

**EDUCATED RHINOS****Anirban Chakraborty**

Assistant Teacher  
Kalyanbrata Sangha High School (H.S.)  
Howrah, West Bengal, India  
Phone No : 9674913754 / 8620962470  
Email :- anirbanchakraborty483@gmail.com

**Abstract**

Oxford Dictionary states that 'education' means instruction, schooling, teaching, training, tuition, upbringing whereas 'learning' connotes knowledge obtained by study or erudition. But in India, the announcement like abolishing compulsory CBSE board exams for Class 10 from the session 2010-2011, introduction of grading system, the passing of Right to Children to free and Compulsory Education Bill, reservation policies *etc.* has made education so easily available that quality of education and learning is on the verge of a pathetic deterioration and is almost proving to be a fallacy. This present study will throw light on the psycho-analytical behaviour of the students and their parents and teachers from different perspectives in today's world and also their so called 'target – oriented', marks-infested, herd-mentality approach.

This attempt based on analysis will probably help the experts and researchers and also the students to analyse themselves and develop a more comprehensive idea about the present scenario of education and teaching-learning. Descriptive and analytical in nature, this paper is based on the data collected from the websites and other print references and reports from different textual sources.

**Keywords:** Education, Rote Learning, Cramming, Quality, Psycho-analysis, Herd -mentality, Isolation

## Introduction

*“This strange disease of modern life  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims.”*

*- Mathew Arnold  
‘The Scholar - Gipsy’*

According to the Census of 2011 “every person above the age of 7 years who can read and write with understanding in any language is said to be literate. According to this criterion, the 2011 survey holds the National Literacy Rate to be 74.07%. The youth literacy rate, measured within the age group of 15 to 24, is 81.1% (84.4% among males and 74.4% among females), while 86% of boys and 72% of girls are literate in the 10-19 age group. As of 2011, enrolment rates are 58% for pre-primary, 93% for primary, 69% for secondary, and 25% for tertiary education.

Despite the high overall enrolment rate for primary education, among rural children of age 10, half could not read at a basic level, over 60% were unable to do division, and half dropped out by the age of 14. In 2009 two states in India, Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, participated in the international PISA (The Programme for International Student Assessment) exams which is administered once every three years to 15 year-olds. Both states ranked at the bottom of the table, beating out only Kyrgyzstan in score, and falling 200 points (two standard deviations) below the average for OCED countries. While in the immediate aftermath there was a short-lived controversy over the quality of primary education in India, ultimately India decided not to participate in PISA for 2012 and 2015.

*New Indian Express* says that Indian Education system seems to be producing zombies since in most of the schools, students seemed to be spending majority of their time in preparing for competitive exams rather than learning or playing. *Business Week* criticizes the Indian curriculum, saying it revolves around rote learning and *Express India* suggests that students are focused on cramming. Most ironically, *Pre-school for Child Rights* states that almost 99% of pre-schools do not have any curriculum at all.

All the above given statistics undoubtedly present a dismal picture of Indian education system but what haunts me more, being a school teacher of a rural school in West Bengal, is why is this happening ? A thorough observation on my part compels me to put down in words that the basic problem lies in the child’s psychology and also that of the parents. But to delve deep into this concurrent problem, we need to have a comprehensive look into the wide arena of psychoanalysis, especially Adler’s system of Individual Psychology. But before that let me put down the objectivity of the present article.

## Objectives

The objectives of the present article are:

1. To study Adler’s system of psycho-analysis, behaviour or personality make-up among the school children and their parents in today’s context.

2. To see the impact of inner reality (Isolation and fragmented existence) and outer reality (herd mentality and aggressive target orientation) among the school children.

3. To suggest recommendations to improve the quality of education and to curb down the acutely competitive herd-mentality of the educands and the educators.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study is descriptive cum exploratory. It is primarily based on data collected from various sources like national reports, news reports, websites and textual references and the analysis has been done on the basis of that.

