

# Editorial

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*Vasant Natarajan, Associate Editor*

The government of India has embarked on an ambitious programme for universalization of elementary education called *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. This is now mandated by the 86th amendment to the Constitution which makes education a fundamental right for every child. But to achieve this requires a massive overhaul of our existing system. We need to increase both the quality and quantity of our schools and colleges. The Prime Minister's Independence Day speech promises many of these things such as the establishment of new high-quality schools, technical training institutes and institutes of higher learning, and a much larger allocation of funds for existing education programmes.



However, an important thing that must change if we are to attract the best teachers to these schools and colleges is the current salaries for teachers. The astronomical salaries being paid to young software professionals and MBAs is creating a social divide that is not healthy for any society. It is in this context that one must view the Prime Minister's recent appeal to the CEOs of Indian industry to take a "pay cut" if they want to participate in nation building. It is ironic that fresh graduates from leading business schools routinely get starting salaries in the range of Rs 10 lakh per annum when their own professors earn less than this after having put in over 25 years of research and teaching. A BSc graduate working in a call center earns more than a starting Assistant Professor with a PhD and three years of experience. Is this how much society values its teachers, stated to be the noblest of all professions? Of course, increased salaries alone will not solve the problem. Government schools must also bring in desirable features of the private sector such as appointments based on qualification, transparency, and accountability both in terms of performance and absenteeism.

Fortunately there still are some individuals who are attracted to careers in teaching and research because of the sheer joy it gives them. They put in long hours because their work is its own reward, they do not look for monetary or other returns. The scientist featured in this issue of *Resonance*, Oswald Avery, exemplifies this trait in large measure. As Mahadevan shows in his article, Avery spent most of his academic life doing meticulous work to establish DNA as the carrier of genetic traits. However, his result was controversial and not easily accepted during his lifetime. It was only later through the work of others that the importance of this pioneering result was established.

Perhaps it is appropriate to paraphrase the tribute given to Avery as a tribute to the teachers of today "... *it will honour society more if it honours its teachers more*"!

