, in her essay 'How Does Language Shape the Way We Think?' gives the interesting hypothetical example. Suppose we want to say, 'Bush read Chomsky's latest book.' Let's focus on just the verb, 'read.' To say this sentence in English, we have to mark the verb for tense; in this case, we have to pronounce it like 'red' and not like 'reed.' In Russian you would have to alter the verb to indicate tense and gender. So if it was Laura Bush who did the reading, you'd use a different form of the verb than if it was George. In Russian you'd also have to include in the verb information about completion. If George read only part of the book, you'd use a different form of the verb than if he'd diligently ploughed through the whole thing. Boroditsky also conducted a test on speakers of English and Russian languages and came up with interesting results. In English, there is only one word for the colour 'blue', whereas in Russian there are two distinct, separate words 'goluboy' (light blue) and 'sinii' (dark blue). Boroditsky's data shows that Russian speakers are quicker to distinguish between the two shades of blue than English speakers who were much less sensitive to subtle differences in shades. To take a broader example, we can consider the fact that in some languages (like English) inanimate nouns take a neuter gender, while in other languages (like Hindi), all nouns, whether animate or inanimate, are classified as either masculine or feminine. A chair, for example, is neuter in English but feminine in Hindi. Would that make a difference in the way the speakers of both these languages think?

It is probably too simplistic to find an answer to the question as to whether language shapes thought or vice-versa. A more realistic and balanced conclusion would be that both language and thought are complementary to each other. It is possible to develop concepts without verbal language and communication can be done through symbols also, but for the most effective and powerful expression and communication of ideas, there can be no better tool than the verbal language. Expressing and communicating effectively will in turn facilitate further development of ideas.

# Online classes failing to impress parents

■ VIJAY GARG

During the outbreak of COVID-19 and global lockdown, distance learning (and especially e-Learning) became the only feasible way of learning, which means the industry is now facing an unprecedented surge in demand. For e-Learning businesses, this situation brings great opportunities for growth as well as lots of pressure. Those who are prepared to meet and retain millions of newcomers will be able to multiply their revenues, and those who fail to respond quickly will lose this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Adaptation Difficulties: Since the online classroom is a new environment for many students, the first challenge is to adopt online learning. If platform seems too complicated, you risk losing your potential students. Naturally, most of the responsibility for overcoming this challenge falls on students, but that doesn't mean there's nothing you can do to help them thrive in online classes. To ease and speed up the process, you can prepare useful materials about online learning like induction training and FAQs covering the benefits of online education and providing tips on how to organize the education process more productively.

Wrong Expectations: The course appeared to be too difficult or too easy, too time-consuming or too theoretical-these are some faulty expectations that will lead to frustration and dropouts. The best way to mitigate this problem is to communicate all possible information about the course, including topics and lessons in the course, teachers' qualifications and experience, level of training required, how much time learners should set aside for the course, broken down by module and assignment, course objectives and outcomes, skills gained after completing each module and course in full etc. It won't save us from students who don't read course description and then drop out because they needed something else, but at least we'll know we've done our part.

Technical Issues: Bugs and slowdowns on the eLearning platform aren't something that helps students be more motivated. Instead, it may force students to abandon the course. Even if your online platform has never experienced any technical issues, the spike in demand for online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown might harm your platform's performance. A rapid increase in traffic on your website is a huge load on your servers that can cause server outages and crashes. Another problem is speed losses for users located far from the servers. To get rid of the technical issues and ensure a smooth eLearning experience for the students, you need to build a flexible and scalable server infrastructure by optimizing content with adaptive delivery (to ensure quality and speed on every type of device and connection) and moving it closer to the user with a content delivery network (CDN). There are two ways to do this: build your own solution or use a ready-made CDN.

Poor Time Management: Lack of time is one of the most com-

mon reasons why students abandon online courses. While some people indeed face unexpected personal circumstances, others simply fail to manage their time properly. Time management is also something you can teach your students. A regular schedule planner and reminders for courses and assignments would be a great help for students who struggle with poor time management skills.

Problems with Motivation: There are tons of reasons why students can lose motivation from unclear course outcomes and lack of control to feeling frustrated because of social isolation. Although some personal motivation problems will always be outside of our control, we can do our best to make the course as engaging as possible. Create a learner's roadmap with clear milestones like gained knowledge and achievements. This path can be displayed somewhere in the student's personal account so that they can follow their own progress and feel satisfaction getting closer to the final goal.

Vary the formats of content and tasks: it could be interactive training, videos, storytelling, gamified solutions, etc. Form a community of students and sometimes use group work. Engagement goes up when students feel like they're a part of a group.

Too Much Flexibility: One of the biggest advantages of online learning is great flexibility: students can take courses at their own pace whenever and wherever they want. At the same time, when there's too much of it, flexibility can be the biggest disadvantage too. The solution is simple: set deadlines for each module (or at least a final deadline) and send reminders when the deadline is close. Without this, the completion rates risk being extremely low as 'at any time' usually means 'at no time.'

Lack of Human Contact: One of the major limitations of the online learning experience is a lack of communication with classmates and teachers, which can be frustrating for some students. Moreover, studies show that social engagement and community components make students five times more engaged and 16 times more likely to finish the course. They acquire new knowledge and skills by watching others' behavior and attitude, and related outcomes. Though online learning implies certain limitations to this approach, we should do our best to create as many possibilities of interaction within the online world as we can. It could be group work, webinars, forums, friendly competitions, debates, or discussion boards where students can work together with their classmates and teachers and learn from each other.

Too Bulky Chunks of Information: It's a familiar situation. You need to embark on a large project, and you simply don't know where to start. But once you break it down into smaller tasks, it becomes more approachable and doable in your eyes. The same thing is true of education: too massive and complicated modules can scare students away from the course. That's where micro-learning comes in to save the day. It's a learning

they are unable to bear excessive summer heat.

Generally, birds keep flying as they have no shelter due to shrinking number of trees in urban areas. Also, the trimming of trees in cities is done in such a haphazard manner that these poor birds have no elongated or think branches to make their dwellings. As a result, in scorching summer, the heat is life-threatening for these birds. With no shelter to seek relaxation, birds try to fly higher but, alas, their frail feathers do not help them and such birds collapse on earth. Thus, it is our humanitarian duty to make water available for birds in our balconies, lawns, terrace etc.

I urge all to show empathy for these birds. If we could provide some grains or keep a bowl of water in our balcony, then it would be a big boon for the birds. These birds would not need to fly long distances in search of food and water. We can place water bowls and some grains in backyards and terraces. This is the first step to save the birds and animals from heat strokes. Birds are tiny mute animals hence they cannot convey their

pain, but the Almighty has given us the power to understand their agony. Hence, as Good Humans, we should at least lend support and help these birds. A little effort from our side can bring a bagful of joy in their life. While some can contribute by way of food grains, others could help in building little cardboard nests for the birds to rest in their lawns or on terraces. Efforts like this by every household can surely play a big share in keeping the bird's population alive.

Every day, more and more wildlife habitat is being lost due to man's lust for more land. Hence, as a human being, it is our social duty to help the birds and give them shelter in our garden or balcony, no matter how small. The point is, birds should survive the onslaught of scorching heat during ensuing summer season.

I would request all to extend their love and compassion to these tiny creatures and bring joy in their lives. So, let us all pledge to save birds this summer!

Mannan Sharma, Sainik Colony.