### **Adler's System of Individual Psychology**

Born in Vienna in 1870, Alfred Adler began his career as an ophthalmologist. He joined Freud's school of psychoanalysis in 1902 and became one of his prized pupils. He broke away from Freud mainly over the latter's over-emphasis on sex and founded a new school of psychology. His system is called Individual Psychology because it lays emphasis on the individuality of human beings in terms of their unique characteristics at the time of birth, the availability of an exclusive environment for growth and development and adoption of a specific style of life to achieve power and attain perfection.

### **What the system tells**

Adler, in his system of explaining behavior [1], replaced the life instinct or sex motive advocated by Freud with the motive to seek power or attain superiority and perfection. According to him, for the satisfaction of the power motive, one follows one's own path in one's own way and thus develops a unique style of life, depending upon the order of birth, early life experience and the requirements of the creative self. Success or failure in the satisfaction of the power motive by adopting his own style turns a person into an adjusted or a maladjusted personality. The individual then learns the ways of striving and making adjustments and this is how, according to Adler's system, one behaves and leads one's life.

Now here the question arises. Does one get an adequate educational environment in today's world where one can behave according to his own free will and lead one's life? Let's focus again on Adler's system of psychology to seek and answer to the question. How and why one behaves in a particular fashion [2,7] may be explained in terms of one's striving urge to dominate, to gain superiority and to achieve perfection in one field or the other, says Adler. He also says that the urge to dominate or to strive for superiority or perfection is innate. If one wants to live, one has to strive to establish superiority in one way or the other and consequently one has to adopt one's own life style. The manner in which all human beings strive for superiority and perfection and the ways and means they adopt collectively constitute the style of life.

Accordingly, one person may try to become superior as a political leader, or may become a renowned author, artist, scientist or wrestler. One's style of life thus depends on the areas or fields in which one chooses to strive for superiority. The whole of one's time schedule, habits of

work, personal and social contacts, comprising one's style of life then will naturally be tailored to the ways and means one chooses for striving towards superiority and perfection.

But is this mentality of people to achieve perfection and superiority over others proving to be detrimental to the society nowadays? Is it bringing about a paradigm shift in the thinking of social animals? Each and every parent wants his/her child to be perfect, to be best among others. To achieve perfection, they are leaving no stone unturned. From participating in reality shows to appearing in almost all the existing competitive exams, they are keeping their hands full. A parent is forcing his/her child to achieve the best which is ultimately ruining the child's innocence and his own natural way of leading his life.

Here we can draw a direct relation to Freud's system of psycho-analysis which is often criticised of treating mankind to be selfish, pleasure -seeking and animal- like rather than social and human. But we cannot completely rule out Freud's analysis in today's world because his theory of Oedipus and Electra complexes emphasizing hatred for the parent of the same sex and love for the parent of the opposite sex stands true and in direct contrast to Adler's psycho-analytical theories. We do get a fair idea about 'innocence and maturity' from *William Blake's 'The Lamb'* and *'The Tyger'* but we fail to conjure up any idea why children in our society are constantly being pressurized to achieve the best. Adler's psycho-analytical theories have become inversely proportional to the lost innocence of young minds. And it is here that I find a striking resemblance between *Eugene Ionesco's 'Rhinoceros'* (1959) and us. Are we not letting these small young minds become '*educated rhinos*' - extremely isolated from within but pregnant with a destructive herd mentality? My use of the phrase '*educated rhinos*' now compels me to throw some more light on the famous drama of *Eugene Ionesco's 'Rhinoceros'* to develop a better understanding of my proposition.

In *Rhinoceros*, an Absurd protagonist[3], Bérenger is brought into direct engagement with the world which manifests itself in the form of a brute, unthinking force. The rhinos represent an absurd world, a world which has neither intelligence nor purpose.

