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# Learning the NEP way

SUKANTA MAJUMDAR

**W**hat should be the true objective of education? Is it merely to equip students for jobs, or should it aim for something higher? In a country like India—with its rich tradition of knowledge and a young population seeking a sustainable future—this question takes on special significance.

India's iconic thinkers—Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi—saw education as the foundation for holistic human development. Tagore called for education that brings "life in harmony with all existence," while Swami Vivekananda emphasised character-building and self-reliance. Gandhi described education as drawing out the best in "body, mind, and spirit". Their vision resonates in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which now completes five years.

Unveiled on July 29, 2020, NEP 2020 is India's first education policy of the 21st century. Replacing the 1986 policy, it is grounded in the principles of access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability. It aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and aims to transform India into a knowledge society and global education leader.

The policy was developed through one of the most extensive consultations in Indian policymaking, involving over two lakh recommendations across districts, blocks, and panchayats. Since its adoption, most states have begun implementing it, adapting its flexible framework to local contexts.

NEP 2020 has ushered in a wave of reforms. In school education, initiatives like PM SHRI, NIPUN Bharat (for foundational literacy and numeracy), Vidya Pravesh (pre-primary preparation), and PM e-VIDYA (multi-modal digital learning) have expanded access and improved quality. Tools like DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) and NCF FS (National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage), 'Jadui Pitara' learning kits, and teacher training programmes like NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) have supported pedagogy reforms.

In higher education, reforms include multiple entry and exit options, a lifelong student ID (APAAR), a unified National Credit Framework (NCrF), and a push for multidisciplinary learning. Students can now pursue two academic programmes

simultaneously, and online learning through SWAYAM and SWAYAM Plus has been expanded. Global collaboration is growing—Indian institutions are opening campuses abroad, while top foreign universities are entering India. Indian higher education institutions have also improved their standing in global rankings, and Indian knowledge systems are being integrated into curricula.

Initiatives like the PM Vidyalakshmi loan scheme, "Professor of Practice" guidelines, and increased supernumerary seats for international students have made the system more inclusive and future-ready.

The NEP has made India's educational system less bureaucratic and more innovative, self-reliant, and vibrant. Students and teachers now feel part of the decision-making process rather than passive recipients. The policy has broken down barriers between academia and industry, technology and tradition, teachers and students, and disciplines like science and humanities.

NEP 2020 encourages globalisation—integrating Indian knowledge systems while embracing global best practices. It promotes education in mother tongues, competency-based assessments, and skilling from early years to foster innovation and entrepreneurship.

Importantly, NEP is expanding access for marginalised sections of society—women, Dalits, and Adivasis. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education rose from 23.7% in 2014-2015 to 28.4% in 2021-2022, with the target of 50% by 2035.

As the world embraces technologies like AI, bioengineering, and green tech, India must build an education system that prepares students not just to cope but to lead. To become a Vishvaguru, we must cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a risk-taking mindset in students.

NEP 2020 addresses persistent challenges in Indian education: outdated curricula, dropouts, reliance on Western pedagogy, Eurocentric knowledge, and unequal access to quality education. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised that education should produce truly educated individuals—students who combine knowledge with ethics. He has called the NEP a "nation's intellectual renaissance paving the way for a self-reliant, globally competitive nation through education and innovation."

(The writer is Minister of State for Education, Govt of India)



# Transforming early childhood care and education

**T**he National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) has ushered in transformative changes in the educational landscape of India, particularly in the field of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). While private schools have had nursery classes for long, government schools have historically admitted children only from Class one, thus sowing the seeds of inequity even before the start of schooling. By paving the way for the opening of preschool classes for 3-6 year olds in government schools – previously catered to only by Anganwadis in the public sector – the NEP has initiated a long-overdue structural transformation towards equity.

There are three key structural shifts in the ECCE sector, driven by the NEP, with each one unfolding at a different pace. Understanding these shifts and preparing for them is crucial in ensuring quality early childhood care and education for the nation's children.

## An expansion

First, the expansion of the ECCE sector. A significant but often underappreciated shift is the anticipated growth of the ECCE sector by 2030, the target year for its universalisation. For decades, the public sector's ECCE infrastructure had stagnated at approximately 14 lakh Anganwadi centres. This is now set to expand significantly. With the NEP paving the way for three preschool classes (Balvatika-1,2,3) in government schools, the number of public ECCE classes will increase significantly. This will have substantial implications for personnel management, including the financing, recruitment, training and deployment of skilled ECCE providers.

The Ministry of Education has already begun allocating budgets under the Samagra Shiksha scheme for the ECCE. Many States and Union Territories (UTs) have begun utilising this provision to introduce preschool classes in



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Understanding the key structural shifts driven by National Education Policy 2020 and preparing for them are essential

government schools. But, some have not begun to use this provision, while others have under-utilised it with some training or material being added, without starting additional classes. The extent and manner of this utilisation needs to be tracked.

## Migration from anganwadis

The second shift is the growing emphasis on education when compared to other ECCE services such as health and nutrition. This trend is already visible in the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, where the Union Territory has introduced a preschool class in all its primary schools, prioritising the admission of 4-6 year olds. This has resulted in a substantial migration of this age group from Anganwadis to schools.

Data shows that parents have overwhelmingly preferred preschool classes in schools over Anganwadis, when given both options. This migration is largely driven by the perception that schools offer better educational opportunities. As a result, the traditional image of Anganwadis as vibrant centres filled with toddlers is now at risk as more government schools open preschool classes, and children in the 3-6 year age group move out of Anganwadis to schools.

The Anganwadi system must adapt by emphasising education as a part of its ECCE services. The Ministry of Women and Child Development's 'Poshan (b) Padhai (b)' initiative is a timely step. However, its success depends on tangible implementation at the ground level, targeting an increase in measurable indicators such as the time spent by an Anganwadi worker on educational activities.

While schools cater to this demand, they need to be aware of the risks of excessive 'schoolification' of pre-schooling. They need to retain play at the centre of this education, in order to focus on the breadth of skills, instead of

focusing on the narrower skills of reading and writing in the pre-school classes.

## The critical role of home visits

Third, the potentially most transformative shift is the possible reorientation of the Anganwadi system to focus on children aged 0-3 years through home visits, rather than focusing on 3-6 year olds attending the centres. Research, such as the 'Perry Preschool at 50' study in the United States and the Yale university study in Odisha done in collaboration with Pratham, highlights the critical role of home visits in early childhood development programmes.

In India, policymakers such as V. K. Paul (Member, NITI Aayog) and N.C. Saxena (IAS, retired) have long advocated focusing on 0-3-year olds within the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) framework, given the disproportionate developmental benefits during this stage. While the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN) Abhiyan has emphasised the importance of the first 1,000 days of life, implementation challenges persist. Overburdened Anganwadi workers naturally focus on 3-6 year olds who are physically present at the centres, leaving limited scope for individualised services to 0-3 year olds through home visits.

If government schools assume responsibility over 3-6 year-olds, we have a unique opportunity where the Anganwadi system could redirect its focus towards 0-3 year olds, along with the care of pregnant and lactating mothers, through more intensive home visits.

This shift, if realised, would mark a truly transformative change in India's ECCE framework. The seeds for this transition have already been sown in the NEP 2020.

*The views expressed are personal*



# From policy to practice: Five years of National Education Policy 2020

Education and the knowledge paradigms related to it have been the foundation of progressive societies. A rich ancient repository of Bhartiya scholarship has been acknowledged worldwide and has inspired many to contribute in their respective academic fields.

Despite such illustrious knowledge heritage, this nation took 73 years to embrace a National Education Policy in the year 2020 that was aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st century education while building upon India's knowledge traditions and value systems. National Education Policy 2020 (NEP2020) was introduced on 29 July 2020 and is completing five years.

This allows us to take a holistic view of the implementation of the policy, assess the conducive changes, overall progress in school and higher education, as well as the further scope of improvement.

Language as a medium of instruction plays a pivotal role in the conceptual clarity of subjects. Educationists have advocated for imparting education in Bhartiya languages since the time we attained independence from the British. Post-independence, one of the earliest recommendations on education in the University Education Commission report (December 1948-August 1949), chaired by Dr Radhakrishnan, said that English should be replaced as the medium of instruction as early as practicable by Bhartiya languages.

However, this recommendation only saw the light of the day when NEP2020 recommended that the 'medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond' should be in the native language. Availability of textbooks in Bhartiya languages has been an ongoing exercise in the last five years.

Two years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had launched 100 books in 12 Bhartiya languages in line with NEP 2020. DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) is a national web platform used as an education e-infrastructure where energised books (which come with a QR code) for 31 Bhartiya languages and 7 foreign languages are being prepared.

The 2025-26 budget allocation of ₹347.03 crore for Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme to provide digital books for school and higher education in Bhartiya languages will encourage institutions to adopt Bhartiya languages as a medium of education in the curriculum. The census report of 2011 states that 96.71 per cent have one of the twenty-two scheduled languages as their mother tongue, while only 10.6 per cent stated that they can speak English.

Education in Bhartiya languages as a medium will make education more inclusive and augment the learning outcomes in the coming years. For instance, in Pimpri Chinchwad College located in



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Maharashtra, B. Tech students were taught Computer Science and Engineering entirely in Marathi. They secured placements in top companies, demonstrating that language is not a barrier to success in technical education.

The burden of the colonial hangover in our textbooks has eventually been replaced by Bhartiya contributions.

While imparting education in Bhartiya languages is one of the primary concerns of NEP2020, it emphasises building a positive cultural identity. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has launched ten new textbooks for classes five and eight in Hindi, English and Urdu, covering languages, social science, science and art education. More are in the offing with emphasis on conceptual understanding, pedagogical approaches, and experiential learning. Under NEP2020, rooting textbooks in our heritage has been a guiding principle that aims to strengthen our national identity.

NEP2020 has also envisaged the incorporation of hands-on experience and skilling necessities of the 21st century in the curriculum. Regulatory Frameworks ensuring parity and integration of academic and skill-based learning have been formalised by the National Credit Framework (NCRF). This parity and equivalence in academic programs, especially in tertiary education, will assist seamless transfer in a unified credit system.

Multiple entry-exit options for a student in a programme in higher education have introduced academic flexibility. To streamline the academic credentials of the students countrywide, a unique 12-digit ID is being generated for the students called Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) that digitally manages the academic records and stores them in the Academic Bank of Credit. This technology-assisted record management supports the 'One Nation, One Student ID' campaign, ensuring accessibility and continuity throughout the country.

Five years of NEP2020 have brought a radical transformation in the education system in the country. An important aspect of taking the leap in its implementation in the next five years would be capacity building of the faculty. At present, NISTHA (National Initiative for School Heads and Teachers Holistic Advancement) and MMTTC (Malviya Mission Teachers Training Programme) are undertaking training programs for teachers in schools and higher education, respectively. Teachers need to be equipped with new pedagogical methods like experiential learning and competency-based assessments. Robust professional development programs in physical mode can cascade the execution pace of NEP2020. A constant feature across the various education policies in the country, from the Kothari Commission in 1965



to NEP2020, has been the budgetary provision of 6 per cent of the GDP for education.

The 2023-24 annual report of the Ministry of Education states that the Centre and States will work together to increase public investment in the Education sector to reach 6 per cent of GDP at the earliest. Education, being a concurrent subject in the constitution, needs handholding from the Central Government as well as the State Governments.

Initiatives like Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan by the Centre aim to improve existing systems, level performances, learning outcomes and bridge social as well as gender gaps at the school level. However, state Governments are important stakeholder, and their lack of political will may lead to potential gaps in reaching the goals.

A standardised monitoring mechanism can help in effective evaluation and implementation of the National Education Policy, particularly in infrastructure and foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) and early childhood care and education (ECCE). The varying level of engagement with the policy by the states and the sheer size of the country, at times, poses a concern to the uniform and effective implementation of NEP2020.

NEP2020 has introduced systemic academic and administrative reforms within the first five years of its implementation. As a nation preparing to become a developed nation by 2047, significant impetus to education will play a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual and skill capital, and economic strength, of India.

The implementation of National Education Policy 2020 across the country in letter and spirit will prepare citizens who take pride in being Bhartiya, fuel innovation, develop a knowledge economy, foster equity, sustainable development, and democratic values and will be equipped to engage with the world confidently.

(The writer is Director of Non-Collegiate Women's Education Board, University of Delhi)

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# Tamil Nadu's engine of progress: education for all

As the State proudly sends off another batch of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds to the most prestigious educational institutions in the country, one must look back at Tamil Nadu's legacy in pushing to make education accessible to all; the success stories are not isolated, they reflect a systemic change



M.K. Stalin

Chief Minister of  
Tamil Nadu

There are many reasons for Tamil Nadu's tremendous economic and social progress over the last century, but if I had to choose just one, it would be education. If social justice is its ideology, then education is its most effective instrument to carry it forward. Education for all, not just those who can afford it or have the "merit" for it, is an equaliser and an enabler. It is the foundation upon which we continue to build an equitable Tamil society.

The seeds of this vision were sown more than a century ago. In the year 1910, a school in Thousand Lights area under the then Municipal Corporation of Madras became the first in India to serve mid-day meals to its students. The initiative, approved by the then Madras Corporation Council and inspired by Justice Party leader P. Theagaraya Chetty, was a pioneering act of both compassion and foresight.

Today, that idea has evolved into one of the largest and most effective school meal programmes in the world, topped up with the Breakfast Scheme which was launched in 2022 by this government. It is one of many reforms that illustrate how Tamil Nadu has used its education policy not just to improve learning outcomes, but to bring about equality in society.

Recently, we witnessed another powerful expression of that vision in action. A total of 125 students from Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Schools have secured admission to some of India's most presti-

gious higher educational institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology, the National Institutes of Technology, the National Institutes of Fashion Technology, the National Law Universities, Miranda House and other leading colleges of the University of Delhi, and more. Further, all the six seats reserved for Scheduled Tribe students at the Biju Gandhi National Aviation University were bagged by students from Tamil Nadu through the national counselling process.

This is the outcome of consistent, targeted and well-implemented policy. These students, most of whom studied in government schools from Class 6 to 12, were facilitated by the Government of Tamil Nadu with laptops and certificates of appreciation. Each of these students has achieved something remarkable not just in the context of their personal journey, but in the context of Tamil Nadu's longstanding goals of equity and access.

These successes are the result of carefully designed support systems. The students received focused training in exams for admissions into various reputed institutions. We have built a strong support system to ensure that Adi Dravidar and tribal students are not left behind in their pursuit of education.

At every stage, from primary school to research, students receive scholarships that ease the financial pressures and help them stay in school. Free education, textbooks and uniforms further re-



**Step by step:** The Tamil Nadu government's breakfast scheme is among the many measures taken to improve access to education for the marginalised. (A. J. RAMESH)

duce the cost of learning, making it easier for families to keep their children in classrooms rather than at work.

For students from remote areas, the government provides safe hostels with food and accommodation, removing the daily struggle of travel or lack of basic facilities. Alongside academic support, skill training programmes are conducted to prepare students for real-world employment. To ensure these students do not face entry barriers, the government also offers fee waivers and concessions for entrance exams to top institutions.

Together, these measures create a support ecosystem that extends beyond classrooms. These are efforts rooted in evidence and guided by principles of equality, beginning early and continuing throughout the student's educational journey. The impact of these efforts is visible in the increasing number of students from marginal-

ised backgrounds securing seats in top institutions. In recent years, Tamil Nadu has consistently produced one of the most inclusive higher education landscapes in India.

Tamil Nadu's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education stands at 47%, while the national average is 38.4%. Among women, Tamil Nadu's GER is 47.3%, against the national figure of 38.2%. These figures are the result of a political movement that placed social equity at the heart of governance, and an administrative system that has pursued that goal with seriousness and clarity.

The roots of this achievement lie in the social justice movement and the educational reforms initiated by the Justice Party and later institutionalised by the Dravidian movement.

In the year 1921, the Justice Party passed the historic Government Order, which came to be known as

the Communal GO, that ensured access to education for children from all communities, particularly the marginalised.

Such early interventions laid the foundation for today's system. The governments formed by the DMK since 1967, built upon this legacy with transformative policies and schemes. These moves were not without resistance, but the party held firm to the belief that educational opportunity is a fundamental right for all, not only for a privileged few.

Our government continues to innovate. Schemes such as the Paduthal Penn Thiruman, which offers 6,000 per month as stipend to girl students from government or aided schools pursuing college education, are making a measurable impact in promoting higher education among women. The 11th Tamil Nadu Initiative, launched in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, has helped ensure educational continuity, bringing learning gaps among vulnerable communities. The free breakfast scheme for primary school students has improved attendance and nutrition, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Taken together, these schemes have contributed to the growing pipeline of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are excelling in competitive environments. Importantly, these are not isolated success stories. They reflect a systemic change.

When students from disadvantaged sections of society make it to institutions of eminence, it reaf-

firms our core belief that excellence in education is not the preserve of the privileged, but the natural outcome of providing equal opportunity and support.

The 125 students we inducted on July 30, 2025, represent more than individual achievement. They remind us that the governance model of Tamil Nadu, built on social justice, inclusivity and national planning, works, and works well.

Their success is a collective work belongs to the families who supported them, to the teachers who guided them and to this government which designed and implemented the schemes that enabled them.

As we send them off to embark on the next stage of their academic journey, we do so with pride and hope. We are confident that they will succeed in their chosen fields of study and become bright professionals in their future careers. Inspired by them, many more will follow in their footsteps, turning these few success stories into a wave of prosperity and upliftment.

We are aware that there are still inequalities to correct and challenges to be met, but we are clear-eyed about the path forward and the steps we need to take. The government will keep investing in schemes that unlock the potential of those who need them the most. We will ensure equal opportunities for all, guided by our cherished principles of social justice. We will empower our people through education, so we can keep building a Tamil Nadu that is just, prosperous and humane.



# सभी शिक्षा संस्थानों में लागू हो नई शिक्षा नीति



बढ़ी जायदाद

पांच वर्ष पुरानी नई शिक्षा नीति का उद्देश्य देश के शिक्षा जगत में एक ऐसा प्रभाव उत्पन्न है, जिससे सबे जातीय मन की पीढ़ी विकसित हो सके

**भा**रत विकसित राष्ट्र बनने की दिशा में तेजी से आगे बढ़ रहा है। इस लक्ष्य की प्राप्ति के लिए कई परिवर्तनकारी योजनाएं तैयार की गई हैं। शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य, इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर, अंतरिक्ष कार्यक्रम और सुरक्षा जैसे विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में चल रही योजनाएं मिलकर विकास की गति दे रही हैं। इसी दिशा में शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में सुधार के लिए नई शिक्षा नीति-2020 का निर्माण, विकास और कार्यान्वयन किया गया है। अब इस नीति को लागू हुए पांच वर्ष हो चुके हैं। वह सही समय है कि हम इसकी समीक्षा करें कि इसने भारतीय शिक्षा जगत में क्या परिवर्तन लाए हैं और भविष्य में हमें क्या करना चाहिए? नई शिक्षा नीति मूलतः एक दीर्घकालिक शैक्षिक परिवर्तन की रूपरेखा है, जिसका मुख्य उद्देश्य भारतीय शिक्षा में मौलिक, उद्योग-अकादमिक संवाद और छात्रों में रोजगारपरकता विकसित करना है। इसमें प्रबंधनमंत्री मोदी द्वारा संक्षिप्त पंच प्रण में से एक बुक पीढ़ी

में आत्मविश्वास और भारतीय शिक्षा के विओपनिवेशीकरण का लक्ष्य भी शामिल है। इसका उद्देश्य भारतीय शिक्षा जगत में एक ऐसा प्रणालीय फूँकना है, जिससे देश में सबे भारतीय मन की पीढ़ी विकसित हो सके।

नई शिक्षा नीति विश्व में सर्वोच्च ज्ञानसंवाद से विकसित हुई शिक्षा नीति है। इसके लिए 1,10,623 ग्राम स्तरीय बैठक और 3,250 ब्लॉक, 725 शहरी एवं 340 जिला स्तर पर संवाद आयोजित किए गए थे। इस दीर्घकालिक निर्माण प्रक्रिया के बाद इसके कार्यान्वयन का कार्य प्रारंभ हुआ। इन पांच वर्षों में अपने प्रारंभ से ही भारतीय शिक्षा जगत में बहुविधक दृष्टिकोण विकसित करने और अन्य लक्ष्यों को पाने के लिए पहले डॉचमल परिवर्तन किया गया। इस डॉचमल परिवर्तन के लिए स्कूल शिक्षा से लेकर उच्चतर शिक्षा तक कई सुधार किए गए। इनमें अनुशासकिका पर आधारित चार वर्षीय स्वातंत्र्य कार्यक्रम की भी शुरुआत की गई। क्रेडिट सिस्टम और क्रेडिट ट्रांसफर जैसी व्यवस्थाएं विकसित की गईं। मूल्यगत शिक्षा, स्कूल आधारित कोर्स, रचनात्मक मौलिक पाठ्यचर्या आदि कई नए पाठ्यक्रम विकसित किए गए। ये डॉचमल परिवर्तन देश के अधिकांश स्कूलों और उच्च शिक्षा में लागू हो रहे हैं। स्कूल से लेकर उच्चतर शिक्षा तक पाठ्यक्रम और पाठ्यपुस्तकें विकसित की जा रही हैं, जो नैतिकता, भारतीय ज्ञान परंपरा, विज्ञान, विकास, उद्योग और ज्ञान जगत संवाद पर आधारित हैं। स्कूल से लेकर उच्चतर शिक्षा से जुड़े कई विद्वान और शिक्षक इस कार्य में लगे हैं। इनके परिणाम शीघ्र ही देखने को मिलेंगे। एनसीईआरटी की



अखिल लक्ष्य

नई पाठ्यपुस्तकें इन्हीं लक्ष्यों को ध्यान में रखकर विकसित की गई हैं और कई पाठ्यपुस्तकें अब भी विकसित की जा रही हैं। यह काम और तेजी से किया जाना चाहिए। वास्तव में नई शिक्षा नीति एक दीर्घकालिक चरणबद्ध कार्यक्रम है, जिसके माध्यम से मुख्य लक्ष्य भारतीय शिक्षा में आमूलचूल परिवर्तन लाना है। भारतीय शिक्षा व्यवस्था में नई शिक्षा नीति के तहत प्रशासनिक परिवर्तन के लिए ई-समर्थ कार्यक्रम विकसित किया गया है। इस कार्यक्रम से अब तक 12,800 उच्च शिक्षा संस्थान जुड़ चुके हैं, जिनमें 1.75 करोड़ छात्रों की शैक्षिक व्यवस्था के दैनिक प्रबंधन का संचालन हो रहा है। नई शिक्षा नीति के क्रियान्वयन के क्रम में 'स्वयं प्लस' लागू किया गया है, जिससे पांच लाख इंटरन प्रेषित हो रहे हैं। इसमें 1.74 लाख प्रशिक्षु विभिन्न उद्योगों से जुड़कर अजीविक प्रेरित शिक्षा हो रहे हैं। नई शिक्षा नीति के तहत भारतीय शिक्षा को भारतीय ज्ञान परंपरा से जोड़ने की दिशा में भी कई कार्य किए गए हैं। भारतीय ज्ञान व्यवस्था से जुड़े गणित, एस्ट्रोनमी,

सौर्यशास्त्र, जल स्वास्थ्य केंद्रित जैसे विषयों में उच्च शिक्षा के लिए लगभग 38 पाठ्यक्रम विकसित किए गए हैं। इनके शिक्षण के लिए शिक्षक और अनुदेशक प्रशिक्षित भी किए जा रहे हैं। भारतीय शिक्षा जगत विशेषतः उच्च शिक्षा में हो रहे इन डॉचमल, प्रशासनिक, व्यवस्थापन, पाठ्यक्रम, डिजिटल और पाठ्यपुस्तक निर्माण का एक बड़ा असर यह हुआ है कि भारतीय शिक्षा संस्थानों ने हाल के वर्षों में विश्व रैंकिंग में महत्वपूर्ण स्थान हासिल किया है। विश्व स्तर पर कहा जा रहे स्कोर-500 रैंकिंग में भारत के 11 विश्वविद्यालयों ने महत्वपूर्ण स्थान प्राप्त किया है। इस वर्ष 46 भारतीय उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों ने स्कोर रैंकिंग में अपनी जगह बनाई है। स्कोर एशिया रैंकिंग-2025 में भी देश के 163 विश्वविद्यालयों ने महत्वपूर्ण स्थान हासिल किया है। स्कोर रैंकिंग में जगह बनाना गुणात्मक मूल्यांकन और सर्वोच्च प्रदर्शन का गहन मूल्यांकन के बाद ही संभव हो पाता है। नई शिक्षा नीति के क्रियान्वयन का एक लाभ यह भी हुआ है कि भारतीय शिक्षा संस्थान

विश्व के कई देशों में अपने कैम्पस खोल रहे हैं। दुनिया के कई विश्वविद्यालय भी भारत में अपने कैम्पस खोल रहे हैं। हाल में मध्य पूर्व और एशिया के कई देशों में आइआईटी और आइआईएम जैसी संस्थाओं के कैम्पस खोले गए हैं।

अब देश के सभी स्कूलों, कॉलेजों और विश्वविद्यालयों में नई शिक्षा नीति लागू की जानी चाहिए। शिक्षा के मामले में दलगत राजनीति नहीं होनी चाहिए। सब शैक्षिक संस्थानों में नई शिक्षा नीति लागू करने के लिए अधिक से अधिक शिक्षकों को नई शिक्षा नीति के लक्ष्यों और प्रक्रिया के संबंध में प्रशिक्षित करने के लिए राज्य सरकारों और विश्वविद्यालयों द्वारा सतत कार्यवाहीएं आयोजित करनी चाहिए। विश्वविद्यालय शिक्षा अयोग द्वारा संचालित मदन मोहन मालवीय ट्रेनिंग सेंटर्स, ओरिएंटेशन और ट्रेनिंग कोर्स तथा कई ज्ञान प्रशिक्षण केंद्र इसमें मददगार हो सकते हैं। हमें ऐसे पाठ्यपुस्तक भी विकसित करने चाहिए, जो सहज और सरल ढंग से ज्ञान विमर्श करते हुए नई शिक्षा नीति के आत्म को अपने में प्रवाहित करें। स्कूल शिक्षा के लिए प्रस्तावित त्रिषष्ट फार्मूला के लिए राज्य सरकारों और आमजन में स्वीकृति का भाव विकसित करना चाहिए। कुल मिलाकर नई शिक्षा नीति लागूतक कई चुनौतियों का सामना करते हुए लक्ष्य प्राप्ति की ओर बढ़ रही है। उम्मीद है कि इसका अगला चरण विकसित भारत-2047 के लिए आवश्यक देश के ज्ञान जगत और ज्ञान शक्ति को विकसित करेगा।

(लेखक डा. इंदरीकु आठ नोबल सार्दस, मुंबई के कुलपति हैं।)

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How education may end

# Bang or whimper?

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI

**T**here is an amphibian called the paradoxical frog. Its tadpole is three times the size of the adult. Our National Education Policy, now in its fifth year, has outdone this feat of shrinkage. The draft NEP filled nearly 600 pages; the final version, just over 60.

