

Animal School in India

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*Here is a little Indianized adaptation I did of *The Animal School: A Fable* by George Reavis, a school superintendent, from the 1940s:*

Once upon a time the animals in the forest decided they must do something serious to meet the problems of a “new world order” so they asked the government to organize a school for them as part of their Right to Education. They were tired of being called uncivilized, uneducated and unintelligent and ranked at the bottom of United Nations indicators. They had adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. All the animals took all the subjects and followed the same timetable — because it was very important to them that no animal be left behind. To ensure that students were progressing satisfactorily, standardized achievement tests were administered to all students.

The duck was excellent in swimming. In fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to go for extra tuitions and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he became only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school as long as he was obedient. So nobody was worried about that, except the duck who lost his passion and motivation for swimming. He longed for a stable government job so he decided to apply for jawan-level post in the army but the queue to join was very, very long. He thus spent most of his time preparing various government entrance examinations.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running but she had a nervous breakdown because of so much makeup work in swimming and flying. Her parents were desperate for her to join a high-powered coaching center in Kota so that she could become an engineer and get a good marriage prospect. She attempted suicide because of all the pressure.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down. He developed an inferiority complex and felt a lot of anger and shame towards his parents and local culture. He stopped speaking his own language and wanted to learn perfect accented English so he could leave the forest and get a call center job in the city (which he was told was ‘more exciting’ than his ‘boring’ village).

The kingfisher bird was a problem child and was oftentimes disciplined severely by his teachers. He was diagnosed as hyperactive and given the drug Ritalin. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the tree-top but insisted on using his own way to do it. The teachers did not appreciate his creative thinking and put him in a special electrified detention cage, with a behavioural modification program. They labelled him a slow learner. He failed out of school and was unemployed for some time. He could not see his own special gifts. Eventually, he became a powerful local goonda (thug) who was controlled by a corrupt politician.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel could swim exceeding well and also run, climb and fly a little. He could also quote a lot of TED talks. He had the highest average and was made valedictorian. He became very arrogant, competitive and distanced himself from the other animals. He decided to sell all his family lands to a mining contractor so that he could continue his studies abroad. He later suffered from lots of anxiety attacks and depression due to expectations to be the ‘best’ and get things ‘perfect’ all the time.

Wanting to distance themselves from the riff-raff, the elephants decided to start an alternative private school which had state-of-the-art infrastructure including IPADS, CCTV cameras and adidas uniforms and followed IB curriculum. This became very elite and expensive so the other parent animals were forced to take on loans in order to join. The children who attended all grew up in a bubble and could no longer adapt to life in the jungle. In the end, they no longer saw the sacred forest as their Home. They no longer could imagine living, learning or having fun without money. They no longer saw themselves as part of Nature. They forgot who they really are.

I invite you to write and share your own adaptations of this story with us...