The scene at the beginning of the play sets up an opposition between the minute details of an apparently normal social reality and the ennui, the alienated perspective of Bérenger. Bérenger's sense of the metaphysical absurdity of the world is contextualized in the mundane reality of the other characters. Ionesco sets up a neat and structured opposition between Jean (another character in the play) and Bérenger's perspectives on the self and the world. Jean has sense of purpose and time, belief in agency and will power. This is contrasted with the sense of anguish and purposelessness of Bérenger's world. In the first act, Bérenger is a character who has intimations of absurdity and is ill-at-ease in the apparently mundane, everyday world around him. Life to him is a "*sort of anguish difficult to describe*", and he feels "*out of place in life among people*". As it turns out, he was quite right to feel the way he did because life around him transforms extraordinarily with appearance of rhinos, revealing that the certitudes and normality were illusions. In Act II Sc 1, while a mad controversy about the existence of the rhinoceroses rages in the office, Bérenger is in a position to verify the objectivity and truth of their existence : "*Oh yes, I saw it all right*", Bérenger says. In the second scene, the reality moves closer to Bérenger when he watches his friend Jean transform into a rhinoceros. Finally faced with the crisis of increasing number of transformations including Jean's, Bérenger begins to see the need

for action: “A whole herd of them ! And they always said the rhinoceros was a solitary animal ! That’s not true, that’s a conception they’ll have to revise ! They’ve smashed up all the public benches. What’s to be done ?” (Pg-69).

This new sense of immediacy and clarity, and the need for engagement with the world acquires a force and a justification almost verging on the “*fatalism*”. Bérenger in Act III is deeply affected by the things around him and is convinced of the need to take them seriously : “*I feel responsible for everything that happens. I feel involved. I just can’t be indifferent.* (Pg-77). Not only is there no longer a sense of ‘*ontological insecurity*’ (to borrow Richard Schechner’s term) but there is actually a sense of agency, a need to engage with and intervene in the development of events. At the end of the play, Bérenger does face some doubts about his position, but he is able to overcome the uncertainties and assert a sense of almost belligerent rightness and agency : “*I’ll take on the whole of them ! I’ll put up a fight against the last of them, the whole lot of them ! I’m the last man left, and I’m staying that way until the end. I’m not capitulating*” (Pg-105). There is a certain intentionality, agency and purposefulness in the character of Bérenger pitted against the world of rhinoceroses.

And here I draw a line of similarity between today’s school-going children and *Ionesco’s Rhinos*. These children are getting transformed into ‘rhinos’ devoid of any feelings, aesthetic sense and creativity. They are only being forced into the rat-race of the society with an injected ability to ‘*smash up all the public benches*’, *i.e.*, social connections and norms apparently mundane. It is agreeable in terms of progress of modernity but thoroughly disagreeable in terms of lost innocence. A pressure-free childhood is what they deserve but the reality is something else. Students are being baulked down by societal pressures almost verging on the “*fatalism*” of a ‘lost childhood.’

Bookish education is rampant nowadays coupled with plagiarism. A student is more interested in copying down from internet sources while doing a project work or making a note. What is more pathetic is to see that there is a transformation into a herd mentality transcending all creative sense and urge. Probably here, Adler’s psychoanalysis finds a strong foothold that there is an intense inner urge in all human beings to seek power or strive for superiority. But this very feeling among the school goers and their parents nowadays is proving to be a negative catalyst. No doubt, it is giving them an impetus to do something perfectly but the lust for power and easy life only conforms to a heightened sense of destruction and isolation. Just like Bérenger and the rhinos, a child of today’s generation suffers from isolation, confined mentality and suppressed angst which often leads them towards something very destructive and heinous. Are they suffering from “*Ontological Insecurity*” or pointless existence ? In a country like India, where unleashed corruption has become the order of the day, a child is more satisfied with ‘good marks’ than ‘good learning.’ Probably, this is also the herd-mentality where a child severely plagued by parental and peer-pressure develops “*a sense of agency, a need to engage with and intervene in the development of events*”, and finally becomes a ‘rhino’. Unconsciously (or perhaps consciously), the parents are leading their children towards a zone of uncertainty, a static situation devoid of any creative intellect where “*Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes....*” (*Waiting for Godot*) (Pg - 41)