It makes up by a plethora of prescriptions. It extends the undergraduate course by a year without stipulating additional faculty, space or funds. It concentrates research under a single body with a pre-set range of topics. It drastically cuts down on grants. Instead, institutions must borrow from the Higher Education Financing Agency and hike fees to repay the loan. Admissions across India are increasingly centralised in one-size-fits-all entry tests. Academic autonomy and diversity vanish in the process.

Not all the provisions are specified in those 60 pages, but follow from them and invoke their authority. Prescriptions and restrictions have grown incrementally. School textbooks revalue not only history and culture but also the theory of evolution and the periodic table. Sectarian objections are raised against university syllabi. Lectures and conference topics are vetted, as are the speakers. IIT Kanpur set up a committee to investigate a song by Faiz Ahmad Faiz. The University Grants Commission issued a circular against spitting on campus. (This was long before Covid.)

What is the outcome of this orgy of commission and omission? It may be too early to answer with factual precision. Crucial factors like campus freedom and academic morale cannot be quantified in any case, but both have unquestionably declined. Campuses are controlled by 'committed' faculty and, at ground level, by politicised student brigades. They do not flourish in spite of the heavy-handed control but as its instruments and even arbiters. Academics across India are wary about speaking their minds as never before. This tells on their readiness to take initiatives or foster original thought, even as they are assessed for 'academic innovation'.

Knowledge and understanding cannot be quantified either, but they are threatened with a reductive conformity. Syllabi are largely standardised across the country. Online teaching occupies more and more pedagogic space. It not only saves on teachers' salaries but also pleas-

as the big edutech houses and, most importantly, confines the nation's youth to a sanitised, unthreatening course of instruction.

Given the dismal situation, even this might often be a gain. But it impairs our best legacies of learning, and deflects the nation disastrously from the goal of a productive knowledge society. Predictably, college education is losing its shine. This year's Common University Entrance Test saw more applicants but fewer students actually taking the test. Engineering colleges, once the destinations of choice, are shutting down. At the juvenile end of the spectrum, the Annual Status of Education Reports reveal an alarming lack of basic skills. In 2024, 26% of teenagers could not read a book in their mother tongue meant for seven-year-olds. The most radical innovation in the NEP has been quietly forgotten: merging *anganwadis* with early primary education, which might truly have changed India's basic educational profile.

The paradoxical frog thus provides a new and depressing parable. When the drumbeats die down, the actual output proves sadly meagre.

An alternative scenario dispenses with the drumbeats. Cash-strapped state governments prefer this option as it saves money, which can then be dispensed elsewhere for better political returns. West Bengal offers an instructive example.

Bengal has doubled its state universities in a little over the last

## National Education Policy 2020



सत्यमेव जयते

Ministry of Human Resource Development

Government of India

### Glaring gaps

dozen years. But the new ones are hardly past the signboard stage, while the established ones are starved of funds and personnel. The latter would be lucky to have half their sanctioned faculty, while some new ones have hardly any full-time teachers at all. Labs, libraries and other infrastructure are in commensurate decline or, in new institutions, virtually absent. Most affiliated colleges reflect the same deficiencies magnified in smaller compass.

The scenario is not peculiar to Bengal. Madras University was unable to pass its annual budget this March. The permanent faculty at major universities might number less than a hundred across departments. College departments are closing alarmingly for a nation intent on doubling its enrolment in 10 years.

Private institutions might be absorbing part of the exodus. But their sheer cost shuts out the majority, with little prospect of compensating employment thereafter. One section of our youth doggedly pursues draining courses at crippling expense. Another section is giving up on higher education altogether.

That is the unspeakable tragedy of the dismantling of the state education system: it robs most Indians of all chance of a meaningful education. Government-run schools are varying deficient in virtually all states. In Bengal, an inadequate but once serviceable school system is crumbling through unchecked corruption and neglect. The teach-

er-student ratio falls all acceptable norms: there is scarcely one full-time maths teacher per high school. Inevitably, faculty morale at all levels is at an all-time low.

A field left fallow is overrun with weeds. Politicised mafiosi call the shots on all too many campuses, even at the hallowed level of medical colleges. Systemic revival seems a receding prospect. Our rulers bask complacently in the impasse under shelter of court orders, skirting the onus of cleaning up the mess. Moreover, as in other Opposition-ruled states, the government and the governor (also chancellor of the state's universities) wrangle over authority while institutions languish and students flee the system.

I have outlined two alternative educational scenarios: misdirected bounty against lack of funds, motions of frenetic activity against torpor and negligence. Ultimately, the two overlap. Both deprive the deprived, cheating the nation of productive human resources.

The path of action might offer more passing rewards than the path of dereliction; neither will lead us to a true knowledge society. T.S. Eliot saw the world as ending "Not with a bang but a whimper." Our educational world affords a choice between the two, or perhaps both together. That might simply double our sense of loss.

We thus revert to the paradoxical frog. Its tadpole may be many times the standard length, but it ends up the same size, croaks in the same key. *TS/14/12*



# WEAK PILLARS

**F**ive years of the National Education Policy 2020 should show the direction in which it is going. It is an ambitious policy for an overhaul of the education system, both school and higher education. The emphasis is on inclusive, multidisciplinary, digitally competent, future-ready training, with the introduction of Indian knowledge systems. One target was 100% foundational literacy and numeracy by Standard III in 2025. Setting targets is part of the learning-outcomes-based policy. But the *Annual Status of Education Report 2024* shows that only 48% of Class III students have reached age appropriate reading fluency. PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan had found that 43% of Class VI students cannot grasp the main ideas in a text and 54% cannot compare whole numbers or read large numbers. Flawed age-appropriate achievement levels are symptomatic of an inner failure. Given that increased enrolment is one of the triumphs of NEP 2020, this suggests that more emphasis needs to be given to actual learning rather than the numbers being reached.

The five pillars of the policy are access, equity — support for disadvantaged groups — quality — multidisciplinary education urging critical thinking, experiential learning and creativity — affordability — free and compulsory education from age three to 18 and accountability — all stakeholders are accountable for learning outcomes. These are noble ideals; yet certain contradictions appear. The ideas of equity and affordability do not chime together, for example. The NEP's idea of cluster schools to share resources would not help schools in remote areas. Its emphasis on digital learning, again, is a bar to equity. Vocational training is now part of the mainstream up to the undergraduate level, yet cultural resistance and the resistance of higher education institutions marginalise it. These are only some of the ways in which NEP 2020 betrays itself. Its three-language formula is being resisted by certain states, either to prevent the influx of Hindi or in fear that it will hurt some regional languages. The ideal of private-public partnership for services and education-focused technology, too, has created fears of the privatisation of education, again sabotaging equity. The main problem perhaps goes deeper. That only some states have adopted the NEP, that too partially, shows up the problem of trying to centralise education and standardise language study and curricula. For a country with diverse regional needs, education at all levels must be infused with autonomy for the best results.

# NEP is rich in language, poor in lived transformation



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anniversary compel one to assess and evaluate it.

In the discourse of policy studies, there is an adage: All policies are good. Implementation matters. Policy-makers use this stance to support their policies; the 'implementation gap' becomes the scapegoat to save the honour of the policy.

In the case of educational policies, it is the teacher who is made the scapegoat. The argument goes: the policy was very good and well intended, but it is the teacher who failed it in the classroom as a stakeholder. Some supporters even claim a bit theodically, that the policy was so good that our present society is not yet evolved for it, and it is the failure of society rather than the policy. However, they fail to recognise that a poorly designed policy with fundamental flaws cannot be 'implemented' effectively.

If the policy has not delved into the 'details' of needs, resources, objectives, procedures and processes of policy formulation, it will sink by its own weight; or even if implemented rigorously, it will lead to 'over-institutionalisation'. The failure of implementation is often a sign that the 'details' were not properly thought through, which means the policy itself was badly conceived or designed.

In this piece, the fundamental flaws of the policy — plagiarism, redundancy, politicisation, agenda-driven



**5 YEARS ON** The NEP was expected to increase enrolments but govt data tells a different story, as

decisions — are not discussed. The focus is on 'implementation', and whether efforts were made to genuinely 'walk the talk' and implement it earnestly.

## Budgetary allocation

It is an age-old recommendation of the Kothari Commission to spend six per cent of the GDP on education. The year NEP came into force, the budgetary allocation to education was Rs 1,847 cr, which was 3.37 per cent of that year's GDP; while NEP(2020) reiterates the demand for a six per cent allocation. In 2024-25, Rs 1,20,687 cr was allocated to education, which is only 3.58 per cent of the year's budget. Even the apparent increase, when adjusted for annual inflation, falls short to merely retain the 2020-21 allotment's real value; the allocation would still fall short by Rs 2,200 cr

The NEP's poetic promises must now contend with the prosaic realities of caste, class, regional and gender inequalities.

## Enrolment in universities and schools

With the new policy, school and university enrolments were expected to increase. However, UDISE (Unified District Information System for Education) data released by the government tells a different story.

The year before the NEP, government schools had 11,89,31,834 students, which reduced to 11,74,50,188 in 2023-24, showing a decrease of 1.89 per cent. Similarly, private schools enrolled 9,02,08,282 students in 2019-20 and 2023-24 saw a decline of 8.35 per cent, with only 8,00,38,588 students. The demonetisation, GST and pandemic-induced migrations and unemployment may explain a shift from private to government schools, but the data still indicates a high dropout rate.

In the institutions of higher education (IHE), 3,46,36,369 students were enrolled in 2019-20. They increased to 4,20,03,073 in 2023-24, showing a substantial increase of 2.34 per cent. However, a comparison of the pass percentage is in 2019-20, 94,01,810 students passed; in 2023-24, 1,05,04,258 obtained their degrees, reflecting a marginal increase from 34.39 per cent to 35.18 per cent.

## Teachers' recruitment in schools and universities

Before the NEP, government schools had 49,28,908 teachers; in the years since, the number has increased by 2 per cent to reach 50,77,987. Meanwhile, private schools recruited 3.53 per cent more teachers, with the number increasing from 38,82,835 to 40,38,847. In universities, the number of teachers shows an increase of 5 per cent from 2019-20 to 2024-25.

However, the shortage is still huge. In a recent answer to a question in the Lok Sabha, the government reported that 14,000 faculty positions are vacant in central IITs alone; similarly, 8.4 lakh vacancies exist in schools across India.

The policy aims for interdisciplinary, multiple entry and exit, dual degrees, four-year UG programmes. It also has many other lofty, yet complex, ideas copiously copied from foreign lands. There is also an intent to welcome foreign institutions as well as teach Indian know-

ledge systems and imbibe global knowledge in students while still being rooted in Indian values and ethos.

This attempt to reconcile contradictory aspirations of global competitiveness and rootedness in 'bhāratīya' value creates a fractured vision, one that appears aspirational but lacks coherence in execution. It evokes the poetic expression 'but I have promises to keep', or else teachers and parents may continue to hold it responsible for its impending failure.

The NEP's fifth anniversary, then, is not merely a moment of celebration or self-congratulation; it also presents a crucial inflection point to assess if the policy is truly moving toward democratising education or inadvertently widening the existing fault lines.

Its poetic promises must now contend with the prosaic realities of caste, class, regional and gender inequalities. Without a sincere commitment to equity, justice and public investment, the policy risks becoming another bureaucratic artefact: rich in language, poor in lived transformation. For, a policy's strength lies not in its visionary articulation alone, but also in its capacity to translate intent into inclusive and equitable structures that are accessible across the spectrum of social diversity.

View on personal



# Cholas, Mughals & India's education: Past & present



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

**P**rim Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to *Gangaikonda Cholapuram* for the *Aadi Thiruvathirai* festival carried a pointed subtext. By spotlighting Rajendra Chola's naval campaigns and expansive trade networks, Mr Modi cast ancient statecraft as a blueprint for India's modern global positioning, subtly asserting that India's historic ambition underpins its contemporary stature.

Unsurprisingly, this visit — alongside the ongoing rewriting of school history textbooks — has reignited debates that in some instances seek to frame the Cholas and the Mughals in binary, even "morality play" terms. The controversy, hinged on the reduction of Mughal-era chapters and the heightened emphasis on dynasties like the Cholas, has catalysed polarised narratives. Right-leaning voices elevate Chola feats and Hindu greatness, portraying the Mughals as foreign invaders; while liberal commentators caution against this reductive dichotomy, warning of its distortion of historical understanding and the risks to social harmony. History, they argue, is being remade into a politicised script: Hindu heroes on one side, the "big, bad Mughals" on the other.

In the digital public square, Mr Modi's visit has intensified these tendencies, driving the discourse further toward binaries, often overshadowing deeper reflection. Chola kings are now framed by many as icons of Hindu pride, but the moment demands a much more meaningful conversation — about what this rich and complex legacy can offer contemporary India, beyond selective celebration.

It's also a moment to ask not just what India's youth learn, but how they learn.

As contemporary political discourse in India focuses on the Cholas, it is worth interrogating what they can truly teach India today. Celebrating temple architec-

ture, maritime reach and administrative prowess is valid, but risks becoming ornamental without a deeper engagement with the values and cognitive strategies that produced those feats. Without reforming how education fosters analysis, inquiry and adaptation, these historical parallels remain superficial.

This should be a conversation about minds, not just a conversation about monuments. "The Chola kings of early medieval South India should be remembered for their cultural innovations. They made the portable sacred image popular, recorded their history in temple inscriptions, and redistributed wealth through festivals. Chola inscriptions estimate 56 festival days a year, marked by tree planting, road construction and productivity," says historian Samyak Ghosh.

Their administrative depth extended to water systems and environment engineering, among other things. Chola kings pioneered sophisticated irrigation techniques that remain relevant. "Tamil Nadu can be proud of some of the oldest examples of irrigation works in the country... Cholas were the first to realise the importance of irrigation. They constructed many reservoirs and changed dry lands into cultivable ones through artificial irrigation," writes scholar C.R. Rathika in her 2016 paper "Irrigation System in Thanjavur District Under the Cholas", published in the *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities*. The Kallanai Dam, also known as Grand Anicut, was built by Karikalan Chola in the 2nd century CE and is among the world's oldest water-diversion structures still in use.

And yet, even as history offers these models of adaptive governance and systemic thinking, India's education system continues to prioritise rote learning, and largely de-emphasise critical thinking in school and college. Most Indian students

**As contemporary political discourse in India focuses on the Cholas, it is worth interrogating what they can truly teach India today.**

still memorize and reproduce. "Our education system has long been shaping one-dimensional personalities — people trained to memorise, reproduce, and conform. The lack of critical thinking is not new; it is systemic and deeply rooted in how we have defined learning for decades," says academic Anurag Shukla, who has taught at several of India's top universities and consults on education reform. "What is new, and worrying, is how technology is now amplifying this problem. AI (Artificial Intelligence), unless used with care and intention, risks further flattening intellectual curiosity and nuance. It can become a tool for outsourcing thought, rather than enhancing it. So yes, the crisis of critical thinking will likely deepen if we do not urgently rethink the foundations of our education," warns Mr Shukla.

In his classrooms, he observes a growing intellectual passivity: "Students often feel they no longer need to wrestle with ambiguity or make meaning for themselves because an answer, any answer, is always just a click away. This ease breeds passivity, not inquiry."

There are consequences. India faces a persistent disconnect between education and employability. The India Skills Report 2025 indicates a rise in overall employability among Indian graduates to 54.81%, up from 51.25% in 2024. Maharashtra leads with 84% employability followed by Delhi, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. But the challenge of aligning education and training with the evolving needs of the global economy persists.

While just over 50% of Indian graduates are considered employable (a rise from 33% a decade ago), this also means that nearly half are not. There are ongoing issues with alignment between education and industry needs, sectoral gaps (especially in new technology and high-demand sectors), and the need for more robust, future-ready train-

ing methods and partnerships. The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) points out that although basic literacy and numeracy have recovered slightly post-pandemic in government schools, the proportion of Class 5 children who could read a Class 2-level text was 44.8% in 2024. Numeracy remains patchy across states. These are not academic technicalities — they are structural threats to a future shaped by automation, climate challenges, and global flux. The jobs of the future demand the human faculties machines cannot replicate — judgment, empathy, originality and ethical reasoning. Whether in public health, governance or business, the most valuable skill will be the ability to think across domains.

Looking to the Cholas for inspiration is not a misstep. Every society needs historical anchors. Chola irrigation systems, built to endure climate variability, can inform modern resilience. Their festivals, blending cultural and economic planning, reflect an integrated civic vision. But their real gift is the model of nuanced, adaptive thought. That is what must reach students.

Indian students deserve a curriculum that engages the Cholas, the Mughals and others with a critical lens — not a script of heroes and villains, nor as objects of nationalist pride in a narrow sense or inherited shame, but as subjects for inquiry. In an increasingly complex world, the goal shouldn't be to label rulers good or evil but to explore how they navigated complexity.

In Finland, a global leader in education, students are actively involved in posing questions, investigating problems and forming conclusions based on evidence they gather through research. This contrasts with traditional models where students primarily receive information from the teacher.

In the end, the true legacy of the Chola dynasty lies not in stone, but in strategy. India doesn't need more monuments to memory... it needs monuments to inquiry.

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# Even government employees like elementary school teachers and nurses have been ordered to hand in their passports, to enforce "discipline"

VIVIAN WANG

**W**hen Tina Liu was hired to teach literature in a public elementary school in southern China, her contract included the usual warnings about absenteeism and job performance.

Then came another line: Traveling abroad without the school's permission could get her fired.

The rule was reinforced in a staff group chat. "According to regulations from higher-ups, teachers need to strengthen their disciplinary awareness," the message said. "We will currently not permit any overseas vacations."

Across China, similar warnings are spreading as authorities tighten control over state employees' contacts with foreigners. Some kindergarten teachers, doctors and even government contractors and employees of state-owned enterprises have been ordered to hand in their passports. Some cities make retirees wait two years to reclaim their passports.

In many cities, travel overseas by public employees, even for personal reasons, requires approval. Business trips abroad for "ordinary research, exchange and study" have been banned. And in most provinces, those who have studied abroad are now disqualified from certain public positions.

Officials cite various reasons, including protecting national security, fighting corruption and cutting costs. But the scope of the restrictions has expanded rapidly, sweeping up employees who say they have no access to sensitive information or government funds. The New York Times spoke to seven public employees, including an elementary school music teacher, a nurse and a literature professor, who confirmed the restrictions.

The rules are part of a push by the central authorities to impose greater so-called political discipline and ideological loyalty on government workers. Two of the people the Times spoke to said they were also ordered to disclose their personal social media accounts to their employers. Another person said she had to notify her employer if she left the city where she worked. Some local governments have banned civil servants from eating out in groups of more than three, measures that came after several reports of excessive drinking at official banquets.

But authorities are especially vigilant about overseas contact. The Chinese government has long been wary of the threat of espionage and what it sees as hostile foreign forces seeking to sow discontent. In July, People's Daily, the Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece, published an article declaring that people-to-people diplomacy "exists because of the party" and should be led by the party.

The result is that even as Beijing advertises itself as eager to attract foreign businesses and tourists, it is preventing many of its own people from leaving.

"On the one hand, you want foreigners to come to China. You advertise Chinese culture and hope they'll boost the economy," said Liu, who is in her 20s. "But on the other hand, why are you trapping us here, rather than letting us see more of the world?"

Travel restrictions for some state employees are not new. Since 2003, high-ranking officials or those handling



OH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

## No passports, no study abroad: China limits its staff travel

state secrets must report foreign travel in advance. Their names are given to border officials to prevent unauthorized exits.

But under Xi Jinping, China's most powerful leader in decades, the controls have extended to far lower-level workers.

Full-time officials at six fishing villages near the city of Zhoushan, in coastal Zhejiang province, were told to surrender their documents, a local government notice shows. In a city in Jiangxi province, a public health agency also told employees to report any overseas trips they'd taken since 2018.

A music teacher at an elementary school in central Hebei province said that she had applied to go to Malaysia this summer because her sister would be studying abroad there. Her school principal refused the request, said the teacher, who gave only her surname, Wang, for fear of retaliation.

A nurse at a hospital in Zhejiang said she would need four layers of approvals to travel abroad. The nurse, who also asked to be identified only by her surname, Zhu, for fear of retaliation, said she had not applied, even though she had long dreamed of visiting Vietnam. The restrictions, she said, seemed to show a fear that even ordinary workers might flee with sensitive information or illicit funds — an idea she scoffed at.

"If there are any secrets, would people like us know about them?" she said. "What money do we have to abscond with?"

Those who are allowed to travel abroad are sometimes required to pledge not to endanger national security or speak ill of China while away.

The Inner Mongolia University of Technology told employees not to accept

any media interviews or to meet with any "outside parties" while abroad, without authorization. Encounters with "anti-China forces" should be reported to Chinese embassies, the university said.

Failure to hand in one's passport within a week of returning could lead to a five-year travel ban.

The restrictions are also creeping into hiring. For new graduates hoping to join China's civil service, some of the most coveted positions are in the programme known as "xuandiao sheng," which loosely translates as "selected students." Those students, who are recruited from top universities, are put on a fast track to leadership positions.

Each province determines which schools it will recruit from, and many, including Guangdong in the south, used to include overseas universities. This year, Guangdong listed only Chinese universities; so did five other regions in the past year. Only Shanghai now explicitly accepts graduates of foreign universities for the elite programme.

Liaoning province, in the northeast, went even further. Anyone who had lived overseas for more than six months, and whose "experience and political performance abroad" were hard to investigate, was deemed ineligible this year.

