

## Gifts and gifts

Dr David Lingiah (Counselling psychologist, Glasgow)

In the March issue (M/Abroad, 05) in *Lost Direction* I referred to “the gift of a human birth”. In his editorial Krish noted “that there are a number of people who are dissatisfied with the present they receive.” He was writing about gifts also. Here I am going to reflect on the gifted child, another form of gifts that parents are often given and very often they do not know they have got it and do not know what to do with it or how to cope with this special gift their child has been given at birth.

At the birth of infant Jesus we read of wise men that came from the East with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for the child. Jesus himself was a special gift to his parents who came to realise this gradually. The child grew up fast to the amazement of his parents. The parents had provided the love and attention, the time and energy required to allow this child to develop thus.

But back home in Mauritius there is a debate going on at the moment with regard to the gifted children. L'Express (15 March) asked the question “Education for the gifted or for the elite?” by Rajendra Patil Hunma.

“Experts generally agree that there is in every population a small percentage of gifted children (des surdoués) and that they deserve special treatment in terms of educational challenges if their talents are not to go waste or be misdirected. It is sometimes noted that gifted children who are not sufficiently challenged simply get bored and stop paying attention or else simply misbehave.”

Education is always a political issue. This debate is now on the agenda as the general elections are about to start this year. The campaigns have already started. Parents with gifted children have therefore found it necessary to form an association (**l'Association des Parents d'Enfants Intellectuellement Précoces de l'Ile Maurice (APEIP)**) to obtain the necessary assistance. Le Mauricien Weekend Scope (Friday 15 April, 05) reported the presence of a French Psychologist in Mauritius to study the situation: “Mrs Arielle Adda a permis aux Mauriciens de prendre conscience de l'existence des enfants doués, également dits surdoués ou intellectuellement précoces”. Melanie Vigier De LaTour, psychologist, in an interview, said:

“Au cours de son passage à Maurice, Arielle Adda a eu des ateliers de travail avec les enseignants du privé et du public. Présent à cette occasion, le ministre Steve Obeegadoo a dit son intérêt pour le sujet et a même parlé de l'importance d'introduire le test de Quotient Intellectuel (QI) dans le système scolaire. Un mois après le passage de Mme Adda, Gilberte Chung, consultante auprès de la Special Education Unit du ministère nous confirme que deux experts dans ce domaine sont attendus bientôt. *Des consultants, spécialistes des Gifted Children viendront, dans deux semaines, nous aider à mettre un plan de travail en place. Suite à cela, nous mettrons sur pied un programme pour ces enfants.*” SCOPE noted thus: “rien n'existe dans le système éducatif pour déceler de tels cas et encadrer ces enfants.”

It is therefore apt for Rajendra Patil HUNMA to express concern in asking this pertinent question : “Education for the gifted or for the elite?” The power elite is already making sure that their kids get the best attention and so maintain the status quo on the island. Melanie declared that “On peut avoir un enfant doué dans n'importe quelle famille. C'est un cadeau, d'ailleurs, en anglais on dit *gifted child*, tout dépend comment il sera aidé ou pas par son environnement.”

When she was asked “Que conseillez-vous aux parents qui se posent des questions ?” The answer was: “ De lire beaucoup sur le sujet. Les livres de Mme Adda - *Le livre de l'enfant doué* et *L'enfant doué, l'intelligence réconciliée* - sont en vente à Maurice, et puis, pour ceux qui en ont l'opportunité, il y a beaucoup d'informations sur internet. Ensuite, consultez un psychologue.”

I wonder how many poor parents will be able to do this. They are already paying dearly what with private tuition and other expenses besides providing the bare necessity for school, college attendance. This rat race for private tuition morning and evening is ruining many families. Young students are driven to the extremes and many do commit suicides. The Minister of Education really needs to look into this scandal. Poor parents with gifted children have an uphill struggle in Mauritius. A lot could be done to support and their children; but the population is caught up in a frenzied of raising funds to construct expensive temples everywhere as if there were not sufficient already on the island. Who is benefiting from this show? The power elites both political and religious are in cahoot to mesmerise the ordinary folks. Nobody is prepared to rock the boat.

Readings:

**Living with a Gifted Child by Freida Painter**

**Who are the Gifted ? Frieda Painter**

**The Psychological Problems of Gifted Children Dr L F Lowenstein**

**How the Brain Learns by David A. Sousa**

**How the Gifted Brain Learns by David A. Sousa**

**Gifted & Talented Children with Special Educational needs edited by Diane Montgomery.**

**The articles from L'Express and Weekend Scope mentioned in text.**