School Education is the field where Adler's *Individual Psychology*, Freud's *system of Psycho-Analysis* and Ionesco's '*Rhinoceros*' fall in a straight line. Instead of terming 'school', nowadays, as a seat of fundamental and elementary education where young innocent minds are to be nourished and nurtured like the petals of a fragrant flower, we can now term it is a factory of marks, producer of a thorough bred, competent and competitive mentality capable of only fragmentation and fission (read moral degradation and degeneration). In short, Education has now become more result oriented to cater to the needs of the parents who are on their toes to make their child the very best by hook or by crook.

To quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan: "*Modern civilization, with its scientific temper and secular humanism, is uprooting the world over the customs of long centuries and creating a ferment of restlessness. The world has found itself as one body but physical unity and economic interdependence are not by themselves sufficient to create a sense of universal human community. In spite of the external unity, the world mind is anarchical and unruly. More than ever before we are divided and afflicted by formidable evils of fear, of suspicion, and of misunderstanding. ("Religion and the world crisis," Vedanta for Modern Man, Pg-371).* Radhakrishnan diagnosed the social maladies through the lens of education and learning.

In recent times[4], there has been a tremendous erosion of values. Consumerism is rampant and all- pervading. School children are the worst affected in this respect. They do not find any significance of values but the virtual world of *Pokemon Go* initiates a certain level of satisfaction among them. Just like Bérenger this virtual gaming world makes them immensely isolated and fragmented from within. But are we doing enough to pave a way out for these children so that they can come out of their boredom and aggressive competitiveness ? Or, is it going to become nothing but a parable of the pointlessness of Existence ? The only answer to these questions is that in no case, should the parents and teachers encourage aggressive rivalry and unhealthy competition among the children as this may enhance the feelings of inferiority, insecurity and anxiety and give rise to serious behavioural problems. "**Child-centered education**' and '**Individualized Instruction**' advocated by Adler, thus needs to be encouraged from the school level.

In addition to this, parents should in no way put pressure on their children. Rather they should try every possible means to nurture a free environment for smooth and natural psychological development of the children. Teachers, on the other hand, should maintain a healthy classroom atmosphere. Easy and free interaction, peer-tutoring and peer-learning should be highly encouraged. Extempores and debates should be arranged in the class so that a student or a child can come up and express his/her own ideas freely. Giving due recognition[5,6] to various social agencies and social activities for shaping the behaviour and personality of children, stressing the need for prevention of behavioural problems of children and realizing the need of guidance clinic/counselling class in the school for students and their parents is of utmost importance. We want non-isolated Bérengers who can be the "*Identity of the Everyman*" and it is in his identity that he can represent the potential regeneration of mankind" (Schechner, Pg- 207). Someone who can proudly say, "*Let's save the world*" (Pg- 101) or someone who can openly put forward the mandate, "I'm content to be what I am." (Pg-73). Every child should and must get the opportunity to direct his own life towards the direction **only he wants**.

## Conclusion

We can conclude with a brief exhortation to the Indians given by **Swami Vivekananda** during his speech in Kumbhakonam on *“The Mission of the Vedanta” - Lecture from Colombo to Almora, Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume -III (PP-193):*

*“Teach yourselves teach everyone his (or her) real nature. Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self -conscious activity.”*

We need to do this and till we reach our goal, it will be a never-ending journey, an eternal developmental process.

*“Too fast we live, too much are tried,  
Too harass’d to attain  
Wordsworth’s sweet calm, or Goethe’s wide  
And luminous view to gain.”*

*- Matthew Arnold  
(Stanzas in Memory of the  
Author of Obermann)*

## Scope of Further Research

There is a need for further research to know the other reasons for the deteriorating quality of education in India and its social impact on children and their parents and teachers in regard to their psycho-analytical behaviour and approaches so that remedial measures can be taken.

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