Police departments in major cities have imposed similar rules. In Shanghai, even having a spouse or close relative who has moved abroad can disqualify a candidate.

Dongshu Liu, a professor at City University of Hong Kong who studies China's civil service, said that many of the restrictions most likely did not stem from a clear cen-

tral mandate. But as the central government's scrutiny of midlevel officials has grown, those midlevel officials were probably trying to avoid any possible sources of trouble.

"Because of US-China relations, because of the competition, I think it's fair to say that Chinese society in general has become more sensitive to foreign countries," Liu said. For policymakers, that makes "everything related to foreign countries risky," he added.

The Chinese government still wants to broadcast an image of openness, and would prefer to keep its inward turn more quiet, said Wu Qiang, an independent political analyst in Beijing. Although some local governments have published their passport regulations online, many interviewees said they were told only verbally.

Enforcement of the restrictions appears to be uneven. Zhu said nurses at other hospitals in her city still had their passports, for instance.

And government employees are not the only ones being scrutinised for overseas ties. China's state security agency has repeatedly warned ordinary citizens about the dangers of traveling overseas, or to look out for foreigners who might be spies.

Dong Mingzhu, chair of Gree Electric, a major Chinese appliance manufacturer, said this year that she would avoid hiring people who returned from overseas, because they might be spies. That declaration drew widespread criticism from social media users who said it promoted discrimination and would harm China's global competitiveness.

The New York Times 8/4/25



# Why the HECI Bill matters for higher education in India

CHETAN SINGH

The Ministry of Education is currently working on a draft bill to establish the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI)—a crucial step towards fulfilling the promise of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). First proposed in the draft National Education Policy 2019 (DNEP-2019) and reiterated in the NEP 2020, HECI was envisaged as “large scale and far-reaching” remedy for the persistent challenges plaguing India’s higher education system—fragmentation, obsolescence, and over-regulation.

To bring this vision to life, the system must adopt transparency through data-driven governance, public disclosure, and outcome-based assessments. Equally important is the adoption of differential regulatory mechanisms: institutions should be regulated based on their performance, not through a one-size-fits-all approach. With real autonomy, credible accreditation, and Centre-state coopera-

tion, these principles could transform the sector from a culture of control to one of trust.

The DNEP 2019 conceived the HECI as a “mechanism to ensure integrity, transparency, and efficiency in higher education and its institutions by having ‘only one regulator for all higher education, including professional education’”. The DNEP 2019 and the NEP 2020 reiterated, demand and advocated that regulation should be “light but tight” and “outcome-based,” with self-disclosure and accountability.

Institutions for decades have buckled under the weight of three or more overlapping regulatory authorities: the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council of Technical Education (NCTE), each with its conflicting mandates and overlapping procedures. The HECI Bill proposes to replace this complex system with a single, transparent, and operationally independent authority. According to the proposed

HECI regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standards are segregated along four verticals: namely, the National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA), National Accreditation Council (NAC), Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), and General Education Council (GEC). This split is more than just bureaucratic engineering; it’s a philosophy that moves from control to enablement. Such a shift is essential to ensure the regulatory system empowers institutions rather than “disempowering” them.

## One policy, many realities

Education falls under the Concurrent List, meaning both the Centre and the states share legislative responsibility. This dual control often leads to fragmented regulation and inconsistent implementation, particularly affecting state-run universities that educate the majority of Indian students.

NEP 2020 envisages the spirit of cooperative federalism, with states and nation-

al priorities in education needing to converge. However, application in each state varies greatly due to differences in political commitment, administrative capability, and financial solvency. As a result of fact, state universities are often plagued by too much bureaucracy, political appointments, and not getting enough funding.

For the HECI framework to be successful, it is critical to ensure that the role of states is not marginalised. On the contrary, they must proactively involve themselves in the preparation of implementation roadmaps, the formulation of State Higher Education Councils/Commissions, and bringing reformulations to university acts in alignment with the NEP vision.

Central to NEP philosophy is the freedom of each higher education institution to govern itself—academically, financially, and administratively. Today, however, the system is one of micromanagement and has little scope for decision-making. NEP 2020 seeks graded autonomy, given on the basis of accreditation and performance.

Institutions could create curricula, handle finances, recruit talent, and innovate with full public disclosure. Further, the regulatory change will also need to be supported by capacity building, management funding models, and protection from the terrors of political interference. “Autonomy is not a measure of virtue; it is a condition of excellence.”

The HECI Bill needs to be enacted as clear and widespread legislation. Its provisions need to clearly specify the functions of the new regulatory verticals and prevent any overreach or duplication. Equally important, the bill should respect the principle of federal cooperation so that states are not just implementers but share the ownership of this new regulatory edifice.

Further, there is a necessity in overhauling accrediting and funding agencies and processes. Accreditation needs to be more than just a one-time badge to wear but should reflect a system of ongoing quality assurance. Similarly, public funding will need measurable outputs such as quality

teaching, equal opportunities, research productivity, and so on.

Most importantly, we must strengthen the institutions. The transition from a micromanaging culture to one of trust and accountability is an open for discussion. Autonomy for academic, administrative, and financial decisions at higher education institutions buttressed by investments in digital infrastructure, governance frameworks, and leadership training is needed.

For real change, we need strong political will, sincere Centre-state cooperation, and some real institutional reforms. If the system is genuine in its implementation, an HECI framework could make the system become empowering, not controlling. Done right, India will not only fix its higher education; it will lay the groundwork for a globally competitive, knowledge-producing society for decades into the future.

(The writer is a professor and dean of the School of Law, Governance, and Public Policy, Oenakeya University, Bengaluru)

# Jobs at Risk AI's Reality Check

India's white-collar workforce has started feeling the tremors of job displacement due to AI with India's largest IT employer Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) announcing it will cut 12,000 roles. While the country's technology industry has weathered several downturns in the past—from the post-Y2K lull to the 2001 financial crisis and the Covid-era freeze—the current shift is unlike any before. AI is rewriting job descriptions, replacing repetitive roles and forcing a reset on what skills are truly futureproof. It's part of a broader trend. Recruitment firms report the erosion of jobs across the board—from finance and insurance to marketing and customer service.

According to the World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs report, the structural labour market shift will impact 22% of today's jobs globally, although it foresees an overall rise. Nearly 8% (92 million) will be lost, while 14% (170 million) new jobs will be created. This will result in net growth of 7% in total employment, or 78 million jobs in 2025-2030, it said. For India, 38% of existing core skills are expected to change.

The traditional job pyramid of the Indian white-collar workforce—wide at the base with repetitive roles—is being compressed, experts said. Hiring is becoming more selective, with companies placing a premium on value-creation over volume.

Rule-based and pattern-driven processes are already being replaced with AI's speed and accuracy, said Sachin Alug, CEO of recruitment firm NLB Services. "We're already seeing it in roles such as customer service agents, data entry operators, invoice processors, and junior audit staff. In many cases, AI handles the first layer of work, such as responses, validations, and summaries, faster and with fewer errors."

The BPO and KPO (business and knowledge processing outsourcing) sectors, India's largest employment engines, are also under pressure. Voice-based customer service agents, chat support, transcription and data-cleaning roles are all at risk due to co-pilots and conversational bots. Nearly 65% of retail jobs and up to 70% of financial reporting tasks could be automated in the coming years, said Neeti Sharma, CEO at recruitment firm TeamLease Digital.

"Already about 30% of global customer service requests are handled by AI, and junior roles in legal and audit are being reduced as AI reviews documents and checks compliance," she said. The squeeze isn't immediate but seems inevitable.

"While these roles are not vanishing overnight, many organisations, especially in captive centres and large shared services setups, are seeing a slowdown or freeze in hiring unless driven by fresh investments or expansion mandates," said Sanjith Chengappa KG, director and business head, professional staffing at Adecco India. The cascading effect of job displacement is creating higher entry barriers for younger people en-

AI is putting white-collar roles at risk and darkening the dreams of India's aspirational youth, reports Himanshi Lohchab

## Facing the Axe: Roles at Risk

### Finance & Accounting

- Accounts payable/receivable executives
- Reconciliation analysts
- Junior tax processors
- Budget and forecasting assistants
- Entry-level investment analysts and risk modelers

### Audit & Compliance

- Junior auditors
- Document validation
- AML/KYC verification staff
- Risk reporting associates

### Insurance

- Claims processing executives
- Policy issuance/back-end processing agents
- Underwriting assistants

### Marketing

- Email campaign executives
- Ad copywriters
- Social media scheduling/content assistants
- Data/reporting analysts
- SEO content writers

### Legal Services

- Document review lawyers/paralegals
- Contract summarisers
- Legal researchers (entry-level)
- Compliance documentation staff

### Customer Service / BPO / KPO

- Voice-based call centre agents
- Chat support executives
- Order processing and status update staff
- Data entry operators
- Basic transcription services
- Feedback collection and routing roles

### Retail & eCommerce

- Inventory and procurement analysts
- In-store customer query reps
- POS billing support staff
- Order fulfilment coordinators



## World Economic Forum

22% of today's jobs globally will be impacted between 2025-2030

8% (92 million) will be lost

14% (170 million) new jobs will be created

7% (78 million) Net employment growth

In India: 37% of workforce will need reskilling

22% will be upskilled and redeployed

12% are unlikely to upskill

31% Fall in share of tasks completed by humans from 48%

34% Increase in technology tasks share from 22%

tering the workforce, he said. It may create urban unemployment clusters, particularly in cities with a high concentration of BPO/KPO jobs, and enhance income inequality. AI disruption isn't confined to entry-level workers. Mid-career professionals are increasingly vulnerable, especially those with 15-25 years of experience in functions now becoming redundant, said Srijan Nason, co-founder of the

Blueart Innovation Fund. He noted that this cohort is at risk due to outdated skillsets and limited exposure to newer tools.

He also noted that the narrative around AI is heavily skewed towards coding and data science. "This creates a perceived 'tech wall' for professionals in fields like human resources, marketing, sales, and arts," he said. According to Ditya Nair, execu-

tive director at Grafton Recruitment India, companies are beginning to prioritise productivity over manpower. "In manufacturing and healthcare sectors, automation or data entry folks and base level roles in finance, admin, HR are where chatbots are being introduced to provide solutions to queries raised within minutes which previously took two days by employees doing the same role," she said.



# Meghnad Desai: The view from classroom

**N**oted economist and Labour peer Meghnad Desai passed away recently. Few individuals command such universal recognition — his impact transcended not just borders but boundaries of language, discipline, and realm of thought.

For both of us, he embodied the ideal of the great teacher. We were from the first batch of Meghnad Desai Academy of Economics. Desai, in one of his lectures, quoted Keynes's description of a master economist: "A master economist...must understand symbols and speak in words. He must contemplate the particular, in terms of the general, and touch abstract and concrete in the same flight of thought."

Desai's style of teaching changed the way we engaged with ideas and understood the world.

We were in the international political economy course he taught. Through this class, I (Patel) became fascinated by the effects of the Industrial Revolution on weavers in India and wrote a short paper exploring how the Lancashire model and its replication in Britain impacted these communities. I approached him at his office. He immediately invited me to sit, enjoying his pizza and coke, he read through my work and, almost offhandedly, began discussing the various arguments that scholars have debated around this topic. What he considered a casual ramble could easily have passed for the literature review section of a scholarly paper on industrialisation in India.

During one of his lectures where he was working out a proof (perhaps of the Heckscher-Ohlin model), I (Misra) had asked him a question related to the math on the board but not directly to the topic. Without missing a beat, he adapted the equations to tackle the query, but after a brief pause, admitted with a twinkle in his eye that he had momentarily lost his way. With characteristic wit, he referenced his age, joking that he would revisit the question the following day.

Later, when I dropped by his office to discuss another doubt, I found him completely absorbed, meticulously working through lines of equations — determined to pinpoint

exactly which sign or step had eluded him earlier. Before him, along with his notebook, was an open box of pizza and a can of Coke, leftovers from a working lunch that he had put aside in his pursuit of clarity.

We recall many water-cooler conversations with peers marvelling at how he didn't need to be this way — but perhaps he simply couldn't help it. That was the only way he knew.

He cared deeply for knowledge, for his students, and for their learning. He remained committed to that ideal.

In the midst of all this, he was very alive to humour, too. He once made a joke about the oddity of naming an institute after someone still alive — which had the entire hall erupting in laughter.

His passion rubbed off on us in many ways. When I (Misra) reached out to him for advice on doctoral studies — confessing a preference for "real-world problems" over purely theoretical work — he shared a perspective that fundamentally shifted my outlook: "You know, Prakhhar, the biggest advantage of theory is that theory saves time. Imagine being able to work out what the outcome of a policy will be before actually implementing it!" After that, theory no longer felt like an abstract exercise detached from reality.

Desai left an indelible mark on us. His last message to one of us was: "Keep reading widely and hang on to some of your ideas but you will have a lot more to learn than you realise". Young minds need that kind of energy — that pushes you forward but also slows you down just enough to learn, reflect and grow.

It is far beyond our abilities to discuss his contributions to academia and literature or to comment on the large body of knowledge he has left behind. What we can say is that he did fit very well this verse:

*"Jis jaanib bhi mitti uda doon, naye aafsaan paida ho jaaye.*

*Filhaal bachchon mein hoon, sabun ke gubbaare banata hoon".*

(Wherever I fling dust, new suns rise. When I'm with children, I shape bubbles).



Prakhhar Misra



Ayush Patel

Prakhhar Misra is at Johns Hopkins University and Ayush Patel is with L74 Craft Ciders.

The views expressed are personal.

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# On Path to Mediocrity?

*Despite being a young and ambitious nation, India's overreliance on outdated education, passive parenting, and low innovation threatens its future in a tech-driven world; writes Sachin Shridhar*

Have you seen the security guard of your building busy watching reels on his phone? His job is to remain alert to what is going on around him, and yet, if he is unmindful of anything, it is precisely what is going on around him. Have you seen young teenagers on mobile phones with a concentration they scarcely show elsewhere in any task whatsoever? Why talk of teenagers—you must have surely come across mothers nonchalantly handing over a mobile phone to a young child to keep him from crying, and the young child is no less. Like a trained monkey, he starts pushing buttons which he knows will flash pictures that distract and calm him down. You must be witnessing these and many similar scenes around you on a daily basis. But have you seen a young child immersed in a book or focused with unbroken concentration? Or have you seen a child play with puzzle toys that help develop visualisation, critical thinking, and motor skills to use his hands dexterously? Most likely, the chances are that you have not—or only in a few instances—compared to the earlier scenarios, which are so ubiquitous.

In India, we are an indulgent lot when it comes to parenting. Our slogan is: "Oh, he is just a child. He will do it when the time comes." No one defines when that time is going to come, and the child moves from small toys to bigger ones and from flashing lights to browsing the internet in a drugged stupor. In the process, isn't education and intellect in the country taking a hit? Aren't we, as a large nation of a billion-plus, getting left behind? The indications are strong.

Forget about the West, which has historically dominated in education and technology—countries like China, and even smaller ones like Israel, South Korea, and Taiwan have marched ahead in science, technology, and innovation. We continue to be low-paid, everyone's favourite backend boys, for we bolster the profits of corporations abroad by hiring out our discounted (read: cheap) labour. We are happy when our children get a job, and if the job is in an MNC, we flaunt the credentials with unmistakable pride. What we choose to forget is that, in all probability, he is doing a job which is procedure-bound, clerical, and needs no



India must put extra efforts towards creating opportunities for those youths who invest time and energy in education

particular skill set or innovation to speak of. With ostrich-like stubbornness, we are also not thinking about—or preparing for—the possibility that in the world of AI and machine learning, many of these jobs will ultimately disappear. Many will get merged into one. It has already started happening. Yet, it does not seem that our educational system is prepared for this. One of the entrenched structural problems is the bureaucracy of the educational institutions. We boast about our IITs and AIIMS, but if we were to look at the world rankings, the best of our institutions—where millions of middle-class children aspire to enter—figure nowhere in the accepted QS World University Rankings. Compare this with China, which has 15 universities in the top 100, and even small countries like Korea and Israel, which have three universities each in the top 100. The problem starts with the bureaucracy of academia. Our university system has permanent professors, much like the permanent bureaucracy we have inherited from the British. Now, a history professor has no such challenge, as the past remains the same—and the more experienced a professor is, the better his capability to describe the past and help students connect the dots. But for technical subjects of today's world, technologies and system requirements change not in years but in a matter of months—and at times,

days. It is then not experience, but contemporary knowledge and a strong connection with industry that is relevant. With permanent jobs, the academic community has neither the incentive nor the need to upgrade their knowledge. That also starts reflecting in the syllabi as well, which remain from a time gone by. Any engineering student you talk to will tell you that they learn most of the new things on their own and generally not through the university syllabus or teaching.

Indian universities, since Independence, have hardly made any name for any breakthrough research of any kind. We claim to be an IT superpower, and yet you will be hard-pressed to name a single IT product or software that has found worldwide application and has come out of India. All the Googles, Facebooks, Apples, Netfliases, Amazons, ERPs, and computer languages of the world have come from the West.

A single university like Harvard has produced 161 Nobel Laureates, and MIT has produced 105 till date. Universities of a small country like Israel, with only 97 lakh people, have given us 11 Nobel Laureates. Now compare that with Indian universities—our score is zero. The Indians who have won the Nobel have all worked abroad. Among the four Indians who have won the Nobel Prize in Science, except CV Raman (1930), all stud-

ied in foreign countries and flourished in those systems. And CV Raman too got the Nobel Prize in 1930, when the system was not in our hands. So, if we look at it objectively, the indications are that our education system has not really given the country any world-class scientist or engineer. It certainly continues to generate millions of unemployable unemployed with generalised degrees and questionable skill sets.

The issue here is not talent, but the system. The research and development budgets are minimal. Permanence, coupled with lack of accountability, has bred mediocrity within the academic system. The focus of education is getting a degree, becoming employable, getting a job, marrying, raising a family, and so on. Per se, there is nothing wrong with it—but when this becomes the sole aim of education, the spirit of enterprise, creativity, and innovation is completely gone. Whatever spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation we are witnessing in our country in a few areas is too small for a country of our size, and it is taking place not because of our education system but despite it. It is a tribute to our young founders, entrepreneurs, and business folks that they keep the wheels moving solely on their own grit, with little support from those who enjoy permanence and perks with no accountability.

Today, we are living a life that our elders will not be able to identify with at all. In a few years, the way we work and live will again be altogether different, and we will find it hard to relate to. So, the societies that will innovate and be part of producing the technologies and solutions—which, in turn, will govern our lives in the coming times—will lead, and the rest will only be marginalised followers. Do we want to be led while forever resting on stories of what a glorious country our India was? Or do we want to be part of the new world, which is replete with opportunities for those who invest in education and technology? If a deep surgery of the education system is not carried out to make it in line with the needs of the AI-driven world that is hurtling towards us, things will continue to slide. The time to carry out deep structural reforms is now—or it will be never for us.

Views expressed are personal

Permanence, coupled with lack of accountability, has bred mediocrity within the academic system



# India and Bharat diverge on NEP's twin-track

The policy's fifth anniversary offers a moment for introspection.

Reinvention must not risk deeper divisions

NAVNEET SHARMA

The dichotomy carefully crafted in our country's political discourse, India versus Bharat, also reverberates throughout policymaking. The phrase '*India, that is Bharat*' is a constitutional truism, yet it is often portrayed as if these are two entirely distinct entities. The NEP 2020 begins with this premise and asserts that the current education system, established during British colonial rule for mass education, is inadvertently 'Indian' and 'Macaulayvian.' It argues that this system does not cater to the needs and aspirations of Bharat, with its indigenous knowledge, values, and norms. The NEP 2020 takes it upon itself to chart the 'right' path to decolonise education, an enterprise it claims remained neglected even after 70 years of independence, because it believes that earlier governments were not *Bhartiya* enough or had a sinister design to keep Indians enslaved to an anglicised understanding of knowledge and knowledge construction.

The NEP 2020 identifies this perceived flaw in our education system as fundamental and seeks to alter both the discourse and the system through the adoption of new and innovative ideas such as learning outcomes, digital and machine learning, academic bank of credits, school and university accreditation, multiple entry-exit options, and vocationalisation. These are presented as globally tested and proven concepts, which, when implemented, are expected to help create *Bhartiya* schools and universities that will produce global citizens rooted in the Indian ethos.

The policy has completed five years, a relatively short period to assess the efficacy of any reform, particularly in the field of education, where it typically takes around 17 years to complete one full cycle of schooling. However, the celebratory fervour surrounding its anniversary invites a closer examination: are sincere and substantive measures truly being undertaken to implement this policy?

The policy advocates allocating 6% of the GDP to education, but without a financial memorandum, this promise re-

mains a chimera, one that was first proposed by the Kothari Commission nearly five decades ago. The budgetary allocation for education stood at 3.53% of GDP before the NEP and has since declined, reaching just 2.5% in 2024-25.

The Centre has withheld funds from states that do not conform to the adaptation and implementation of NEP, using schemes like PM-SHRI and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as instruments of compliance. In states governed by parties with differing ideologies, such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala, funds are often denied.

Even among private schools, there exists a wide spectrum, ranging from those operating out of modest *kothis* or

by producing research on topics such as the impact of *sattvik* food on gut health and *prana*-based Vedic approaches to reducing suicidal tendencies. Meanwhile, over 80% of India's population continues to consume non-vegetarian food, and there has been a 27% increase in student suicides.

The idea of IKS, as evident in the model curriculum, overlooks any contributions to Indian or *Bhartiya* knowledge produced between 1000 AD and 1857 AD. The subtext is clear: during eight centuries of Muslim rule, Indians allegedly neither learned nor constructed any meaningful knowledge. The model curriculum elevates Sanskrit, or more precisely, Brahminical, knowledge as the only valid occupant of the sanctum sanctorum of Indian intellectual heritage. In contrast, Tamil, Pali, and Persian literatures, non-textual traditions, and contributions from Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, *Lokayata*, Sufism, and Urdu are treated as though they emerged from some other India or Bharat altogether.

The NEP proposes the concept of a 'school complex' to ensure the 'optimal' utilisation of resources, a move that has recently triggered a wave of school mergers and closures in Uttar Pradesh. This trend is likely to shrink the footprint of government schools. Frameworks such as the School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAACF) will introduce multiple layers of supervision, increasing bureaucratic oversight. While the policy voices support for public schooling, it simultaneously relaxes the regulatory criteria for establishing private schools. A recent study reveals that only 9.54% of schools meet the basic definition of a 'school' in terms of infrastructure and teacher availability. Over two crore children remain out of school, and according to the latest UDISE report, enrolment has declined in both government and private schools by 2.62% and 8.32%, respectively.

No policy can serve as a panacea overnight for the deep-rooted issues of the education system. The anniversary of such a policy should serve as a moment for reflection, revision, and re-anchoring of priorities, not a spectacle by the government, policymakers, and ideological supporters. It must also stand as a moment of sincere contemplation, prompting recognition that in its bid to reinvent Indian education, the NEP 2020 may be entrenching the very divide it claims to bridge, carving out two divergent trajectories for 'India' and 'Bharat', rather than shaping a unified and just future for all.

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bungalows to institutions with sprawling campuses and state-of-the-art facilities. The digital divide is stark, and government schools, too, vary greatly in character, from under-resourced municipal schools to well-funded Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas. According to the UDISE report, among the 3,94,634 government schools catering to classes 6 and above, only 23% have ICT labs, 54% have internet access, and just 35% are equipped with smart classrooms. Despite a significant emphasis on digital and machine learning in the policy, there is no clear roadmap for the digital upgradation of schools. As a result, the policy seems to operate on two distinct tracks – one for *India* and another for *Bharat*.

## IKS: A thousand-year void

Barely three months after the launch of the NEP, the Ministry established the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) division to revive India's ancient knowledge traditions within a modern context. This initiative includes 27 research centres, 17 centres for teacher training, and curriculum development, and seven language centres. These centres are active-





# 'Defect to win': science is set to be overwhelmed by fraud papers

Without independent, coordinated, and better-funded systems to detect, investigate, and punish misconduct, science risks being shaped by those who see bad-faith behaviour as the most rational path forward, according to a major study that drew on multiple data sources and analytic tools

Vasudevan Mukundh

**A** meticulous new study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* on August 4 has warned that systematic scientific fraud is no longer a fringe concern but a pervasive, organised, and rapidly growing threat that jeopardises the foundations of research worldwide. The study has revealed a fine-grained break-up of the actors, methods, and scale behind industrialised academic misconduct.

