

Nothing concentrates the mind more than existential jeopardy, and undoubtedly the challenges facing the community threaten its existence. The community has to look within itself to find sources of strength and resources for regeneration. As a first step, it must learn to deal with the predators within who feed off the capital of the community for their personal gains. The inability to leverage the wealth of the Waqf properties to serve their intended purpose by freeing them from the jaws of sharks is too well known to bear repetition. The quest of Muslim politicians for crumbs from the table of privilege at the cost of who they represent, the sorry state of Muslim-managed institutions, lack of moral, intellectual, and often financial integrity, confused thinking, and disjointed action have all contributed to mire us in our present predicament. We have been resistant to change and complicit in the preservation of the status quo. The plaint is not about what others have done to us, the lament is about what we have done to ourselves. This is a moment for introspection, deep and unsparing.

What is the state of our educational institutions from madrasas at the grass roots level, through schools, to the provision of tertiary education? The much-maligned madrasas can serve a very useful purpose of educating a substantial, underprivileged section of the community. Making their curricula more relevant to the needs of the present day and age can breathe new life into these moribund outfits. What prevents this from happening—a lack of imagination, resources or will? What about our schools and institutions of higher learning? Surely their standards need to be raised. But how? We cannot have good education without good teachers. What kind of facilities do we have for training teachers? Education is more than just a profession; it is a mission and those engaged in it must pursue it with missionary zeal. Is that possible? I have personally had the good fortune to be schooled in two Christian missionary schools. I bear witness to their commitment, sincerity and quality. Indian Christians run excellent schools; Indian Muslims run lousy ones. We can take pages from their playbook and improve our schools. What about tertiary education? We need to look no further than St. Stephen's in Delhi, St. Xavier's in Mumbai, Loyola College in Chennai, Christian Medical College in Vellore, XLRI in Jamshedpur, and this list can be expanded to include several more. Where is our list, and how do we compare? While they strive for excellence, we are all too ready to lower the bar and accept mediocrity or worse. The purpose of saying this is not to generate defensiveness or envy, but to induce aspiration and provide inspiration. What prevents us from learning from their example? How can we institutionalize structures and processes that will allow us adopt educational best practices?

Change is a function of dissatisfaction with the status quo and the stimulus necessary to precipitate it. It is hard to believe that we can be anything but extremely dissatisfied with our present situation. And we have received much more than a stimulus—we have received a shock! So what is needed to turn things around? This is where we need thought leadership to be the catalyst. For that to happen, we have to provide institutionalized platforms to bring people and ideas together. Unless we make thought the springboard for action, our responses will be confused, contradictory and counter-productive. We must pool together our intellectual resources and try to assemble an agenda for empowerment that would determine a roadmap for regeneration and revival.

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