Drawing on a trove of bibliometric and forensic data, the team — from Northwestern University and the NSF-Simons National Institute for Theory and Mathematics in Biology, both in the US, and the University of Sydney in Australia — has revealed how coordinated entities like paper mills, brokerage firms, compliant editors, and unscrupulous journals work together to mass-produce fraudulent research.

In a personal blog post about the effort, Reese Richardson, the study's lead author and a postdoctoral fellow at the Amaral Lab at Northwestern University, wrote, "The scientific enterprise is now witness to widespread, organised defection from the scientific public goods game. Large swaths of players, among them many scientists, reviewers, editors, and publishers, are choosing to no longer make genuine contributions to the pot."

## A public goods game

The team framed its analysis using game theory, likening science to a sprawling public goods game in which progress is driven by collaboration, trust, and mutual investment. In the study's framework, in exchange for generating knowledge and training the next generation, scientists receive societal rewards like funding and career advancement. However, as the size and complexity of science have both ballooned, so too have the incentives and opportunities to defect.

"While there has always been some concern that these pressures may compel some to defect from the scientific research ethos... the focus has largely been on the actions of lone individuals," the team wrote in its paper. "Recently, however, reports of coordinated scientific fraud activities have increased."

Richardson wrote that "defection" was defined as "the act of choosing to contribute less than other players despite having the means to contribute."

He added that in repeated public goods games simulated in the laboratory, players understand over time that defecting yields the greater advantage, leading to them contributing less and less to the collective pool. And although there is "usually a group of players that cooperate to play the game in good faith, most players gradually lower their input. As a result, the total benefits from the pool dwindle while the number of defectors rises."

The paper also rationalised the use of the game theoretic framework as a means to analyse research misconduct as an

organised activity rather than as errors committed by specific individuals. "Unethical behaviour in science is often viewed as a character failure of an individual, not something perpetrated, enabled, and promoted by a cohort of individuals and entities. Indeed, even the definition of a now standard term such as 'paper mill' remains nebulous. Some of the organisations we describe may be better characterised as 'brokerages' than paper mills. We also cannot ascertain where our observations are due to the involvement of commercial paper mills or where they arise as a result of less formal peer networks operating on a noncommercial basis (as could be the case among some of the editors we flag)."

The authors added that the framework is also useful "because it frames some behaviour not in ethical terms but in terms of rationality. ... For many junior doctors and budding scientists, engaging in defecting behavior may be the new norm."

At the heart of this breakdown is the modern system of academic incentives. Funding and recognition increasingly hinge on quantitative proxies like publication and citation counts, h-indices, and journal impact factors, all of which can be artificially inflated.

## Architecture of fraud

For their analysis, the team members used multiple data sources and analytic tools. Their sources included journal and article metadata from Clarivate's Web of Science, Elsevier's Scopus, PubMed/MEDLINE, and the OpenAlex databases — spanning several thousand journals and millions of articles — as well as lists of deindexed journals from the major indexing services and early-warning lists from Chinese oversight authorities. They combined this with data about retracted papers from the Retraction Watch database; metadata and content from PubPeer, a post-publication critique platform; and programmatic analyses of publisher data, notably from PLOS ONE and Hindawi, both of which label each article with its handling editor.

Upon analysis, the team found that certain editors at large journals, such as PLOS ONE and the stable of Hindawi journals, consistently handled disproportionately many articles that were eventually retracted or which received critical comments on PubPeer.

Using probabilistic modelling and statistical controls, the team could identify individuals whose pattern of acceptance couldn't be explained by chance. These editors, many of whom also published each other's work, formed tightly-knit clusters that, despite making up less than 1% of all editors, were implicated in most problematic articles at their journals.

One particular insight was that the fraud ecosystem has become resilient and adaptable. For example, as the paper put it, organisations such as the Academic Research and Development Association (ARDA) in India don't only write and submit papers on behalf of clients but

**The team identified individuals whose pattern of acceptance couldn't be explained by chance. These editors, many of whom also published each other's work, formed tightly-knit clusters that, despite making up less than 1% of all editors, were implicated in most problematic articles**

actively "journal hopped," shifting its business to new journals as soon as existing venues were deindexed or scrutiny of its activities increased.

The team wrote that between 2018 and 2024, ARDA's roster of guaranteed publication venues ballooned from 14 to more than 86 journals, including obscure or hijacked periodicals as well as journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and MEDLINE. They added that the journals listed by ARDA have also been deindexed at rates vastly exceeding the baseline, often in apparent response to exposure events — although the deindexing also occurred too slowly to offset the tide of fraudulent output.

Evidence from journal archives has indicated that most articles published through ARDA's network are beyond scope, with a significant share also representing improbable international collaborations. For example, the researchers found that of the five journals they comprehensively inspected from ARDA's offerings, 10.1% of publications had authors from different countries; they also spotted a paper about roasting hazelnuts appearing in a journal about HIV/AIDS care. The team interpreted this to mean ARDA was selling papers' authorships to the highest bidders.

## Sobering numbers

An important plank of the analysis is the team's construction of networks based on image duplication, which has become a hallmark of fabricated science. The researchers identified large clusters of articles published in the same journal, in the same year, and by the same publishers, all connected through shared or manipulated images. They were able to use statistical methods to show that this was not a random occurrence: Instead, the numbers are consistent with mass production and coordinated placement.

While all of science is susceptible, the extent of infiltration seems to be uneven. By comparing closely related subfields in RNA biology, Richardson et al. found that while error rates were similar across disparate new and expanding fields, the retraction rates differed dramatically. Subfields with formulaic, template-driven research, such as lncRNAs, miRNAs, and cancer, had retraction rates peaking at 4%, which significantly exceeded what the researchers said can be expected from honest error.

Perhaps the most sobering data exposed a mismatch between the scale of fraudulent output and the integrity of the mechanisms designed to address it. The corpus of suspected paper mill products

has been doubling every 1.5 years, which the team has estimated is 10x faster than legitimate scientific publishing and far outpacing the growth of both retracted and flagged articles.

Even aggressive measures such as deindexing journals have been dwarfed by the sheer volume of compromised outlets. For example, fewer than 100 journals have been deindexed every year whereas there have been tens of thousands of journals and a staggering number of suspect publications.

According to the paper, "In response to concerns about editorial practices, [a few bibliometric aggregators] can deindex a journal. Web of Science and Scopus deindex on the order of a hundred journals each annually. While this may appear to be a large number, it is ten-fold smaller than the number of journals that publish paper mill products."




"Extrapolating from current trends," the paper added, "we estimate that only around 25% of suspected paper mill products will ever be retracted and that only around 10% of suspected paper mill products will ever reside in a deindexed journal."

## The winning strategy

The researchers also acknowledged some important limitations of their work. Foremost was that scientific fraud is by nature clandestine and even comprehensive data is not likely to accurately estimate its full scale. The patterns of detection and exposure are themselves biased by resources, attention, and field-specific vulnerabilities. Even so, the team wrote, the aggregate evidence "shows that the integrity of the extant scientific record and of future science is being undermined through the shortcomings in the very systems through which scientists infer the trustworthiness of each other's work."

The study and its accompanying reflections constitute both an urgent warning and a call for collective action within the scientific community. Industrialised scientific fraud is no longer a marginal concern, nor is it adequately deterred by current measures. Instead, the researchers have revealed a resilient ecosystem of actors who have been incentivised to defect repeatedly, by exploiting the metrics and weaknesses of the current system at the expense of honest research and scientific progress.

"These networks are essentially criminal organisations, acting together to fake the process of science," the study's senior author and Northwestern University professor of engineering sciences and applied mathematics Luis A. Nunes Amaral said in a statement. "Millions of dollars are involved in these processes."

Without coordinated, better-resourced, and systematically independent approaches to detect, investigate, and sanction misconduct, the study's findings suggest that the future of science is at risk of being shaped by those for whom defection is the rational way to go. (mukundh.v@northwestern.edu)   



# Rewriting the rules of school in A.P.

TDP government reworks school reforms, aiming for better access

## STATE OF PLAY

**P. Sujatha Varma**

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**T**he Telugu Desam Party-led NDA government in Andhra Pradesh is revisiting the education sector reforms introduced by its predecessor and is making changes wherever deemed necessary. Minister for Human Resources Development Nara Lokesh has stated that policies yielding positive outcomes will be retained, while those that failed to deliver tangible results will be rolled back. The task being both critical and challenging, the Minister is taking an objective and balanced view of the educational landscape, recognising that the well-being and future of students must remain at the heart of the new initiatives.

Officials in the education department are assessing what has worked, what needs improvement, and how best to move forward without causing inconvenience to stakeholders. The task at hand is to cater to the needs of 58,535 schools, 68,15,925 students, and 3,13,112 teachers across the State. Of these, 44,285 are government schools with 33,37,762 students and 1,84,898 teachers; 789 are aided schools with 87,612 students and 3,259 teachers; 13,461 private schools with 33,90,551 students and 1,24,955 teachers.

According to Mr. Lokesh, the TDP government inherited an education system in a state of paralysis, lacking essential frameworks and operational efficiency – a charge refuted by the YSR Congress Party, which has accused him of “systematically weakening the education sector in the State.”

## ANDHRA PRADESH

The data show that the State has 12,512 single-teacher schools, 5,312 government schools with single-digit enrolment, and 14,052 State-run schools with 20 or fewer students. The overall enrolment in government schools declined by 10,49,596 students between 2022 and 2024.

With declining learning outcomes, the government faces the formidable challenge of reversing the trend to secure children's futures. A recent survey suggested that 84.3% of Class III students could not read a Class-II level text, 62.5 % of Class V students struggled with basic reading, 47% of Class VIII students still could not read Class II level text, 59.1 % of Class III students could not perform basic subtraction, 54.8 % of Class VI-II students could not perform division and only 12.9% and of Class III students could solve basic division problems.

One of the most controversial decisions of the previous YSRCP government was GO 117, which reorganised schools and reapportioned teaching staff. The order divided schools into six categories and mandated the merger and demerger of classes. The fragmentation of schools led to the number of schools having fewer than 10 students rising from 1,215 in 2021-22 to 5,312 in 2024-25, and schools with fewer than or equal to 20 students increasing from 5,520 to 14,052 during the same pe-

riod, indicating a severe decline in student enrolment.

To curb the ill effects of GO 117, the NDA government introduced GO 21, which revises the restructuring model by creating nine categories of schools. However, this faced trouble, with teacher unions raising serious concerns over its “negative impact on the public education system”. GO 21 is part of the transformative journey called Learning Excellence in Andhra Pradesh, which aims to improve access, learning outcomes, and future-ready skills.

The recently concluded ‘Mega’ DSC (District Selection Committee) exam, conducted to recruit 16,347 teachers in government schools after a gap of seven years, enhanced the government's image. Other welcomed steps include the introduction of academic star ratings to assess both student and teacher performance, targeted efforts to boost school enrolment in rural and tribal areas, and the consolidation of multiple teacher apps into a single platform.

In intermediate education, curriculum and textbook revisions for first-year students are being implemented from the current academic year, aligning with the syllabus with national competitive standards. The revisions would be introduced for second-year students from the academic year 2026-27.

The reach of the changes being made is very vast, and resistance to change is natural in large systems, especially when previous reforms are still being digested. The government should remain watchful of implementation gaps that often emerge. Due diligence is key to ensuring that the quality of learning improves without sacrificing stability. *h/n*



# NEXUS OF GOOD

# Realising Digital Dreams

*The Alwar e-Vidya initiative has transformed school infrastructure through digital libraries, community involvement, and interdepartmental convergence, promoting inclusive, sustainable education and lifelong learning*



ANIL SWARUP

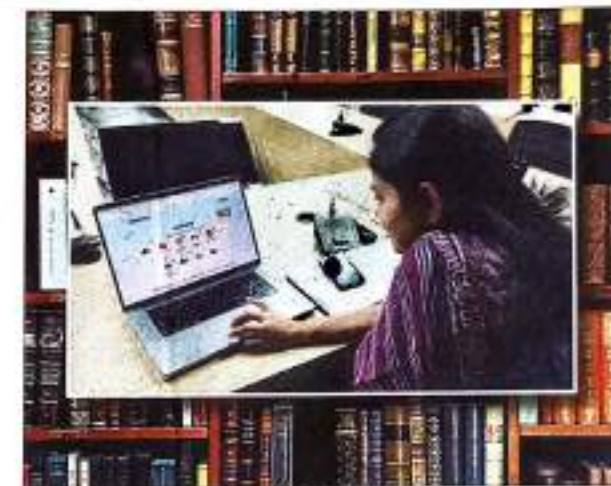
THE WRITER IS  
AN AUTHOR AND  
A FORMER CIVIL  
SERVANT

Ensuring quality and sustainable education for all, alongside providing lifelong learning opportunities for all, is a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-4), to which India is a signatory. Access to a functional computer was lacking in more than 50 per cent of the senior secondary schools in Alwar district in Rajasthan. In addition, more than 15 per cent schools still lacked access to a functioning toilet block, and the majority were being run in decrepit, old buildings which had last been renovated more than 5 years ago. An ambitious project called Alwar e-Vidya was launched with the goal to create spaces for Digital learning – E-libraries – and equip government school children with the tools required to excel in a competitive world alongside strengthening the educational infrastructure in the district by converging all existing government schemes.

The initiative was centred on the following five pillars:

► **Strengthening the SDMC:** Alwar has a total of 291 integrated schools with Classes 1–12 on a single campus, stationed at Gram Panchayat Headquarters, with the senior-most teacher serving as Principal. As a first step, a preliminary survey of schools was conducted to determine the status of basic infrastructure, as well as the presence or absence of an e-library. This was done with the objective of preparing a vision document for schools in consultation with the SDMC (School Development and Management Committee). SDMCs were encouraged to brainstorm, think, and write down the needs of the school in terms of basic infrastructure—functional e-library, existence of B&Ls, functional toilets, green spaces, and a functional rooftop rainwater harvesting system (RTWHs). This helped the, until then, defunct SDMCs to build confidence, collaborate, and, for the first time, think holistically about the development of the school. A fortnight later, the Panchayat Elementary Education Officers (PEEOs) presented their Vision Document. This participatory exercise helped consolidate school-specific needs, and the bottom-up approach ensured that the SDMC was aware of the direction the initiative would take. SDMCs were also encouraged to utilise the funds lying with them creatively.

A preliminary survey showed that 140 out of 291 schools had an e-library setup, but of them, 40 per cent were defunct or in need of minor repair. The



Through the e-Vidya initiative, young IAS officer Artika Shukla has brought a sea change in Alwar district

rest had no e-library. Fifty per cent of the schools lacked basic RTWHs systems, 27 per cent of schools did not have a green space, and about 15 per cent lacked functional toilet blocks for boys and girls (ironically, the country had been declared ODF many years ago).

► **Interdepartmental Convergence of Funds:** It was clear right from the start that no additional funds would be given to the district for this initiative. Hence, it was decided to comb through the existing funds provided to the district and ensure interdepartmental convergence in planning their utilisation. A meeting was held at the level of the District Collector with the CEO, Zila Parishad, District Education Officer, Mining Engineer, District Minority Officer, GM DIC, and all Block Development Officers and Sub-Divisional Officers. It was found that funds from various existing schemes—MP LAD, MLA LAD, PM Jan Vikas Karyakram (in minority blocks), District Mining Fund Trust, Mewat Vikas Yojna (specifically for Alwar and Bharatpur districts), SFC, FFC, as well as CSR funds—could be utilised for upgradation of school infrastructure and establishing e-libraries. In addition, MGNREGA could be converged with other schemes to create khel maidans and/or green campuses within school premises, and SBM (G) funds could be utilised to make CSCs (Community Sanitary Complexes) within school premises.

► **Community Engagement and Involvement:** A large-scale community awareness and involvement programme was initiated. Sessions were held in the Matsya Industrial Area of Alwar district to nudge companies to adopt schools to create functioning e-libraries. A workshop was held for all Sarpanch/Prashasaks to request them to utilise their funds as per the recommendations of the local SDMC. At the district level, a portal on the district's website was started to enable the adoption of schools by NGOs, civil society organisations, as well as learned individuals with links to the district.

► **BCIs as the Fulcrum:** It was felt that to actually anchor the initiative at the school level, it was necessary to give the reins of the e-library to someone in the school who could creatively teach students using the e-library setup and function as the fulcrum of the initiative. The BCI, or Basic Computer Instructor, is a resource person with a BTech/equivalent degree presently posted in the majority of the 291 government schools in Alwar. As part of the initiative, six training sessions were held for all BCIs of the district, with batches of 30 over the summer vacations. A special session was held by distinguished government teachers from our own district to handhold and make the whole process more informal, familiar, and easier to imbibe.

► **Monitoring and Feedback** through Zila Nishpadan Samitis: Regular monitoring and feedback regarding the initiative was taken by means of the Zila Nishpadan Samitis at the district level, with representatives from Education, Zila Parishad, and other departments under the chairmanship of the District Collector. The two best BCIs and one best PEEO, based on performance, were asked to come to the monthly meeting and present before the committee the good work done by her/him. The best practices were then shared with all other Principals and the Education team of the district for replication. BCIs were also honoured by the District Collector for creating the best blog/e-magazine. This helped create a positive feedback mechanism by which a healthy competitive environment was generated, and Principals of the schools started vying for the top spot by taking creative initiatives for their own school's betterment.

As a result of the initiative, 29 new e-libraries have already been set up within a short span of six months, while 89 more libraries are being set up. Under CSR, an overwhelming response was received, with Metso, Ashok Leyland, Dabur, and other companies taking up the setting up of e-libraries under their CSR funds. Twenty-five new toilet blocks were sanctioned and built by the Zila Parishad team utilising SBM (G) funds within school premises. One hundred seventeen new rainwater harvesting structures were made in schools within two months before the beginning of the rainy season. In the past one year, schools of Alwar district received support of over Rs 5.8 crores from the community, CSR, donors, vachees, NGOs, and other institutions.

More than 95 schools created their own blogs, and the rest are in the process of creation. The five best e-magazine-creating schools and their teams were applauded at the district level in June for their creativity. The project was also converged with Project Pehchan—an initiative to empower all differently abled persons in the district. Under this, around 760 differently abled kids enrolled in Classes 8–12 in government schools were imparted basic computer skills and encouraged to write blogs in specific sessions tailor-made for them.

What has been initiated under the inspired leadership of this young IAS officer, Artika Shukla, in her capacity as District Magistrate, is a wonderful example of Nexus of Good. The model can easily be replicated elsewhere.

Views expressed are personal

As a result of the initiative, 29 new e-libraries have already been set up within a short span of six months, while 89 more libraries are being set up

# The role of AYUSH Ministry in building a science-backed future for ayurveda



**MOOL  
MEENA**

Excellence under Ayurveda. The Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) has played a key role in redefining traditional Indian medicine since its inception in 2014. With an aim to modernize Indian traditional healthcare systems as per the 21st-century health challenges, its mission is to promote AYUSH as a credible, scientific, and globally trusted approach to holistic health.

Over 50 MoUs with international research bodies have enabled global collaboration. The Ayush Research Portal offers public access to clinical and pharmacological research, enhancing transparency and credibility.

India is also pioneering innovation in Ayurveda through the application of genomics and AI. Projects like Prati-Genomics by CSIR-IGIB and Ayurvedh-Initiatives at IIT Jodhpur are linking Ayurvedic principles with molecular science, enabling personalized medicine and evidence-based diagnostics.

Ensuring Quality and Regulatory Standards

To strengthen trust, the Ministry emphasizes quality assurance. The Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy (PCIMH) sets rigorous safety and efficacy benchmarks for Ayurvedic formulations. Certification schemes like AYUSH Standard Mark and Premium Mark (with QCI) help ensure both domestic and export credibility.

The Ministry is also addressing concerns about heavy metal content and product consistency by setting up state-

of-the-art analytical labs and adopting WHO-aligned testing protocols.

## Integrating Ayurveda with Public Healthcare

The National AYUSH Mission (NAM) promotes integration of Ayurveda into mainstream public health. Co-location of AYUSH services at primary, community, and district health centers has expanded accessibility, offering patients holistic, preventive, and economical care. NAM also supports infrastructure upgrades and capacity building, while including AYUSH professionals in the national Health Mission (NHM) for collaborative care. This integrative model is crucial for managing both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

## Reforming Education and Building Human Capital

The Ministry has restructured Ayurvedic education under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It replaced older bodies with the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) and the National Commission for Homoeopathy (NCH), ushering in transparency and student-centric reforms. The number of recognized AYUSH colleges rose from 234 in 2014 to over 1,000 in 2024. Initiatives like AYURGYAN

support scholarships, fellowships, and research funding, preparing a future-ready workforce of practitioners, researchers, and entrepreneurs.

## Embracing Digital Transformation

The Ministry launched Ayush Grid, integrating education, service delivery, research, and administration, to align with India's digital health goals. Key initiatives include:

- AHMS (Ayush Hospital Management Information System)
- E-Sanjeevani (Telemedicine)
- m-Yoga, Y-break, and Marasmi Yoga App

These digital tools enhance access in underserved areas. The WHO has even cited India's work in integrating AI with traditional medicine as a global benchmark.

## Supporting Startups and Entrepreneurship

The Ministry's Champion Services Sector Scheme has catalyzed the growth of AYUSH startups and MSMEs, offering interest subsidies and incubation support. The AAIH-CMSI Incubation Centre has supported over 900 startups,

more than half from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, creating over 8,500 jobs.

Ayurvedic wellness products have also seen a digital retail boom, reaching urban consumers through e-commerce and app-based platforms, thus broadening market access and consumer engagement.

Apart from that, as part of globalization and cultural diplomacy, the International Cooperation Scheme has helped Ayurveda gain global recognition through bilateral agreements, academic chairs abroad, and participation in international health expos.

The introduction of the AYUSH Visa supports medical tourism and wellness travel to India.

By aligning with international standards and establishing the Ayush Export Promotion Council, the Ministry has enabled exports of AYUSH products to over 150 countries.

## Public Health Impact

The role of AYUSH in creating a public health impact is visible and expanding. It can be seen through programs like Ayushman Arogya Mandir, which saw beneficiary numbers rise from 1.5 crore in 2021 to 4.8 crore in 2023. Moreover, AYUSH's integration in Poshan Abhiyaan and health insurance reflects public

trust. In addition, the inclusion of systems like Sowa-Rigpa, a traditional Tibetan system, and NABH accreditation of AYUSH hospitals shows a growing government commitment to quality and inclusivity in healthcare delivery.

## Addressing the Road Ahead

Challenges remain, despite the success of the AYUSH model. Areas needing attention are fund utilization under NAM, enhanced pharmacovigilance, and clearer interoperability between allopathy and Ayurveda. Therefore, for a seamless integration into mainstream healthcare, the need of the hour is greater awareness, provider training, and harmonized policies.

## Conclusion: Tradition Empowered by Science

The Ministry of AYUSH has laid a strong base for a future where Ayurveda is a globally recognized, scientifically validated healthcare system.

Ayurveda is evolving from a traditional wisdom to a modern, accessible, and impactful solution for lifelong wellness, thanks to the ongoing developments in digital health, research, education, and entrepreneurship.

Mool Meena, Minister & CEO, Stoppers

9/1/25



# Green clearance

## Supreme Court roots for the environment

**A**MID a fierce monsoon that has exposed flaws in the development models of several states, the Supreme Court has thrown its weight behind the environment. It has struck down a clause that exempted certain large building and construction projects from prior environmental clearance. The controversial clause was part of the January 29 notification issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The SC Bench has ruled that projects with a built-up area above 20,000 square metre — whether industrial, educational or otherwise — cannot be exempted from the environmental impact assessment (EIA) regime.

Unfortunately, sustainable development continues to be a mere slogan rather than a way of life. Environmental safeguards are often sacrificed at the altar of business interests. The ministry had claimed that the exemption in question would not only reduce the compliance burden on industries but also promote ease of doing business by reducing duplication of approvals. However, the stress on expediting green clearance by cutting red tape sparked fears that the government was opening the floodgates to industries and private educational institutions.

There is no room for compromise when our natural resources are at stake. Development activities that cause damage to the environment prove counter-productive in the long run. The EIA regime mandates tree plantation for certain categories of projects, but the monitoring mechanism needs to be strengthened. This requires close coordination between Central and state agencies. It's the job of the regulatory authorities to ensure that any project that could impact local ecosystems and communities is not approved — unless suitable mitigation measures are taken. The decision-making process has to be fair, transparent and time-bound; otherwise, it will put off investors and slow down India's growth engine. Striking a balance between development priorities and environmental concerns is the way forward. A half-hearted approach to this tough tightrope walk is literally a recipe for disaster. *Tr/c*



# School education system in Assam

DWAIPAYAN

*Quality school education in Assam continues to decline despite various government interventions and infrastructural efforts.*

It is not unknown to anyone that education is considered the main force of growth and development of human society and the bulwark of our social life. Every welfare-oriented or advanced country in the world has accepted education as a top priority. The accelerated growth and prosperity of a country largely depend on a quality education system. In this era of cut-throat global competition, education is a basic need. It has been observed over the past few years that globalisation has laid special emphasis on quality education. It has highlighted the need for the expansion of science and technology in the current education system and has made it effective by expanding vocational and skill education, enabling people to find new paths of opportunity.

Assam has long been beset with a host of complex socio-political issues. One such intricate issue that needs mention here is the varied challenges in the school education system in the state. The government is doing the needful to tackle them. It is undeniable that there has been a sharp decline in quality of education, from the primary to the secondary level – a phenomenon that was not observed, especially in urban areas, in the 1970s, when vernacular-medium schools had numerous students on their rolls belonging to well-to-do and poor families alike, and the average pass percentage of these schools, including those in Guwahati, was simply impressive. This can be attributed to English-medium schools being few and far between at that time in many urban areas, including Guwahati. But today, the decline in enrolment in

vernacular-medium schools is a major concern, largely due to the growth of English-medium schools.

However, the state government has been making every effort to improve the quality of education through various schemes to enhance enrolment and achieve the objectives of universal primary education – such as Operation Blackboard, the Restructured Teacher Training System, the Midday Meal Scheme and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. These have immensely contributed to removing barriers in achieving the goals of universal education for all children in the age group of 6-14 years under Article 45. But, disappointingly, despite the government's serious efforts to improve the quality of education from the primary to the secondary level, the results have hardly met expectations.

Significantly, the Central government recently initiated remedial measures to improve the infrastructure, such as the construction of school buildings, provision of drinking water, toilet facilities, furniture, etc., at the primary and secondary levels. It cannot be denied that to run a school smoothly, the school campus and its surroundings need to be academically friendly and must have the necessary desks, benches and teaching equipment.

But, mere infrastructural development will seldom help improve educational quality. The quality of education will improve only if the responsibility is entrusted to teachers who can develop themselves as real educators. Only then can the purpose of imparting better education to students be served. It must be kept in mind that if

the linchpin of primary and secondary education is inherently weak, there is little or no likelihood of improving the overall quality of education.

Therefore, prudence suggests that what is most needed is the recruitment of competent teachers based on the actual needs of classrooms, with special emphasis on quality education. A study shows that students suffer qualitatively when they do not have a trained teacher in a subject to provide effective instruction. Only a qualified teacher can be expected to improve the quality of classroom education. But the problem is that there is a dearth of subject teachers with high-quality training in many educational institutions. For example, if some institutions have science teachers, others may instead have Maths or Art teachers. Therefore, with teachers not being recruited in schools according to students' needs, the annual results of many of these institutions are disappointing.

The Central government sets clear guidelines for the teacher-pupil ratio (TPR): 1:30 for primary schools, 1:35 for upper primary, and 1:40 for secondary. Therefore, a teacher should be recruited for every 30 to 40 students from primary to secondary school respectively. If this is implemented, the concerned teacher can give the individual attention students deserve. But is this well-considered arrangement maintained? Conversely, if a classroom is overcrowded, many students from backward and marginalised communities, particularly those with lower academic aptitude, can hardly be expected to learn anything effectively. Therefore, it is understandable that primary and

secondary education in Assam can be improved if teachers are recruited with the classroom student strength in mind.

At a time when the Government of Assam is leaving no stone unturned to enhance students' enrolment in vernacular-medium schools by improving the overall teaching and learning environment, the news of high dropout rates among high school students is disappointing. However, the State government's decision to form a dedicated team to conduct a detailed study of the problem of high dropout rates among secondary students (Classes VIII to X) is a well-thought-out, timely initiative. The team has been tasked with recommending a targeted, incentive-based scheme akin to the successful 'Nijut Moira' programme to curb dropouts.

A study has shown that children who are at risk of discontinuing their studies are mostly from vulnerable and marginalised groups. Often, they leave school for a variety of reasons. One major reason, unsurprisingly, is the need to contribute to their family's livelihood. Therefore, to curb dropouts, schools ought to arrange a special class within the daily routine for vocational and skill education at the secondary level, and engage teachers with extensive knowledge to impart these skills. Trained teachers need to develop the art of integrating vocational education with mainstream education, as stipulated in NEP 2020 – a sustainable solution to the problem. This approach should be made interesting for students and empower them to acquire skills that offer better livelihood options after school.

PM/14/6



# The fear of losing a school

With Uttar Pradesh initiating the process of merging over 10,000 primary schools with low attendance, anxiety grips families that can only afford government schooling.

**Mayank Kumar** reports on their worries, distances, tough terrain and safety, all of which may force people with low income and mobility to take their children, especially the girls, out of school

**S**angita Devi, 42, is feeling hot and thirsty. She has walked over 2 kilometres in the scorching heat in a protest she hopes will yield results. Fellow walkers ask her to take a sip of water. "Let's finish the march; then I will drink and eat," says Devi, who walks for her son's education.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous State with a population of over 200 million people, has witnessed many such demonstrations in the past month. On June 16, the Basic Education Department initiated the process of what it described as a "pairing" of over 10,000 government primary and upper primary schools that had a low enrolment across the State.

The protesters argue that the government's move will force students to travel longer distances in difficult geographical areas. Devi is hopeful of a reversal after she heard from a relative residing in Sahapurva village in Lucknow district about the cancellation of the merger.

There are over 1.3 lakh government-run primary (up to Class 5), upper primary (Classes 6-8), and composite schools (Classes 1-8) in Uttar Pradesh. During the 2023-24 academic year, over 1.67 crore students were enrolled in them.

Devi is determined to send her son to school even if the decision doesn't change. "I will pick and drop him on foot," she says, adding, "I have seen the importance of education. My nephew is earning over ₹30,000 per month after completing an Industrial Training Institute course. He has constructed a two-storey house after saving for five years."

She, then, looks towards her own house, a temporary thatched structure. Devi is a daily wage labourer with irregular work, earning ₹400 a day. "I am not paid my daily wage on time," she says, adding that she has no ancestral land, and life is a struggle. Some day, when her son is educated, she hopes to have a pucca house of three rooms.

## In and out of school

"My nephew's school in Sahapurva was merged with the primary school at Paharpur village," says Vinendra, 34. Sahapurva villagers stopped sending their children to the new school in Paharpur, because it was a little over 1 km away and the road connecting the villages was busy, he says. "Attendance dipped after the merger. No one wants to risk their children's lives. We are farm labourers and cannot afford to drop and pick them up daily. We don't have vehicles to do this," he adds.

He says he has heard that the Sahapurva school will be reopened soon. The Basic Education Department issued a clarification on July 30, saying that no school has been permanently paired.

"If student numbers rise or seating becomes inadequate, classes will resume in the original buildings. Complaints from certain districts regarding the initiative have been taken seriously, and necessary action has been taken, including restoring operations in certain schools where required," says Sandeep Singh, Minister for Primary Education. The Department further stated that the distance between paired primary schools will not exceed 1 km for primary and 3 km for upper primary schools.

The Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court, on July 25, ordered a status quo on the merger of primary schools in Shajapur district after it noticed discrepancies in documents presented earlier with respect to the merger of schools.

Ankur Kumar, 32, from Choudarva village in Amethi, now has to travel to Pathan village primary school, passing through a forest area. "I want to study. I hope to earn a stable income and go up socially. My father drops me off on foot daily," he says. They don't have enough money for him to go to a private school. Government schools are free of cost up to class 10; privately-owned and run schools in villages could cost anywhere from ₹200-2,000 per month.

The threat of school closure has frightened Kanchai Lal, 61, a daily wage labourer from Bar Khas village in Azamgarh district.

"I heard the school will be closed. It will be a devastating blow as I can't afford private school for my son. He is now in Class 4. For daily wage labourers, anything more than meals twice a day



[Tag] Uttar Pradesh primary school teachers' unions staging a protest at the Basic Education Department office in Lucknow against the school pairing; Sarajwadi Party workers protesting in Lucknow over the issue. **MAYANK KUMAR**

is out of reach. Free education was a major help," says Lal, who is from one of the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities. The villagers are planning a protest if the merger happens.

For girl children, most villagers say, it is doubly difficult, because safety is an issue. In June 2024, Uttar Pradesh had registered the highest number of complaints with the National Commission for Women.

## The 'merger' debate

The merger initiative has faced a similar backlash from political parties that are critical of the Bharatiya Janata Party in power, both at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh.

"The merger is a planned design to keep the poor away from education. The project is leading to increasing travel distance, potentially leading to higher dropout rates," says Anil Yadav, a senior Congress leader who is involved in demonstrations against the merger.

He adds that it is mainly those from SC, Scheduled Tribe (ST), and other marginalised communities who send their children to government schools. Children between 6 and 14 years will be impacted the most, with the highest number being girls, he adds.

He dismisses the temporary closure clause, saying that any modification "will demolish the overall education system in U.P.", a State that faces "a

lack of quality teachers and learning gaps among primary school students".

The Annual Status of Education Report, an India-wide survey by the education-focused non-profit Pratham, found in 2024 that in U.P., only 27.5% of government-school children in Class 3 could read a Class 2 text, and only 31.4% could do subtraction sums. In Class 5, only 50.5% of government school children could read a Class 2-level text, and 14.8% could divide. Uttar Pradesh, the report records, has seen an overall betterment of education, and teachers worry that this school merger will set children back.

The school pairing initiative is based on the National Education Policy-2020 recommendations that push for integrating small schools with better-equipped institutions in the vicinity. A letter from the Ministry of Education dated June 5, 2024, stated that merging schools with fewer than 50 students can significantly improve the learning environment and educational quality. Following this, a meeting chaired by the Director General of School Education on October 28, 2024, districts were directed to prioritise the review and merger of low-enrolment schools.

The Minister says, "In schools with very low enrolment, students often miss out on essential experiences such as classroom interaction, peer learning, group activities, games, and project-based tasks. Integrating these students into adq-

uately enrolled schools provides them with a complete educational atmosphere." He says this gives the government the chance to invest more in schools, with smart classes, information and communication technology labs, and sports equipment.

## Privatisation push

The vacant school buildings will house hiveshiksha (play schools) and anganwadis centres. "This will be a meaningful step towards strengthening pre-primary education and preparing children mentally for Grade 1," says Singh.

Adarsh M. Saji, the newly elected president of the Students' Federation of India (SFI), feels differently. He ascribes a "privatisation agenda" to the merger and says the government is "asserting its stand" that "the marginalised and oppressed are outside of their priority".

He says, "In the last four years alone, over 80,000 schools have been shut down across India. The BJP-ruled States like Madhya Pradesh top the list in school closures, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat." This, he feels, is a setback to the Right to Education, which became a Fundamental Right in 2009, offering free education to every child between 6 and 14 years. He participated in a protest march in the Sultanpur district.

The plan of "merging" schools comes from Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-Ed), a project launched by NITI Aayog in 2017, calling for targeted interventions in capacity building, school consolidation, and systematic reforms.

It pushed for reorganising and consolidating schools into larger schools. Implemented in three States—Jharkhand, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh—the project led to the merger of over 8,000 schools, which it described as "sub-scale schools" with larger schools.

Sub-scale schools are educational institutions with fewer than 50 students and often suffer from a host of challenges, including the lack of teachers, leading to multi-grade teaching, a lack of subject-specific expertise, and poor infrastructure. Some may not even have playgrounds or boundary walls.

## Vacancies and unemployment

Some teachers' unions are up in arms against the merger, fearing post-cuts in schools. They hold protests across Uttar Pradesh, but the government's assistance last week that there are no job cuts on the cards has given them hope.

"We are already grievanced, as teachers are made to do multiple other government activities other than teaching. But yes, we were alarmed," says Jyandra Yadav, a teachers' union leader associated with the Uttar Pradesh Pratham Shiksha Sangh.

A 2023 report by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, a government body, points out that only 19% of a teacher's annual school working hours are spent on teaching activities.

The remaining time is spent on non-teaching duties like data collection, election duties, mid-day meal distribution, and administrative processes like transfers and reviewing leave applications.

Prospective teachers in U.P. are also agitated, claiming the merger has brought into the limelight the government's failure to provide employment.

"Over the last seven years in U.P., not a single job vacancy for primary teachers has been advertised. The last vacancy came up in 2018. Many young people completing teaching degrees are waiting for job opportunities," says Abhishek Tiwari, a Shajapur-based State president of NITI Aayog's Pratham Shiksha Sangh, Uttar Pradesh. The Basic Training Certificate (BTC) and Diploma in Elementary Education (DIEET) qualify a person to teach primary school students.

NITI Aayog's 2023 report had noted that there were 2.1 lakh teaching positions vacant in U.P.'s government schools. Aspirants claim that even the advertised vacancies in U.P. face court cases for years, leading to delayed appointments.

"We saw this with the 2018 advertisement," says Tiwari, adding that people waste both their youth and their parents' money trying to get jobs away from the hands of the



A primary school building in a dilapidated condition at Bakhli Ka Talab in Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh. The school may soon close to make way for the merger process. **MAYANK KUMAR**



# The physics of violin, when music and science meet

In 1922 a young man, C Subrahmanya Ayyar, gave his first solo performance playing the violin at the Presidency College, Madras. The soiree was followed by a lecture by Ayyar's younger brother on the physical properties of the sound made by the violin. The latter was none other than the eminent physicist, Sir CV Raman. The connection between physics and the violin went much further. Ayyar himself would quote from the works of eminent physicists like Hermann von Helmholtz in his writings on the violin and Raman would go on to build a "mechanical violin player".

In the roughly two decades between World Wars I and II, Indian physicists published nearly a dozen papers in the two foremost international physics journals of the day, *The Physical Review* and *The Philosophical Magazine*, on the violin or research closely related to it. There were many more papers in local scientific journals as well. The history of the violin in the hands of Indian physicists is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the relationship between science and culture.

Music historian Amanda Weidman relates Ayyar and Raman's interest in the violin to the larger history of the creation of a "classical" form of Carnatic music. The first violins had arrived in India in the 1760s in Calcutta. But they were soon taken up by musicians in southern India. Baluswamy Dikshitar, the brother of composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar, the composer-king of Thanjavur (in today's Kerala) Swati Tirunak, his court performer Vadivelu, and Varahapayyar, the court minister of Maharaja Serfoji of Thanjavur, are all known to have played the violin around the dawns of the 19th century.

A century later, by the 1920s, the violin had been thoroughly incorporated into Carnatic music. But

strenuous efforts were being made to distance it from its earlier historical connections to Irish and Scottish fiddling — from which the Kannada name for it, *pitelsi*, had derived, and to establish it as a classical instrument. Even the way the instrument was held, often using one's feet, were vigorously criticised by reformers such as Ayyar who sought to reshape its profile and playing technique to align it with classical western conventions.

Weidman also points to the explicit links between these classicising tendencies and the expression of modernised caste and class identities. There were even advertisements of violins targeted explicitly to the then-rising Brahmin middle class in colonial Madras.

Such biographical and social context might suggest that the Indian physicist's enthusiasm for the violin was entirely derived from the social milieu of colonial Madras. That, however, would be misleading. If we look closer at the places and people involved in violin research, we find a more complicated history.

The man who published the most in international journals on the violin was Kulesh Chandra Kar. His very first paper on the subject, while still a student, would be published in the *Philosophical Magazine*. It was indeed Raman himself who first suggested this line of research to Kar. Kar was himself a musical enthusiast and so he readily embraced the research. But Kar had no discernible relationship to Carnatic music or the social life of Madras. Born in Bihar, Kar was mostly educated in Calcutta and went on to teach at the physics department of Presidency College, Calcutta.

As a charismatic teacher, Kar was successful in getting several talented students interested in violin research. One of the students who took up violin research through his influence was BK Sen. Sen



By the 1920s, the violin had been thoroughly incorporated into Carnatic music. AT PHOTO

went on to work at the physics department of Rajshahi College. In present-day Bangladesh. Like Kar, Sen too rebuilt and improved upon the mechanical violin player originally designed by Raman. Unfortunately, Sen's model was left behind and eventually destroyed during the Partition.

Other, younger researchers such as NK Dutta and SK Ghosh, at Presidency College, Calcutta and RN Ghosh at Allahabad University would also publish multiple papers on violin research. They too worked with versions of the mechanical violin player.

Based in Allahabad, Calcutta, Shilpur, and Rajshahi, most of these researchers were Bengalis. They had little exposure to Carnatic music and certainly were not caught up in the social processes of colonial Madras, as Ayyar and Raman had been. Those amongst them that were musically inclined had their ears tuned to Hindustani classical music, rather than Carnatic.

The violin had never been adopted into Hindustani music the way it had been absorbed into Carnatic music. It was only around the mid-1940s that

VG Jog began to introduce the violin into Hindustani classical circles. Scientists like Kar, Dutta, or Ghosh, would, therefore, be unlikely to associate the instrument directly with their own musical tastes.

In fact, it is possible that the basis of the interest in violin acoustics amongst Calcutta physicists had roots that predated Raman's. Ramendrasunder Tribedi, a physicist and prolific science-writer, had written about experiments with the violin that were similar — though much simpler — than the ones conducted by Raman sometime around the 1900s. The essay was published in 1926, four years after Tribedi's death. Tribedi was extremely prominent in Calcutta's intellectual circles. He was a close friend and later relative by marriage to Rabindranath Tagore as well as being a founding member and president of the Bengali Literary Association. His work and writings would therefore have been influential for younger researchers.

Yet, Tribedi was a connoisseur and student of Hindustani classical music. The roots of Tribedi's influence, like Ayyar's, went back to the research of Helmholtz, whom Tribedi addressed as "Mahatma Helmholtz".

While personal interests and cultural resonances often amplified the attraction of particular lines of research, physics also had its own intellectual lineages. The violin, through Helmholtz, had emerged as much a research tool as a musical instrument. The two biographies of the violin — as research tool and musical instrument — occasionally intersected and occasionally did not. To completely conflate the two would not only be misleading but would also caricature the complicated relationship between science and culture.

Like people, objects such as the violin, perform in multiple arenas of human existence and creativity. Culture and science are both such arenas. The mutual relationship of these two arenas cannot be predetermined. It unfolds differently in different historical contexts and through the actual traffic of people and objects between these arenas.

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Projit Bihari Mukharji



SUGATA BOSE

# MY TEACHER RAJAT KANTA RAY

*He challenged orthodoxies, upheld finest traditions of intellectual scholarship*

IN 1975, WE were third-year students at Presidency College, Calcutta, when a breath of fresh air entered seminar room 17 on the first floor of the old building in the form of Professor Rajat Kanta Ray. A freshly minted PhD from the University of Cambridge, he integrated the most recent, cutting-edge historical research in his lectures to undergraduates. He believed in the inextricable link between scholarship and teaching. The more mischievous among us parodied the extravagant hand gestures that accompanied his erudite lectures, but we loved him because he treated us as equals.

In February 1977, he was the professor-in-charge who took us on a historical excursion to Khajuraho and other sites in Madhya Pradesh. We were mesmerised by his deep knowledge of architectural history. The doors of his home in Jodhpur Park were always open to his students.

Rajat Kanta Ray had done his doctoral research in the environment of the so-called Cambridge school of nationalism, but he expressed his reasoned dissent from some of its supercilious attitudes in a path-breaking article on "Political change in British India". His first work focused on the political history of Bengal during the 50-year timespan from 1875 to 1925. He also wrote authoritatively with Ratnalekha Ray on agrarian history in the colonial period. Having been taught by him to think criti-

Equally adept at political and economic history, Rajat Ray did path-breaking research on the history of industrialisation and industrial policy. One of his finest long-form articles was on the bazaar and the long-distance flows of credit and finance that connected South Asia to Southeast Asia, West Asia and East Africa across the Indian Ocean. I urged him to write a book on the subject, but he was quite happy to hand over the baton to the next generation of Indian Ocean historians.

cally and challenge orthodoxies, I offered an alternative analysis of agrarian social structure in my own doctoral work at Cambridge. I was always struck by his generosity and open-mindedness in accepting criticism from even his most devoted students.

Equally adept at political and economic history, Rajat Ray did path-breaking research on the history of industrialisation and industrial policy. One of his finest long-form articles was on the bazaar and the long-distance flows of credit and finance that connected South Asia to Southeast Asia, West Asia and East Africa across the Indian Ocean. I urged him to write a book on the subject, but he was quite happy to hand over the baton to the next generation of Indian Ocean historians.

Later in his long and distinguished academic career, he turned to exploring cultural and intellectual history. He wrote with grace and imagination about emotional history and what he called "the felt community". During a visit to Harvard early in the 21st century, those were the topics he wanted to discuss with me.

In conventional terms, being appointed vice-chancellor of Visva Bharati from 2006 to 2011 was his crowning glory. I was not particularly excited about seeing my revered teacher take on the burdens of administration. On one occasion, he pro-

trated himself before a statue of Debendranath Tagore to seek the sage's guidance. Yet, his time in Santiniketan rekindled his interest in Rabindranath's concept of *jibandebo*. He devoted himself in his final years to writing in Bengali on this theme.

There was another context in which I saw Rajat Ray closely. For decades, he was a member of the Council of the Netaji Research Bureau. My late mother Krishna Bose and I sought his advice about international academic conferences at Netaji Bhawan where he was invariably a very lively intellectual presence. He was masterful in chairing history seminars.

The passing of this exemplary scholar-teacher at this critical juncture in our country's history leaves an enormous void. He was bold and forthright in standing up to the assaults on academic freedom and the discipline of history by the forces of Hindu majoritarianism. His answer, however, was not to retreat into narrow provincialism but to uphold the best intellectual traditions of Bengal in their full amplitude. In the enveloping darkness of Bengal's all-round educational and cultural decline, my teacher Rajat Kanta Ray lit a candle whose flame will forever burn bright.

The writer is Gardiner Professor of History at Harvard University

26/12



*Parryodhama*, surrounded by *Asplenium* in  
diversified *Kathala* (cactus) marks

*Sage Workbooks* is in the form of an 'engine of prophecy': essentially a Transhumanist computation running on a silicon computer.

*Infertile, wearing fertility bracelet  
and diagnosed with severe psoriasis*

Korean soldiers, storming Pusan positions while bandaging behind protective log shields, with both sides displaying intense war-particle weapons that not already visible

Ulmex, flowering over the headfield of Kura Khetra, looking like 'flying saucers designed and built by artisans'

Five women warriors, charging into battle  
with belting around at waist

Jaideep Unadurti

There is considerable evidence that the

[illegible][illegible]

The press releases from that time are hortatory in tone, with Japan stating that "we will help and encourage the people of the East and West to work together to bring about a new world order—a world of peace, justice, freedom, and mutual understanding."

The writer who would become known as the new voice of the Indian people, Tagore, was born in Calcutta in 1861. He was a member of the Indian National Congress and was a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi. He was a poet, a playwright, a novelist, and a social reformer. He was a member of the Indian National Congress and was a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi. He was a poet, a playwright, a novelist, and a social reformer.

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They saw the beginning of the rise of the highly refined (and imaginary) first cars also called "barkas Veda."

# ECONOMICS TIMES (P-5), 10 AUGUST 2025

# Techno-Vedic Time Travel

The answer to India's inexplicably long search for science-fiction nirvana might be in a heady mix of climate crisis and mythology.



**SCIENCE FICTION'S TIME LAG**

While *Alphaville* was envisaged as the beginning of a cinematic universe with its own cast, characters and films, it never quite took off. The "worst" on-screen ever was its lead, Romy Schey, who was cast as a normally American woman in the role of an alien from a time far ahead in a post-apocalyptic cybernetic world.

The French director's sense of dramatic irony, dogged realism "inspired" by his ideological moral hatred for the world as it then stood, of the 1930s.

Though French and American film is not so locked, it perhaps set in motion a process, which would be described (after film's fall) as "aligned" and "aligned" by the French film industry, as a new aesthetic movement, that glorified hyperbole to avoid the political and technical, to be a temporary expedient of unending apocalyptic violence, and the stage of the, usually mass characters who would.

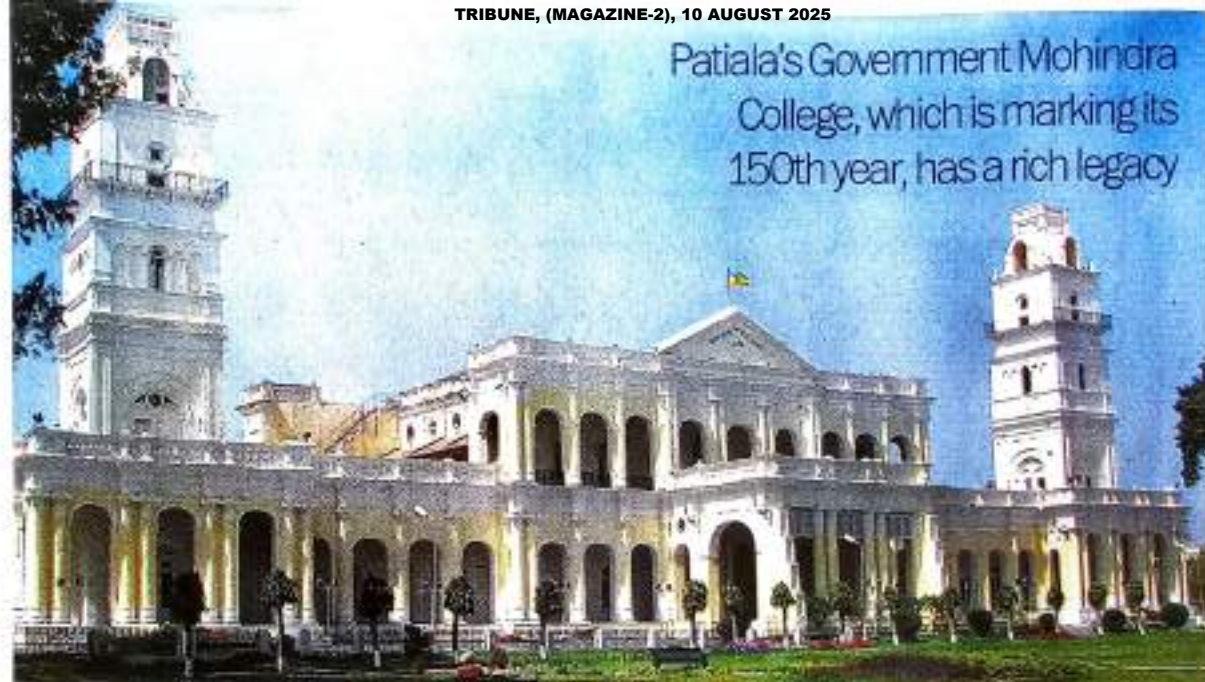
But science fiction always took the what if game too far. Why? Well, Indian science fiction takes off in a different way.

The development of the genre in the United States, and western, like *Alphaville* and *Metropolis* was born on the tide of rapid and urbanisation, scientific progress, and a wide horizon of world war.

The genres were mostly just loved engines of plots, aimed at alien markets, who painted the universe as it was, or the 30s, 40s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s, 2030s, 2040s, 2050s, 2060s, 2070s, 2080s, 2090s, 2100s, 2110s, 2120s, 2130s, 2140s, 2150s, 2160s, 2170s, 2180s, 2190s, 2200s, 2210s, 2220s, 2230s, 2240s, 2250s, 2260s, 2270s, 2280s, 2290s, 2300s, 2310s, 2320s, 2330s, 2340s, 2350s, 2360s, 2370s, 2380s, 2390s, 2400s, 2410s, 2420s, 2430s, 2440s, 2450s, 2460s, 2470s, 2480s, 2490s, 2500s, 2510s, 2520s, 2530s, 2540s, 2550s, 2560s, 2570s, 2580s, 2590s, 2600s, 2610s, 2620s, 2630s, 2640s, 2650s, 2660s, 2670s, 2680s, 2690s, 2700s, 2710s, 2720s, 2730s, 2740s, 2750s, 2760s, 2770s, 2780s, 2790s, 2800s, 2810s, 2820s, 2830s, 2840s, 2850s, 2860s, 2870s, 2880s, 2890s, 2900s, 2910s, 2920s, 2930s, 2940s, 2950s, 2960s, 2970s, 2980s, 2990s, 3000s, 3010s, 3020s, 3030s, 3040s, 3050s, 3060s, 3070s, 3080s, 3090s, 3100s, 3110s, 3120s, 3130s, 3140s, 3150s, 3160s, 3170s, 3180s, 3190s, 3200s, 3210s, 3220s, 3230s, 3240s, 3250s, 3260s, 3270s, 3280s, 3290s, 3300s, 3310s, 3320s, 3330s, 3340s, 3350s, 3360s, 3370s, 3380s, 3390s, 3400s, 3410s, 3420s, 3430s, 3440s, 3450s, 3460s, 3470s, 3480s, 3490s, 3500s, 3510s, 3520s, 3530s, 3540s, 3550s, 3560s, 3570s, 3580s, 3590s, 3600s, 3610s, 3620s, 3630s, 3640s, 3650s, 3660s, 3670s, 3680s, 3690s, 3700s, 3710s, 3720s, 3730s, 3740s, 3750s, 3760s, 3770s, 3780s, 3790s, 3800s, 3810s, 3820s, 3830s, 3840s, 3850s, 3860s, 3870s, 3880s, 3890s, 3900s, 3910s, 3920s, 3930s, 3940s, 3950s, 3960s, 3970s, 3980s, 3990s, 4000s, 4010s, 4020s, 4030s, 4040s, 4050s, 4060s, 4070s, 4080s, 4090s, 4100s, 4110s, 4120s, 4130s, 4140s, 4150s, 4160s, 4170s, 4180s, 4190s, 4200s, 4210s, 4220s, 4230s, 4240s, 4250s, 4260s, 4270s, 4280s, 4290s, 4300s, 4310s, 4320s, 4330s, 4340s, 4350s, 4360s, 4370s, 4380s, 4390s, 4400s, 4410s, 4420s, 4430s, 4440s, 4450s, 4460s, 4470s, 4480s, 4490s, 4500s, 4510s, 4520s, 4530s, 4540s, 4550s, 4560s, 4570s, 4580s, 4590s, 4600s, 4610s, 4620s, 4630s, 4640s, 4650s, 4660s, 4670s, 4680s, 4690s, 4700s, 4710s, 4720s, 4730s, 4740s, 4750s, 4760s, 4770s, 4780s, 4790s, 4800s, 4810s, 4820s, 4830s, 4840s, 4850s, 4860s, 4870s, 4880s, 4890s, 4900s, 4910s, 4920s, 4930s, 4940s, 4950s, 4960s, 4970s, 4980s, 4990s, 5000s, 5010s, 5020s, 5030s, 5040s, 5050s, 5060s, 5070s, 5080s, 5090s, 5100s, 5110s, 5120s, 5130s, 5140s, 5150s, 5160s, 5170s, 5180s, 5190s, 5200s, 5210s, 5220s, 5230s, 5240s, 5250s, 5260s, 5270s, 5280s, 5290s, 5300s, 5310s, 5320s, 5330s, 5340s, 5350s, 5360s, 5370s, 5380s, 5390s, 5400s, 5410s, 5420s, 5430s, 5440s, 5450s, 5460s, 5470s, 5480s, 5490s, 5500s, 5510s, 5520s, 5530s, 5540s, 5550s, 5560s, 5570s, 5580s, 5590s, 5600s, 5610s, 5620s, 5630s, 5640s, 5650s, 5660s, 5670s, 5680s, 5690s, 5700s, 5710s, 5720s, 5730s, 5740s, 5750s, 5760s, 5770s, 5780s, 5790s, 5800s, 5810s, 5820s, 5830s, 5840s, 5850s, 5860s, 5870s, 5880s, 5890s, 5900s, 5910s, 5920s, 5930s, 5940s, 5950s, 5960s, 5970s, 5980s, 5990s, 6000s, 6010s, 6020s, 6030s, 6040s, 6050s, 6060s, 6070s, 6080s, 6090s, 6100s, 6110s, 6120s, 6130s, 6140s, 6150s, 6160s, 6170s, 6180s, 6190s, 6200s, 6210s, 6220s, 6230s, 6240s, 6250s, 6260s, 6270s, 6280s, 6290s, 6300s, 6310s, 6320s, 6330s, 6340s, 6350s, 6360s, 6370s, 6380s, 6390s, 6400s, 6410s, 6420s, 6430s, 6440s, 6450s, 6460s, 6470s, 6480s, 6490s, 6500s, 6510s, 6520s, 6530s, 6540s, 6550s, 6560s, 6570s, 6580s, 6590s, 6600s, 6610s, 6620s, 6630s, 6640s, 6650s, 6660s, 6670s, 6680s, 6690s, 6700s, 6710s, 6720s, 6730s, 6740s, 6750s, 6760s, 6770s, 6780s, 6790s, 6800s, 6810s, 6820s, 6830s, 6840s, 6850s, 6860s, 6870s, 6880s, 6890s, 6900s, 6910s, 6920s, 6930s, 6940s, 6950s, 6960s, 6970s, 6980s, 6990s, 7000s, 7010s, 7020s, 7030s, 7040s, 7050s, 7060s, 7070s, 7080s, 7090s, 7100s, 7110s, 7120s, 7130s, 7140s, 7150s, 7160s, 7170s, 7180s, 7190s, 7200s, 7210s, 7220s, 7230s, 7240s, 7250s, 7260s, 7270s, 7280s,



Patiala's Government Mohindra College, which is marking its 150th year, has a rich legacy



Government Mohindra College's architectural splendour makes it a unique institution. PHOTO COURTESY: SHARAJ RAI

# Beginnings, 1875

MANINDER SIDHU

**A**MONG the oldest colleges of North India, Government Mohindra College, Patiala, crossed the 150th milestone of its historic journey on March 30. I consider it serendipitous that I joined as principal soon after. Inevitably, I delved into some of the archival material to learn more about the institution that transforms you the moment you come face to face with its overwhelming architectural grandeur and sprawling greens.

'Mahindra', as it is popularly called, has among its alumni scores of individuals who have gone on to occupy high offices, and are top professionals. Gian Singh Rarewala, former chief minister of Pepsu, too, was an alumnus.

The college was started as a 'language school' by Maharaja Narinder Singh in 1860, with a focus on teaching three oriental languages: Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. His son, Maharaja Mahinder Singh, with a sound vision of state education, created a regular education department on the lines of the education department of British India on June 13, 1870. In 1873, the school of languages, also referred to as the 'Centre School', was upgraded to a college.

In 1873, its 300 students prepared for an entrance test of Calcutta University, following which the college was affiliated to it. Due to this umbilical connection, a fair share of the faculty members and principals who served the college in the colonial period were from Bengal.

Mahindra College, in its 'Centre School' phase, was located in the congested areas of Haveli Nizam Khan, Samania Gate; Haveli Mahant Kashi Gir, Dhak Bazaar, and Haveli Shamsher Singh near Triveni Chowk.

The present location of 21 acres was selected for building a majestic complex blending western and Indian architecture.

Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India, laid the foundation stone on March 30, 1875. Built in nine years by skilled craftsmen at a cost of ₹5 lakh, it was inaugurated by Lord Ripon, the then Viceroy of India, in 1884.

The journey of Mahindra when the freedom movement took off was not an easy one. A com-

plete riot was observed on the death of Lala Lajpat Rai in the college, in direct conflict with British interests. But existential crises were overcome by the sagacious planning of its insightful principals. Some of these legendary educationists deserve a mention: the tenures of Atul Kumar Ghosh (1886-1906), Edmund Candler (1906-1915), TL Viswani (1915-1919), Mirmohan Singh (1919-21), BN Khosla (1927-45), Teja Singh (1949-52), Bhagat Singh (1967-73) and Gursewak Singh (1972-1976), among others, are remarkable for shaping the destiny of Mahindra. The Government of India released a stamp to mark the centenary celebrations of the institution in 1988. A stamp was also released to honour Principal Viswani for his contribution to Indian thought and higher education.

AK Ghosh, the longest-serving principal, was instrumental in the foundational development of Mahindra. A professor of English, he was transferred to Muir College, Allahabad, in 1906. Edmund Candler, a British journalist based in Bengal, was handed the reins of the college. Ghosh spent the last phase of his life at Allahabad in the company of Motilal Nehru and Madan Mohan Malviya. The question of his supersession was also raised in the British Parliament then. He wrote several books and commentaries, like Viswani, but his works were downplayed due to his association with the freedom struggle.

The sturdy backbone of the college in the 1920s and '30s were its legendary teachers. Take English teacher KK Mulherjee, for instance. His dedication, versatility and brilliance inspire awe and admiration. As in charge of the dramatics society of the college, he directed and staged several plays of Shakespeare. One play was highly appreciated by the three members of the university inspection board: AC Woolmer, Registrar of Punjab University; GA Wadham, Principal, Khalsa College, Amritsar; and Prof Ruchiram.

Prof Mukherjee himself performed the role of Skellock and Mohammed Munir, who later became the second Chief Justice of Pakistan, acted as Antonio. Mindful of the role of wit, humour and guffaws in a student's life, he founded the Jolly Club. The first college magazine, *Mohindra*, was published under his stewardship. He retired

as Secretary, Education, UT, Chandigarh.

Among other professors, MR Kohli of the Economics Department became the founder of the New Bank of India; Prilam Singh became a follower of Bahai religion to serve humanity; and KL Buddhi Raja was promoted to the IAS.

Post-Independence, several faculty members worked their way into the civil services and a considerable number of principals were elevated as Directors, Higher Education, and chairmen of school education boards. Principals Bhagat Singh, Gursewak Singh and Harbalkish Singh and sharmas Indrajit Kaur served as Vice-Chancellors of Punjabi University.

In its eventful history, the college had periods of affiliation to Calcutta University, Punjab University, Lahore, and Punjab University; it finally dropped anchor at Punjabi University, Patiala, in 1982. The BA programme took off in 1880 and BA degree classes commenced in 1887 to mark the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign.

The FSc course was introduced in 1920 and the BSc programme in 1939. MA in Mathematics was introduced in 1912. MA in Philosophy (1882) was one of the earliest post-graduate courses to be taught, such was the thrust on rationality and humanistic values!

Post-Independence, the Anglicised fundamentals of the college merged with the regional cultural ethos. Architecturally, the regal edifice erected by the Patiala monarch still stands apart from post-colonial structural additions.

With a strength of 7,000-8,000 students, it is among the largest government colleges in the state. In the last few decades, to match the growth in academic curricula, a befitting infrastructure has been put in place. Attention to the well-being of its faculty and students, and enhancement and maintenance of its resources will go a long way in upholding its legacy.

The college provided free education to all till 1980. It seems the time is right to repay its intangible debt. Its declining architectural health could do with some care. I pray its illustrious alumni, faculty and the administration respond to the structural plea of this heritage public institution.

—The writer is principal of Government Mohindra College, Patiala



A. Joseph Dorairaj

**D**uring admission season, marks, grades and percentiles are the talk of the town. A staggering number of students have scored very high marks and outstanding grades. Some have managed to score centum even in arts subjects. But this raises a question: is there a strong correlation between marks and competencies? Sadly, the answer is no.

### Problems

Where is the gap and how should it be addressed? Most teachers, including those in colleges and universities, are generous in awarding marks and grades so that they do not invite criticism that their students have not performed well in exams. The assessment pattern itself also subtly promotes high grades. Most questions are remember-recall questions that only test rote memory. There are hardly any higher order questions that test the ability to think, analyse, evaluate and apply concepts and theories learnt in classrooms to real life. In many institutions, the Continuous Formative or Internal Assessment, which accounts for close to 40% of the total marks, is not rigorous. Teachers generously award anywhere between 70-90% on the argument that students need to be helped to come out in flying colours.

The key question, therefore, is: do CGPAs help students progress to higher studies or in their employment prospects? Many students

who score excellent marks are unable to secure admission in premier institutions for their Master's and research programmes or crack job interviews. This is a reflection of their cognitive capabilities and the educational system. Their CGPAs have given them a false sense of excellence.

### Strategies

How can this be set right? By creating and promoting an ecosystem with a decent correlation between student competencies and grades. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy talks about six levels of

# Marks are not enough

We need to re-visit and re-define excellence in terms of students' ability to navigate the complex challenges of life



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

knowledge and question papers should deal with all of them. Higher order questions that talk about analysis, critiques and evaluation and the translation of concepts and theories into realities are crucial. When confronted regularly with challenging questions that are not memory-based, students will be forced to think and sharpen their cognitive capabilities. Certain key education outcomes such as multiculturalism and adaptability cannot be quantified and assessed using traditional benchmarks of excellence but they are vital to one's

growth and societal development.

Students should be helped to think beyond CGPAs and transition to the real world where skills and competencies, both cognitive and meta-cognitive, matter. They should realise that critical thinking, problem-solving and communication skills and emotional intelligence are crucial to navigate the complexities of life. They should be encouraged to go beyond textbooks, exams, and grades and step into the real world where they will be assessed not by their marks and

grades but by their cognitive capabilities and humane qualities.

This requires student-centric classrooms that promote thinking skills with an emphasis on analysis, interpretation and application and offer adequate space to raise questions and express diverse points of view on academic and non-academic topics. The obsession with marks and grades should be replaced by a focus on life-skills that will prepare future-ready citizens who can contribute to making the world a better place to live in.

In the final analysis, higher educational institutions should promote an ecosystem that weans students away from a memory-based educational system and nurtures their thinking capacities. Administrators, teachers and parents should realise that there should be a transition from classrooms to the real world fraught with multiple challenges. The whole exercise calls for a re-think on the notion of excellence. Traditionally, excellence in academic circles was equated with enviable CGPAs where students were graded on the basis of predetermined criteria. We need to re-visit and re-define excellence not so much in terms of marks and grades but in terms of students' ability to navigate the complex challenges of life. This obviously calls for going beyond marks, grades and percentiles.

The writer is an Emeritus Professor, Gandhigram Rural Institute Deemed to be University. Email: josephdorairaj@gmail.com

NALS

# Language lessons

The obsession with Hindi is diversion from the needs of school education

**T**amil Nadu and Karnataka are planning to implement a two-language formula for school education, as opposed to the push for a three-language policy in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Both States are inclined towards primacy for local languages, Tamil and Kannada; respectively, and then English in school education. Tamil Nadu has already unveiled its State Education Policy (SEP) while a commission has submitted its recommendations for Karnataka's SEP. Tamil Nadu has merely reiterated its existing two-language policy, but Karnataka is set to discontinue its three-language policy. The commission has proposed that Kannada or the child's mother tongue should be the medium of instruction up to Class 5, and preferably till Class 12. Kannada or whatever is the mother tongue and English will be the two compulsory languages. If implemented, this will replace the model that includes Hindi as a third compulsory language. Other recommendations include moving away from NCERT textbooks and developing a Karnataka-specific curriculum and bilingual teaching methods. The Tamil Nadu SEP, which was announced by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin recently, makes Tamil compulsory up to Class 10 across all boards. The NEP proposes a third language which should be Hindi or another Indian language, seen as an attempt to impose Hindi.

The Tamil Nadu SEP also commits to promote critical thinking, digital literacy, climate education, and social justice. Apart from a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) approach, the State also wants to offer special support for tribal students, first-generation learners, and students with disabilities. The government has pledged more support for public education. In fact, uniform high quality public education should be the biggest priority of school education policy for all States and the Centre. The Centre's ill-advised focus on language turns unproductive and controversial even though it does not insist on promoting Hindi on paper. The three-language policy is also in disregard for the demand for English language learning, and as a medium of instruction across States, including in the Hindi-speaking regions, and Gujarat and Maharashtra. Education policies have been a major driver of the development outcomes in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and any attempt to forcibly alter them by central policies would do no good to anyone. Tamil Nadu is fighting for the release of ₹2,152 crore in education funds from the Centre that is rightfully its. There is no harm in learning Hindi or any other language, but when perceived as a political project of domination, its promotion causes resistance. The Centre must give up its language obduracy and focus on several critical challenges in school education. It must work with State governments to tackle them. *ufo*



# Choice key to language policy for schools

The Tamil Nadu State Education Policy promises to “build an inclusive, equitable, resilient, and future-ready school education”. It has backed the intent with radical initiatives and necessary funds: The FY25 state budget allocated ₹44,042 crore for school education — 13.7% of the total state expenditure, among the highest in the country. Tamil Nadu, which pioneered mid-day meals in schools, now offers breakfast as well. The outcomes reveal their impact:

- The gross enrolment ratio is close to or above 95% at the primary, upper primary and secondary levels, with the retention rate exceeding 97%. Initiatives such as
- science labs and digital classrooms have helped boost
- learning outcomes among students from marginalised
- communities. The focussed investment in school
- education, similar to the trajectory followed by South East Asian countries, has helped Tamil Nadu emerge
- as an industrial powerhouse.

What, however, stands apart in this focussed push to improve educational standards is the government's language policy. Tamil Nadu has adopted a two-language formula, fearing that the Centre's backing for a three-language policy is merely a camouflage for Hindi imposition. Linguistic pride is central to Tamil identity, and the Dravidian parties have historically been vigilant against attempts to privilege Hindi over other Indian languages. That said, the state needs to ask if it should reformulate its stand to offer more choices to its students. No language should be imposed on students; neither should a government limit the linguistic options available to students. And science, not political rhetoric and pride, must guide language policy. A rational policy could opt for a three-language policy — evidence suggests that children are quick to learn languages early. The third language need not necessarily be Hindi; a bouquet of options, including other Dravidian and foreign languages, could be offered. A more liberal language policy will make the state's progressive education policy even better.

AT/M



# शिक्षकों की शिक्षा पर भी देना होगा ध्यान

**शि**क्षा के क्षेत्र में आने वाले वर्षों में कई नई चुनौतियाँ सामने आएंगी, जिनका सामना केवल वे युवा कर सकेंगे, जिनके पास उत्कृष्ट स्तर की शिक्षा होगी और जो नए समय के लिए उपयोगी कौशल से लैस होंगे तथा जीवनभर नए ज्ञान एवं कौशल सीखने के लिए तत्पर रहेंगे। यह उत्कृष्टता उन्हें उन्हीं संस्थानों से प्राप्त होगी, जिनकी कार्यसंस्कृति उच्च स्तर की होगी। कोठारी आयोग (1964-66) की रिपोर्ट आने के बाद देश में शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में गतिविधियाँ तेजी से बढ़ी थीं। चूंकि तब स्कूलों और प्रशिक्षण संस्थानों का तेजी से विस्तार आवश्यक था और वह तेजी से हुआ भी, इसलिए जब भी किसी व्यवस्था में तेजी से विस्तार होता है, तो गुणवत्ता में कमी को रोकने के विशेष प्रयास करने होते हैं, जिन पर ध्यान नहीं दिया जा सका। शिक्षक प्रशिक्षण में नए निजी संस्थान खोलने की ओर उन लोगों का ध्यान भी बढ़ी संख्या में गया, जो इसमें व्यापार की संभावनाएं देखने लगे थे। राज्य सरकारों द्वारा नए सरकारी शिक्षक प्रशिक्षण संस्थान खोलने से पीछे हटने से भी उन्हें भारी प्रोत्साहन मिला। शिक्षक प्रशिक्षण में गुणवत्ता का हास वर्ष 1970 के बाद विश्वविद्यालयों द्वारा पत्राचार से बीएड पाठ्यक्रमों के प्रारंभ होने से हुआ। सरकारी विश्वविद्यालयों ने केवल आर्थिक लाभ के लिए बिना पर्शुप और आवश्यक संसाधन जुटाए ही पत्राचार द्वारा बीएड पाठ्यक्रम प्रारंभ कर दिए थे। इन पाठ्यक्रमों में धनार्जन ही मुख्य लक्ष्य था।

वर्ष 1998-99 में राष्ट्रीय अध्यापक शिक्षा परिषद (एनएसीटीई) ने बिहार के तत्कालीन राज्यपाल को एक प्रतिवेदन देकर प्रस्तुति दी कि कैसे कुछ सरकारी विश्वविद्यालय खुलेआम बीएड की डिग्री 'बेच' रहे हैं। जांच हुई, छापे पड़े, गिरफ्तारियाँ हुईं तो केवल बीएड ही नहीं, अन्य अनेक विषयों की उपाधियाँ भी तैयार मिलीं। 'बिहार बीएड स्कैंडल 1999' के संबंध में जानकारी प्राप्त की जा सकती है। फिर क्या हुआ, इसके संबंध में एक अत्यंत कष्टकर वर्णन 2012 में उच्चतम न्यायालय द्वारा गठित आयोग के अध्यक्ष एवं भारत के पूर्व मुख्य न्यायाधीश



जगमोहन सिंह राणपूत



शिक्षा व्यवस्था की नींव है अध्यापक • फाइल

न्यायमूर्ति जेएस वर्मा ने भी लिखा, जो न केवल उनकी पीड़ा को दर्शाता है, बल्कि लगभग सभी नियामक संस्थाओं और व्यवस्था की दयनीय स्थिति का स्पष्ट वर्णन करता है। स्थिति 2020 तक भी वैसी ही रही। उनके कथन को राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति-2020 में दोहराना पड़ा, '...न्यायमूर्ति जेएस वर्मा आयोग (2012) के अनुसार स्टैंडअलोन टीईआइ (शिक्षक शिक्षा संस्थान), जिनकी संख्या 10,000 से अधिक है, अध्यापक शिक्षा के प्रति लेशमात्र गंभीरता से प्रयास नहीं कर रहे हैं, बल्कि इसके स्थान पर डिग्रियों को बेच रहे हैं। इस दिशा में अब तक किए गए विनियामक प्रयास न तो सिस्टम में बड़े पैमाने पर व्याप्त भ्रष्टाचार को रोक पाए हैं, और न ही गुणवत्ता के लिए निर्धारित बुनियादी मानकों को लागू कर पाए हैं, बल्कि इन प्रयासों का इस क्षेत्र में उत्कृष्टता और नवाचार पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव पड़ा है।'

कुछ परिवर्तनों के साथ ऐसे ही निष्कर्ष विभिन्न क्षेत्रों में कार्य कर रही अधिकांश नियामक संस्थाओं पर आज भी लागू होते हैं। इनमें से

शिक्षा में उत्कृष्टता, गुणवत्ता, नवाचार के लिए सबसे महत्वपूर्ण आधार प्रशिक्षित, प्रतिबद्ध और समर्पित अध्यापक हैं

एक राष्ट्रीय मूल्यांकन एवं प्रत्यायन परिषद (एनएएसी) ने अभी कुछ महीने पहले अपने लगभग 800 निरीक्षणकर्ताओं को हटाया, क्योंकि उसके कुछ निरीक्षणकर्ताओं को सीबीआई ने पकड़े थे। जो इसे समझ सकता है, वह यह भी समझ जाएगा कि एनसीटीई की साख में बड़का लगाने के लिए भी कौन लोग जिम्मेदार थे। इस समस्या का समाधान संभव है। इसका उदाहरण एनसीटीई ने ही 1998 के आसपास देश के समक्ष रख दिया था। एक बड़े राज्य के मंत्रिमंडल ने अक्टूबर/नवंबर में 70 नए बीएड कालेज 'उसी वर्ष' से खोलने की स्वीकृति प्रदान कर दी थी। यह एनसीटीई के नियमों का खुला उल्लंघन था। इस संस्था ने हरसंभव प्रयास किया कि इस स्वीकृति को अगले वर्ष तक रोका जाए। न राज्य सरकार से, न मुख्यमंत्री के स्तर पर कोई सुनवाई हुई। फिर एनसीटीई ने साहस दिखाकर 15-20 विज्ञापन अनेक भाषाओं में उस राज्य में ही नहीं, राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर भी जारी कर दिए कि 'इन संस्थानों से प्राप्त डिग्री अमान्य होगी, अवैध होगी।' इस पर बड़ा तहलका मचा। केंद्र सरकार भी इस कार्रवाई से अप्रसन्न थी, मगर संस्था डटी रही। लिहाजा राज्य सरकार को अपना आदेश वापस लेना पड़ा। यही एक पत्राचार विश्वविद्यालय के साथ भी किया गया। अनेक निरीक्षणकर्ताओं से निरीक्षण के दौरान प्राप्त 'उपहार' वापस कराए गए। कई नामी-गिरामी लोगों से आगे निरीक्षण का कार्य ले लिया गया।

शिक्षा में उत्कृष्टता, गुणवत्ता और नवाचार के लिए सबसे महत्वपूर्ण आधार प्रशिक्षित, प्रतिबद्ध और समर्पित अध्यापक हैं। किसी भी स्कूल या बड़े संस्थान की साख उसके अध्यापकों, प्राध्यापकों और प्रबंधकों की नियति, लगनशीलता, कर्मठता और सत्य-निष्ठा पर निर्भर करती है। इस शाश्वत सत्य को सरकारों को ही नहीं, बल्कि राष्ट्र और समाज को भी स्वीकार करना होगा। उसे हर स्वीकृत पद पर नियमित नियुक्ति पद खाली होने से पहले पूरी करनी होगी। देश के सामने इसके अलावा और कोई विकल्प नहीं है।

(लेखक एनसीईआरटी के पूर्व निदेशक हैं)

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# 2 languages, not 3: Will others follow TN's lead?

**T**he recently unveiled Tamil Nadu State Education Policy 2025 has emerged as a model document for the entire nation for it keeps the spirit in which children's education is viewed in the State since the time of K. Kamaraj, who believed in the uplift of downtrodden communities through not only teaching children but also retaining them in classrooms. The new policy, already touted as an effective counter to the contentious National Education Policy (NEP 2020), among other things, reimagines the school curriculum as experiential, inquiry-based and competency-driven and seeks to integrate the unique cultural heritage of the state into the syllabus.


One quintessentially Tamil Nadu trait of any education policy in the country will be the two-language policy that promotes teaching of the mother tongue and English. Followed by all State-run schools for over half a century in Tamil Nadu, the two-language formula is now gaining popularity with neighbouring Karnataka seeking to implement it and Maharashtra seemingly aspiring to follow it, the new policy cherishes that pedagogical heritage by conserving it. Reinforcing the need for every student attending a school in the State to gain functional proficiency in Tamil, irrespective of the board the institution is affiliated to, policy makes learning of Tamil compulsory, another distinctive feature that more States might wish to emulate.

The policy revisits Tamil Nadu's historical achievements in education like near-universal enrolment, reduced dropout rates, educational equity across caste, gender and geography and in effectively addressing persistent disparities faced by Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), minorities, children with special needs (CwSN) and first generation learners to ensure the continuation of social justice in education.

Envisioning the school as a safe, vibrant space nurturing the full potential of every learner, who would be able to speak, read, write and comprehend both languages — mother tongue and English — with confidence, the policy aims at shaping citizens with more life skills and problem solving abilities and discourages learning by rote, the present day system that hampers the development of learners seeking to take on the world in all spheres, including academia.

Since the policy aspires to convert schools into physically safe, emotionally nurturing and socially inclusive spaces that integrate child rights, gender sensitivity, mental health, physical fitness, arts and life skills into the pedagogical culture besides modernising facilities through smart classrooms, barrier-free access, science and computer laboratories and digital tools, it would well turn out to be a model for the world itself, if implemented properly.

Some essential components of 21st century schooling like climate literacy, entrepreneurship, and civic responsibility have been incorporated in the policy that also seeks to bridge urban-rural digital divides and strengthen the pre-service and in-service training ecosystem for teachers by introducing peer mentoring systems, modular courses and leadership development for school heads.

Another feature that makes the policy truly international is the recommended reforms in assessment, calling for a radical shift from high-stakes, memory-based exams to continuous, formative, and competency-based assessments employing techniques like project work, peer evaluation, and self-assessment. By reinforcing the State's commitment to the No-Detention Policy for Classes 1 to 8, the introduction of a system of bridge courses, learning outcome monitoring and individualised support for vulnerable and first-generation learners, the new policy could well pave the way for a zero dropout rate. 



## COURSE CORRECTION

# India's higher education: A broken promise

The steady deterioration of universities can have a severe impact on India's development goals

DEEPAK NAYYAR

There is a quiet crisis in higher education in India that runs deep. The educational opportunities for school-leavers are simply not enough, and those that exist are not good enough. The pockets of excellence are outcomes of the enormous reservoir of talent and Darwinian selection processes. It does little for those with average abilities or without social opportunities. The challenges confronting higher education in India are clear. It needs a massive expansion to educate much larger numbers, but without diluting academic standards.

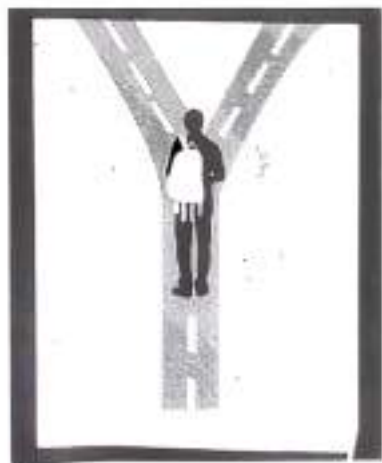
It is just as important to raise the average quality. What is more, in terms of access, higher education in India needs to be far more inclusive. And, it needs some institutions, each with a certain critical mass, that are exemplars of excellence at par with the best in the world. Such excellence is largely missing in India, while it is diminishing rapidly in the few pockets where it existed. Indeed, in terms of world university rankings, which have become the fashion in recent years, our performance is poor. For those who set high standards, it borders on the dismal.

QS University Rankings 2025 reveal the geographical country-composition of the top 100 universities in the world: the United States (26), Western Europe (18), the United Kingdom (16), Australia (8), Hong Kong (6), South Korea (5), Japan (4), China (4), Singapore (2), Malaysia (1), and Taiwan (1). Thus, 72 were in the Western world, including Australia, but there were as many as 23 in Asia. India had none.

Of course, it must be said that these rankings have all the limitations of composite index numbers, since it is difficult to measure qualitative attributes while weights assigned to different components shape results. Even so, it is obvious that our universities have miles to go before reaching world standards. Islands of excellence - IITs, IIMs, or the IISc - are no consolation. Successive governments have sought to multiply the number of IITs and IIMs, but the inevitable outcome is highly uneven

quality and a dilution of the brand equity of existing institutions that have already attained academic excellence. More importantly, the lifeblood of higher education is not small elite institutes but large universities providing educational opportunities for young people.

The comparative advantage that India had, at least in a few of its universities, has been slowly, yet surely, squandered over time. And, sadly, even the little that remains is being progressively undermined by the growing intrusion of politics in universities. But that is not all. Systematic and mindless under-resourcing of public higher education is also a reason for the steady regression in the quality of universities.



The situation is much worse than it was just one decade ago. Universities have deteriorated rapidly in India, while universities elsewhere in the developing world, particularly in Asia and even more so in China, have made significant progress. There is an obvious danger. Unless we introduce correctives, the situation might worsen further to transform us from erstwhile leaders into laggards, or worse.

## Student outflow

There is intense competition among students for admissions to public universities with a semblance of standards and reputations, despite the divergence in quality. The fortunate few, who do well enough in the Class 12 examinations, take up these limited places, while most, the less fortunate, make do with institutions in the private sector, where fees are always higher and, apart from a few exceptions, quality is mostly poor. Of course, quality is uneven both in public institutions and the private

sector. But exceptions to these generalisations simply prove the rule. Only the privileged few have parents rich enough to send them abroad instead.

During the past 25 years, the number of students from India going abroad for higher education increased rapidly from roughly 50,000 in 2000 to 200,000 in 2010 and 350,000 in 2015. This number climbed to 600,000 in 2019, which was the last year before the Coronavirus pandemic that shut down universities across the world. It rose further to 900,000 in 2023. It is estimated that in 2023, of the students going abroad to study, 30% went to the US, 25% went to Canada, 20% went to the UK, while 10% went to Australia and New Zealand.

If we assume that their average expenditure on fees and maintenance is \$30,000 per student per annum, in 2023, Indian students overseas spent \$27 billion, which is about the same as India's foreign exchange earnings from tourism in 2023. However, annual expenses on fees and maintenance in rich countries are likely to be much higher, so the costs would be proportionately higher.

These sums, if made available for higher education in India, could help transform at least some universities. But that is not all. A large proportion of students - around 75% - who go abroad for higher education do not return to India. The number of foreign students at universities in India, even from South Asian countries, is also much diminished, as compared with the past.

Our higher education is caught in a pincer movement. For one, there is a belief that markets can solve the problem through private players, which is leading to education as business, shutting the door on large numbers who cannot finance themselves, without regulation that would ensure quality. This is no solution.

For another, governments that believe in the magic of markets are virtual control freaks with respect to public universities. This is motivated by the desire to exercise political influence in higher education for patronage, ideology, rents, or vested interests. This is a big problem. Unless we introduce correctives here and now, we will mortgage the future of young India and stifle our aspirations for a developed India.

(The writer, an economist, is Professor Emeritus at Jawaharlal Nehru University and former vice-chancellor, University of Delhi)

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# No funds for education dreams

The Congress government in Telangana has let the education sector down

## STATE OF PLAY

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## Telangana

Last week, a few dozen students of a Tribal Welfare Residential School for Girls in Parigi in Vikarabad in Telangana protested against the absence of math and chemistry faculty. In July, students of Left organisations agitated at the Secretariat in Hyderabad over poor education policies. Around the same time, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) directed the State government to investigate reports of over 800 children falling ill due to suspected food poisoning in Telangana's residential schools.

The protests by students and the directions of the NHRC cannot be seen in isolation. For the second year in a row, the Congress government in Telangana has let the education sector down. While the average allocation for education across States is around 15% of their total budget, according to a State Budget Analysis, Telangana allocates significantly less. For the year 2025-26, for instance, it earmarked only 7.9%.

The Congress rode to power in 2023 promising a higher outlay for education. Several education activists and NGOs helped the party during its campaign. On January 24, before the Budget was presented, activists demanded that the Congress raise the budgetary outlay for the sector, but this did not happen.

The education sector has been underfunded over the past decade in the State. At the time of Telangana's formation, the education budget of united Andhra Pradesh was 13.35% of budget estimates in 2013-14. After the formation of

Telangana, this dropped to 10.89% in 2014-15 and further to 7.3% in 2022-23.

The number of personnel in the sector has also dropped. Telangana had 1,56,957 employees in the education sector at the time of its formation. By the time the Bharat Rashtra Samithi handed over the reins to the Congress, the number had declined to 1,51,801. In 2024-25, the number has gone up to 1,53,421, but this is still insufficient. The School Education Department had 1,37,252 employees in 2014-15; this dropped to 1,31,872 in 2022-23. How a reduction of 5,380 personnel has impacted the school education sector is anyone's guess. It is also pertinent to note that the government's reduced priority towards the sector comes at a time when schools have been struggling to get back on their feet after the pandemic.

A recent report shows how the system has been hollowed out due to the absence of regular teachers in rural and peri-urban areas, where the Congress performed well. Enrolment in government schools dropped from 70.1% in 2022 to 59.8% in 2024, according to the 2024 Annual Status of Education Report, published in January this year. If the State had invested sufficient funds in the sector, students would have continued to go to government schools. The same report found that only 6.8% of students in Class 3 can read text prescribed for Class

2 students. This is a drop from 12.8% in 2018.

The government is not unaware of the needs of the education system. The Telangana Education Commission, set up in September 2024 under former IAS officer Akunukri Murali, had submitted a report on the state of education and the requirements to raise standards. It had called for an outlay of ₹5,000 crore for improving facilities in 100 mandals out of the 632 mandals in Telangana. The report had stated that a phase-wise outlay over six years would cover all the schools at a total cost of ₹31,600 crore. However, its suggestions remain on paper.

The earlier regime had focused on the marquee model of residential education where a few students are provided good quality education, food, and boarding. There are 3,170 residential schools catering to girls, minorities, Other Backward Classes, and Scheduled Tribe students. The Congress government appears to be following a similar model by developing Young India Integrated Residential Schools. These schools will be able to cater only to a few as a vast majority of students in Telangana are day scholars whose parents prefer educational facilities in the neighbourhood. Unless there is more investment in government schools in every neighbourhood, the goal of universal primary education will be a mirage in Telangana.

In 1795, Surendranath Banerjee, one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress, spoke of how only 7.5% was spent by the British on education. He said this needed to change. More than 130 years later, spending a similar share on education does a great disservice to the young people of Telangana. *YH*



# NOT BY ROTE

CBSE's plan to introduce open-book examinations for Class IX is welcome. It must take into account past failures, current realities

**I**N A COUNTRY where high school marks the initiation of a frantic race to elite institutions and coveted streams in higher education, the decision of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to introduce open-book assessments for students of Class IX from 2026-27 comes as a pedagogically progressive move. Shifting the focus from rote learning to analytical thinking and real-world application echoes the goals of the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023. The present proposal aims to integrate it "as part of three pen-paper assessments per term", covering core subjects like language, mathematics, science and social science. It is also unlikely to be made mandatory at the initial stage. With thoughtful design, open-book examinations (OBEs) can democratise assessment, easing the anxiety many students feel about high-stakes exams.

There are other potential gains. OBEs require creative imagination and a multi-disciplinary focus. At a time when artificial intelligence is rewiring views of dissemination of knowledge, skills and employability, OBEs can nurture independent thought, critical reading, and ethical information use — competences essential beyond classrooms and board rooms. By rewarding comprehension and assimilation over speed and memory, it also stands to recast conventional understanding of success and failure, especially for students who may not excel under time-bound, memory-intensive conditions.

However, the execution of recent educational reforms strikes a note of caution. CBSE's previous experiment — the Open Text-Based Assessment introduced in 2014 — was shelved in 2017-18, citing a lack of "critical abilities" among students. Rolling out complex reforms like OBEs without first investing in teacher training and equitable access to resources risks repeating past oversights. Analysis of the result of the OBE pilot study, approved in 2023 for Classes IX to XII, shows "scores ranging from 12 per cent to 47 per cent, indicating challenges in effectively utilising resources and grasping interdisciplinary concepts". This points to the necessity of further ground work to prepare students to meet the challenges of OBE, a lack of which in under-resourced schools, especially in rural areas, may exacerbate inequalities. The reform also arrives amid other changes, including the restructuring of curricula, rationalisation of text books and digital evaluation systems. There is a real danger that too many changes implemented too quickly may dilute impact and overwhelm both educators and students. OBEs hold great promise, and if done right, could make the education system more compassionate, holding space for different kinds of students. What comes next must be purposeful, with a clear-eyed understanding of past failures and current realities.



SPORTING  
VISION

## Framework for Excellence

*The National Sports Governance Bill 2025 is a ground-breaking initiative which calls for accountability, transparency and athlete welfare, looking forward to Olympics and the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047*



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The bill places sports firmly in the national development agenda, focusing on ethical management, infrastructure modernisation, and athlete empowerment

On July 23, 2025, the Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, Mansukh Mandaviya, introduced the National Sports Governance Bill 2025 in Parliament—a milestone moment that signals a new era in Indian sports administration. For decades, our country has needed a structured, transparent, and athlete-centric governance model that aligns with international standards. This Bill not only fills that gap but also redefines the priorities of Indian sports in alignment with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji's visionary goal of making India a sporting superpower as part of the Viksit Bharat 2047 mission.

The Bill draws its strength from best practices outlined in the Olympic Charter, Paralympic Charter, and global governance principles, while retaining India's unique cultural and sporting identity. It places sports firmly in the national development agenda, focusing on ethical management, infrastructure modernization, and athlete empowerment.

#### A Visionary Step Towards Reforms in Sports

The journey of Indian sports reform is inseparable from the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, who, since 2014, has elevated sports to a strategic national priority. Initiatives such as Khelo India, Fit India Movement, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), Khelo Bharat Niti 2025, and the National Education Policy 2020's emphasis on physical education have already transformed grassroots sports and athlete development.

The introduction of the National Sports Governance Bill 2025 is a natural continuation of these efforts. It ensures that our administrative and governance structures match the growing aspirations of young athletes and the nation's dream of hosting the Summer Olympics 2036.

#### Why This Bill Is a Game-Changer?

For years, Indian sports governance has struggled with fragmented decision-making, limited accountability, and lack of transparency within National Sports Federations (NSFs) and other governing bodies. The National Sports Governance Bill 2025 directly addresses these issues by establishing clear rules, ethical frameworks, and accountability measures.

#### A New Era of Sports Governance

The introduction of the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025, marks a historic step toward modernizing and revolutionizing the administration of sports in India. This landmark legislation promises to redefine the country's sports governance framework by embedding transparency, fairness, accountability, and athlete welfare as its cornerstones. At the heart of these reforms lies



While the Bill sets a strong legislative foundation, its success will depend on robust implementation

a vision to align India's sports ecosystem with international standards while nurturing the next generation of champions.

#### The Creation of the National Sports Board (NSB)

One of the most transformative elements of the Bill is the establishment of the National Sports Board (NSB), envisioned as the apex authority for regulating and monitoring all National Sports Federations (NSFs) in India. This board is designed to ensure that every sports federation adheres to global best practices, including the principles laid down by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and other international governing bodies.

The NSB will hold sweeping powers to grant, renew, or withdraw the recognition of NSFs. Financial aid from the government will be tied directly to each federation's compliance with ethical and administrative benchmarks and its commitment to improving athlete performance. By linking funding with governance standards, the NSB aims to create a culture of accountability, eliminating the inefficiencies and opaque practices that have historically hindered Indian sports.

A defining aspect of the NSB's mandate is its athlete-first approach. From ensuring fair representation of athletes in decision-making to promoting their welfare on and off the field, the NSB will serve as a guardian of India's sporting talent. The Board is expected to bring uniformity, transparency, and professionalism into sports administration while strengthening India's credibility on the international stage.

#### National Sports Selection Panel: Merit Above All

The Bill also introduces a National Sports Selection Panel, an independent body designed to ensure fair, objective, and merit-based selection of athletes for national and international competitions. For decades, allegations of bias, favoritism, and opaque selection procedures have plagued Indian sports. This reform aims to eliminate such irregularities by establish-

ing a transparent and standardized process across all disciplines.

The panel will be composed of independent experts and former athletes, ensuring that selection decisions are guided by performance metrics and professional expertise. By prioritizing talent and hard work over personal or political considerations, this panel will not only restore faith among athletes but also set higher benchmarks for sporting excellence.

#### National Sports Tribunal

##### Fast-Tracking Dispute Resolution

The Bill acknowledges that timely resolution of disputes is critical to the career and morale of sportspersons. To address this, the Bill sets up a National Sports Tribunal, a dedicated judicial body with the expertise to handle sports-related disputes swiftly and impartially.

Whether it is a disagreement over team selection, disciplinary action, doping allegations, or administrative conflicts within sports federations, the tribunal will provide an accessible and specialized platform for grievance redressal. Unlike traditional courts, which are often mired in delays, this tribunal will be streamlined and sport-centric, ensuring quick resolutions that allow athletes and federations to focus on performance rather than prolonged legal battles.

#### Code on the Use of National Symbols

Another landmark provision of the Bill is the introduction of a comprehensive Code on the Use of National Symbols in sports contexts. The Tiranga, National emblem, and National anthem are powerful emblems of Indian unity and pride. The Bill mandates strict protocols to prevent the unauthorized or commercial misuse of these national symbols during sporting events and promotional activities.

The aim is to preserve the dignity and sanctity of these symbols while ensuring their respectful and inspiring display at official sporting events. This measure will reinforce a sense of national pride and integrity, both for athletes representing the country

and for spectators who rally behind them.

The Statement of Objectives and Reasons behind this Bill highlights a bold and ambitious vision: as India prepares to bid for hosting the 2036 Summer Olympics, it is imperative to establish a governance structure that embodies international credibility, operational excellence, and athlete-first policies.

The Bill seeks to promote sporting excellence by ensuring that all sports federations adopt transparent practices to identify and nurture high-performance athletes. By instituting strict accountability measures, ethical codes, and global alignment, the Bill aims to transform India into a sporting powerhouse capable of excelling at the Olympics and other global events. Modernizing sports governance is not just an administrative necessity but a national priority, recognized as a vital pillar for developing human capital and achieving the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

#### Sports as a Pillar of Viksit Bharat 2047

Sports are no longer seen as an extracurricular activity—they are now recognized as an essential component of human capital development. A physically fit, mentally resilient, and competitive youth population is key to achieving the ambitious Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. The National Sports Governance Bill 2025 is, therefore, a stepping stone in building this future.

By fostering discipline, teamwork, and a culture of excellence, the Bill will not only elevate India's sporting performance but also create employment opportunities, global recognition, and social unity. It aims to engage millions of young Indians—athletes, coaches, administrators, and professionals—who will collectively drive the nation's growth story.

While the Bill sets a strong legislative foundation, its success will depend on robust implementation. National Sports Federations, state sports councils, and private stakeholders must adopt these reforms with integrity and commitment. Building the capacity of administrators, coaches, and physical education teachers will be vital to ensure smooth execution.

The National Sports Governance combines ethical governance, modern infrastructure, athlete empowerment, and global alignment to prepare India for 2036 Olympics aspirations and beyond. As India marches towards Viksit Bharat 2047, every medal, every record, and every success story will stand as a testament to this bold and visionary reform. The Bill is not just about building champions—it is about building a nation of winners, united by a common dream to see India rise as a global sports superpower.

m/s/r

Views expressed are personal



# The Art and Science of Management

Sustaining organisational competitiveness demands realistic standards and unwavering efficiency, achieved through a strategic balance of judgement, data, adaptability, and contextual awareness in decision-making



VINAYSHIL  
GAUTAM

Pursuit of efficiency is advocated everywhere. The pursuit of efficiency assumes the setting of standards, adequate resources, proximity to provision, and follow-up in an effective manner, which can produce sustainable results. These attributes may appear simple, but they are complicated to deliver.

It's not a simple complication — it has deep psychological overtones. Many people expect the other person to be efficient. When it comes to themselves, they would like a more lenient view, euphemistically put across as "realistic."

In operational terms, many subordinates expect their superiors to be understanding and often flexible in following standards. The expectation is to build into the system a resilience which is "accommodating."

This plausible approach, if practiced at each level, can be a potent factor in loosening the system and making the setting of standards — and operating them — a matter of personal choice and accommodation.

One of the outcomes of this situation will be an impact on overall productivity and, very often, a decline in outputs at an aggregate level. This, in turn, can have a domino effect: The overall credibility of the organisation can deteriorate, and it can soon become a way of life.

This being the case, it is best not to deviate from standards but to make the setting of standards more realistic. This produces a dilemma. The dilemma is a tacit acceptance that the organisation cannot work at its best potential. Operationally, this cannot mean that suboptimal standards be set.

Even those suboptimal standards, as indicated above, can become resilient, and over a period of time, a downward trend could set in. This is dangerous in two ways: every organisation is part of a cluster of similar institutions, and if one is working at a level lower than the competition, it could lose the market, productivity, and profitability.

This would open the floodgates to an ultimate exit from competition. The proposition is simple: lowering standards has its price, and sometimes this price can make the organisation so dysfunctional as to edge it out of the market itself — verging on self-destruction. Hence, the classical dilemma remains: Finding an approach that is realistic but does not amount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

This is where strategy comes in. Strategy is the bridge between policy and action that outlines an operational approach to everyday



## The Pioneer SINCE 1865

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functioning. This requires judgment and an understanding of the competency of one's colleagues. Unfortunately, there are only a few statistical tools, which provide limited and tentative inputs to the overall picture. The overall picture still requires judgment — indeed, deep judgment. This brings us to one of the major concerns in management: Where do operational tools work, and where does judgment work? Management as a profession has been divided between these two camps. People with an operations research and statistical background have a preference for quantitative methods, whereas people with backgrounds in softer disciplines like Political Science, Sociology, and History tend to prefer a judgmental approach.

The narrative above is an adequate illustration of what appears to be a simple proposition but is embedded in a complex setup of factors and options. This is where leadership and judgment become useful, and top management requires decision-making skills that go beyond statistical notes.

The nature of management, where efficiency parameters are concerned, is not simply one of high or low standards. It is about what works in the market and what will ensure the organization's survival, productivity, and profitability.

All in all, it will require a merger of both experience and judgment. It will also require an integration of statistical tools and judgmental methods. It would require pilot testing and experimentation with a sound assessment of the potential of the organisation and its people. It will also need an understanding of the times, Government policies, and the context so that the course of action undertaken by top management survives the

stresses of the times and makes the conditions of work not only attractive but also feasible.

The science of governance is also the art of governance. Together, they form the route to growth and survival. There are no easy answers, but that is never a reason to abandon the quest for a solution.

The narrative above shows the requirement for an integrative mind and a holistic approach to decision-making and problem-solving. This alone will encourage resource optimisation and give organisations a competitive edge.

Management, both as an art and a science, is closer to being a craft. It aids in adopting a course to ensure not only the survival but also the success of efforts.

Progressively and typically, the nature of management continues to evolve. There was a time when resources were largely viewed as "material entities" for giving a competitive edge to the organisation (through much of the nineteenth century).

The input of "material" resources began sharing its privileged place with "ideas" through much of the second half of the twentieth century. Organisational competitiveness became increasingly influenced by non-material assets. It did not stop there — ideas became important and started influencing the growth and prosperity of entities.

A stage now seems to be approaching where ideas are having to share their space with notions such as "intelligence." The notion of organisations has evolved — and is continuing to do so — at a drastic pace. The typology of organisations today is far richer than before. This pattern looks likely to continue. **सत्यमेव जयते**



# Wake-up call

Bhagwat's affordability appeal matters

**I**N his recent address inaugurating an affordable cancer-care centre in Indore, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat delivered a pointed admonition: health-care and education — long seen as societal duties — have morphed into profit-driven ventures, increasingly inaccessible to the common man. Bhagwat's appeal to resurrect the ethos of "dharma" over corporate-style CSR strikes at the heart of a troubling reality.

For millions of Indian households, the financial burdens of healthcare are crushing. Only around 17 per cent of health spending nationwide comes from public coffers, leaving an overwhelming 82 per cent to be met through out-of-pocket payments. The consequences are acute: hospitalisation can push families into lifelong debt or even poverty. In Punjab alone, households managing chronic illnesses like diabetes and cardiovascular disease face catastrophic costs, especially for diagnostics and outpatient services — gaps barely covered by existing insurance schemes. Education tells a similarly dire story. In tier-1 cities, parents are shelling out over Rs 60,000 per child annually, with some dedicating nearly half their monthly income to tuition and related costs. The outrage peaked recently when nursery admission in a Hyderabad school was reported at Rs 2.51 lakh per year, prompting public shock and discussions on runaway educational costs.

These numbers underline a creeping commercialisation. Bhagwat's critique, coming amid reports of strain between the RSS and the BJP, signals a call for policy redirection: re-emphasise access, affordability and service, not commodification. The Delhi Assembly's passage of a Bill to regulate private school fees may be an encouraging nod in this direction. The Modi government must heed Bhagwat's message. Restoring health-care and education to the realm of rights — not market goods — is vital for social equity. Only by treating these sectors as civic obligations rather than revenue streams can the government bridge ideological divides. *mlc*



# एकता की मिसाल हैं भारतीय भाषाएं

**भा**षा केवल संवाद का ही माध्यम नहीं है, वरन संस्कृति की वाहक भी है। भारत एक बहुभाषी देश है। पूर्व से पश्चिम तक, कश्मीर से कन्याकुमारी तक संपूर्ण राष्ट्र में सहस्रों भाषाएं बोली जाती हैं। भोजपुरी में एक कहावत है- 'कोस कोस पर पानी बदले, तीन कोस पर बानी' अर्थात् दो-दो मील पर पानी में बदलाव आ जाता है और छह-छह मील पर भाषा-बोली बदल जाती है, परंतु पानी के स्वाद-गुण और भाषा के भाव में कोई परिवर्तन नहीं होता है। भारतवर्ष की सभी भाषाएं एक ही परिवार की शाखाएं हैं और इसीलिए उनके भीतर एक सांस्कृतिक भाव की स्रोतस्विनी प्रवाहित है, जो इस राष्ट्र को 'एक भारत श्रेष्ठ भारत' बनाती है। गुलामी काल में अंग्रेजों की विभाजनकारी नीति को बल देने के लिए पाश्चात्य भाषा विज्ञानियों ने भाषा परिवार की एक मिथ्या कल्पना पर आधारित अवधारणा प्रस्तुत की। उन्होंने 'आर्य समस्या' जैसी एक कृत्रिम समस्या को जन्म दिया। इसके मूल में उनकी यह दुरभिसंधि थी कि प्राचीन संस्कृत (छंदस) की प्राचीनता को प्रश्नांकित करते हुए भारत की भाषाओं को अनेक भाषा-परिवारों से उत्पन्न बताया जाए और इसमें वे सफल भी रहे। यहां तक कि 'आर्य' शब्द को जर्मन फासीवाद से भी जोड़कर देखा गया।

भारत में आर्यों के आगमन की कृत्रिम अवधारणा अनुमान, अटकल या प्रतीति के आधार पर रची गई। ऐसा करने वालों के पास इस प्रश्न का कोई सटीक उत्तर नहीं रहा है कि भारत आने के पूर्व इन कथित आर्यों का मूल निवास कहाँ रहा और वहां से दो दिशाओं में बिखराव का कारण क्या रहा? वैदिक साहित्य में उस मूल स्थान की चर्चा क्यों नहीं है? वस्तुतः अंग्रेजों को यह स्थापित करना था कि भारत में सभी जन, द्रविड़, आर्य आदि सभी बाहर से आए हैं, अतः हमारे आने में कोई विशेष समस्या नहीं है। यह भूमि ही आप्रवासियों से बनी है। अंग्रेजों और उनके भारतीय मानसपुत्रों ने भी इस कृत्रिम अवधारणा के आधार पर एक अज्ञात 'प्रोटो इंडो यूरोपियन' नाम की भाषा की कल्पना की और संस्कृत को 'इंडो आर्यन' नाम दे दिया। उन्होंने संस्कृत से लेकर फारसी, ग्रीक, लैटिन, जर्मन



सुरेंद्र दुबे

**'भाषाएं अनेक, भाव एक' की अवधारणा को स्थापित करके ही विकसित भारत की नींव मजबूत की जा सकती है**



बांग्ला भाषा को 'बचाने' सड़क पर उतरी ममता • छड़ल आदि भाषाओं को कतिपय शब्द साम्य के आधार पर 'इंडो यूरोपियन' भाषा माना तथा शेष भारतीय भाषाओं को अन्य कल्पित भाषा परिवार से उत्पन्न बताने के लिए 'आर्य-द्रविड़' जैसे षड्यंत्रकारी प्रत्यय को विकसित किया। भाषा परिवार की इसी षड्यंत्रकारी अवधारणा ने कुछ राजनीतिज्ञों को अपनी रोटी सेंकने का अवसर दे दिया है। अगर शब्द साम्य ही 'भारोपीय परिवार' की कल्पना का आधार है तो ऐसे हजारों शब्द हैं, जो आज भी अनेक भारतीय भाषाओं में व्यवहृत होते हैं। 'दिन' शब्द संस्कृत, पंजाबी, मराठी (दिवस), गुजराती, नेपाली, बांग्ला, असमिया, उड़िया, डोगरी, बोडो आदि में ज्यों का त्यों प्रयुक्त होता है। 'राष्ट्र' शब्द संस्कृत, सिंधी, मराठी, कोंकणी, बांग्ला, असमिया, उड़िया, तेलुगु, मलयालम, कन्नड़, संथाली आदि में उपस्थित है। 'प्रेम' शब्द संस्कृत, पंजाबी, कश्मीरी, सिंधी, मराठी, गुजराती, कोंकणी, नेपाली, बांग्ला, असमिया, उड़िया, तेलुगु, मलयालम, कन्नड़, मैथिली आदि भाषाओं में जिस का तस प्रयोग में आता है। 'देवता' शब्द संस्कृत, पंजाबी, सिंधी, मराठी, गुजराती, नेपाली, उड़िया, तेलुगु (देवत), तमिल

(देवतै), मलयालम (देवत), कन्नड़ (देवते), डोगरी, संथाली आदि भाषाओं में या तो ज्यों का त्यों या कतिपय परिवर्तनों के साथ प्रयुक्त होता है।

अगर शब्द साम्य के आधार पर संस्कृत और अवेस्ता या लैटिन एक परिवार की भाषाएं हैं तो तमिल और हिंदी क्यों नहीं? तमिल शब्द चट्टै (वेणी) हिंदी में चोटी है। तमिल शब्द परै (पक्षी) हिंदी में है। ऐसे सैकड़ों शब्द हैं। वस्तुतः आर्य और द्रविड़ भाषाओं में तात्त्विक अपेक्ष है। इसका विकास भारतीय परिवेश में ही हुआ और इन्हीं में भारत की ज्ञान परंपरा और संस्कृति संरक्षित है। वास्तव में भारतीय भाषाओं में संस्कृति और विचारों की एकध्वेयता रही है। इसका साक्ष्य यह है कि हर भारतीय भाषा ने रामायण और महाभारत से प्रेरणा ग्रहण की। भारतीय भाषाओं में मूलभूत एकता भी रही है। तमिल और उर्दू को छोड़कर भारत की लगभग सभी भारतीय भाषाओं का जन्मकाल लगभग समान है। विकास के चरण भी प्रायः समान हैं। साहित्यिक पृष्ठभूमि समान है। संत काव्य की समान प्रवृत्ति है। प्रेमाख्यान काव्य की एक जैसी परंपरा है। स्त्री एवं दलित संवेदना एक जैसी है। सभी भारतीय भाषाओं में सहकार और अन्योन्याश्रित संबंध रहा है। राधाकृष्णन ने ठीक कहा था कि भारतीय साहित्य एक है, जो कई भाषाओं में लिखा जाता है। 'भाषाएं अनेक, भाव एक' की अवधारणा को स्थापित करके ही विकसित भारत की नींव मजबूत की जा सकती है। इसके लिए परिवारमूलक भाषाभेद की पाश्चात्य अवधारणा को नकारते हुए भारतीय भाषा परिवार की सही और सार्थक अवधारणा को विकसित करने की आवश्यकता है। हिंदी का तमिल, कन्नड़, मराठी या बांग्ला से कोई विरोध नहीं। भारत की सभी भाषाएं परस्पर पूरक और अंतः क्रियात्मक हैं, इसलिए आज आवश्यकता है कि भारतीय ज्ञान परंपरा को सशक्त करने के लिए भाषा परिवार की पाश्चात्य षड्यंत्रकारी अवधारणा को तर्क पूर्ण ढंग से निरस्त किया जाए और भारत की सांस्कृतिक एकता के लिए भारतीय भाषाओं की भूमिका को स्थापित किया जाए।

(लेखक केंद्रीय हिंदी शिक्षण मंडल के उपाध्यक्ष और साहित्यकार हैं।)

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# Debunking the myth of job creation

**O**n July 1, 2025, the government approved the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme to support employment generation, with an outlay of ₹99,446 crore. However, this raises serious concerns about the target population in a labour market where capital-labour asymmetries, the formal-informal sector divide, and the persistent mismatch between employment opportunities and employability continue to marginalise large sections of the workforce, particularly low-skilled and the informal workers.

## Problems with the scheme

While being an ambitious attempt to generate employment, the ELI reflects an employer-centric approach to the labour market. By providing fiscal incentives to employers for creating employment, particularly in the manufacturing sector, the scheme overlooks the persistent mismatch between employability and actual employment opportunities. Incentivising employment generation seems to mimic subsidising capital which may consequently promote existing capital-labour asymmetries. In effect, this may further lead to the strengthening of the bargaining power of employers rather than of the workers, which may enhance the already high wage gaps. This would prove detrimental for workers, especially from the informal and low-skilled segments, who remain excluded from the benefits of the scheme.

At the heart of India's labour market crisis lies not just a lack of jobs but a severe skill mismatch. The Economic Survey 2024-25 reveals that only 8.25% of graduates are employed in roles matching their qualifications. Worse, over 53% of graduates and 36% of postgraduates are underemployed in semi-skilled or elementary occupations. This dismal alignment is further reflected in wage outcomes: only 4.2% of graduates in specialised



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Although the ELI Scheme is an attempt to address India's unemployment crisis, the design of the policy could deepen structural inequalities in the labour market

roles earn between ₹4 lakh-8 lakh per annum, while nearly 46% in low-skill jobs earn less than ₹1 lakh. These figures expose not just the inefficiency of India's education-to-employment pipeline, but also the futility of employer-centric incentives in a labour market where workers lack the skills that industry demands. Only 4.9% of Indian youth (15-29 years) have received formal vocational training. In the absence of a robust skilling infrastructure, the ELI Scheme does little more than pay employers to absorb an unprepared workforce.

The scheme tends to prioritise sectors/firms that are already integrated into the formal economy, i.e., those who have already registered with the Employee's Provident Fund Organisation. While this design may seem administratively sound, it indirectly marginalises 90% of the labour force employed in the informal sector, who are already devoid of social security, formal contracts, and stable employment protection. In doing so, it risks establishing structural inequalities rather than resolving them. This restriction and consequent exclusion may exacerbate existing dual labour market structures, where the formal sector is provided with state support and incentives, while the informal sector remains unrecognised in policy initiatives. Such a scheme may also be indirectly reinforcing inequality by channelising fiscal allocation (in other words, public resources) towards the relatively well-off enterprises, leaving behind low-wage, unregistered workers. The state's substantial investment in the formal sector also bypasses the informal workforce which continues to absorb the bulk of new labour market entrants.

What is more worrying is that the scheme could end up normalising disguised unemployment – where people appear to be employed but are in fact not contributing to output – which is common in sectors such

as agriculture and informal services. The result is low productivity and stagnant or low wages. Enterprises might resort to relabeling existing jobs as 'new employment' to claim the subsidy.

The scheme's special focus on manufacturing also reveals a sectoral blind spot. While manufacturing remains critical to economic transformation, its employment elasticity in India has been steadily declining due to increased automation and capital intensity. Today, manufacturing contributes less than 13% to total employment, while agriculture and services together employ nearly 70% of the workforce. By disproportionately privileging manufacturing through extended incentives, the ELI Scheme may further marginalise large segments of the workforce, particularly women, rural youth, and informal workers, who are more likely to be employed in low-skill services or agriculture. This sectoral imbalance represents an outdated assumption that the manufacturing sector will be the primary engine of job creation.

## What could be an alternative?

Although the ELI Scheme is an attempt to address India's unemployment crisis, the policy design indicates that it will deepen structural inequalities in the labour market. It also highlights the absence of mechanisms to address skill development, improve job quality, or social security for the workers in the informal sectors. Investment in skilling and education reforms will instead benefit low-skilled workers. Further, more initiatives should be shifted from short-term employment generation to long-term sustained employment opportunities and enhanced productivity, without compromising on labour rights and bargaining power. Finally, an employment generation drive should avoid dealing with headcounts, and rather focus on being an equitable and sustainable development strategy.



## Editor's TAKE

# Sports Bill: Reforming Indian Sports

Despite being passed amid Opposition protests, the bill is a potential game changer that could reshape India's sporting landscape

At long last, administrative reforms are beginning to take shape for the long-neglected world of Indian sport. It is no secret that India's medal tally at global events falls far short of the true potential of its athletes. A vast pool of talent has too often been squandered under the weight of bureaucratic red tape, while sportspersons struggle for basic amenities even as governing bodies sit atop generous budgets. On more than one occasion, India's contingents at international competitions have had more officials than athletes, highlighting the skewed priorities in the system. Now, it appears that change is finally on the horizon – or at the very least, that the first real steps are being taken in that direction.

The Lok Sabha, on August 11, 2025, passed the long-awaited National Sports Governance Bill along with the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill, marking what Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya described as the "single biggest reform in Indian sport since independence." Most Opposition members were absent when the bills were introduced, having been detained during a march to the Election Commission.

Mandaviya called the passage of the Sports Governance Bill a transformative moment, one that would ensure accountability, deliver justice, and establish the highest standards of governance in sports federations.

The bill introduces a sweeping institutional overhaul aimed at reshaping how sport is governed in the country. It creates a National Sports Board with the authority to recognise, fund, or even derecognise sports bodies – including cricket's powerful BCCI – based on their adherence to governance norms, transparency, and ethical conduct. It also sets up a National Sports Tribunal with civil court powers to handle disputes swiftly and fairly, with appeals permitted only in the Supreme Court. Transparency is a central theme, with recognised sports bodies brought under the ambit of the Right to Information Act, allowing their functioning to be scrutinised by the public. While recent amendments have provided certain exemptions, the push for openness is a clear shift from the opaque practices that have long plagued Indian sports administration. In addition, the bill imposes strict age and tenure caps on top office-bearers, limiting their total term to 12 years and capping the age at 70, extendable to 75 in special cases to align with global norms. Executive committees will now be more inclusive, with mandatory representation for women and celebrated sportspersons, ensuring that decision-making reflects both diversity and lived sporting experience.

Beyond structural reform, the legislation signals India's growing ambition on the global sporting stage. By professionalising governance and aligning with international standards, the country strengthens its case for hosting major events, including the Olympics. If implemented effectively, the National Sports Governance Bill could usher in a new era where transparency, fairness, and professionalism replace patronage and opacity – giving Indian athletes and federations the solid foundation they need to compete and excel at the highest levels.



# Kerala's Paradox: Literacy Without Livelihood



**YUVRAJ  
CHAUDHARY**

Kerala, with a staggering 94 per cent literacy rate — the highest in India — should be an economic powerhouse. Instead, it faces a sobering reality: nearly 30 per cent of its youth are unemployed, the highest rate in the country. How can the most educated state in India struggle so deeply to provide jobs for its own graduates? This is Kerala's paradox. For decades, it has been a darling of development economists, hailed as an outlier in India's uneven progress story. The state built public health systems that rival Western Europe, achieved near-universal literacy, slashed infant mortality, and empowered women in ways rare in much of India. And yet, behind these gleaming human development numbers, the economic engine is sputtering.

Kerala still holds extraordinary assets — a globally literate workforce, strong institutions, and a deep tradition of social investment. But the numbers are moving in the wrong direction.

Much of Kerala's early success came from what scholars like Amartya Sen and Richard Franke called the "Kerala Model," which prioritised equity over growth. Land reforms dismantled feudal structures, mass education campaigns reached even the most marginalised, and basic services were extended across caste and class divides. Redistribution came before accumulation — and for a time, it worked.

Today, the picture is less bright. Kerala's five-year average annual growth rate is just 3.16 per cent, among the slowest in India. Manufacturing remains anaemic, agriculture has declined, and the state now leans heavily on services and the remittances of its 30 lakh migrants abroad. In FY25, its growth slipped to 6.19 per cent, the lowest in Southern India. Public debt stands at 23.8 per cent of GDP, and salaries, pensions, and interest payments consume nearly two-thirds of state revenue. The labour market is equally troubled. Casual wages are among the highest in India, yet income inequality is wide. High minimum pay for low-productivity work protects some workers but also discourages investment, pushes employers toward automation or informal hiring, and prompts relocation to other states. The result is a dual economy — pockets of affluence amid widespread underemployment. Rigid labour laws, militant unionism, and practices like *nokku kooli* — where payment is demanded merely for "supervising" work — have further deterred industry. In the absence



of private sector growth, the formal job market has shrunk, trapping a generation of educated youth in a limbo of ambition without opportunity.

Meanwhile, the state's dependence on migrant labour for construction and manual jobs contrasts sharply with its steady export of graduates to the Gulf. For many young Keralites, foreign shores remain the only viable path to dignity and income. But with Gulf visa restrictions tightening and the cost of living abroad rising, this remittance lifeline is fraying.

Fiscal governance adds to the strain. The tax base is narrow, enforcement weak, and key sectors like gold remain under-taxed. The most dependable revenues now come from alcohol and lotteries — a risky reliance on consumption over production. In 2023, when the GST Council levied 28 per cent tax on gambling and online gaming, Kerala quickly aligned its own laws. The move signalled an uncomfortable truth: In the absence of a robust productive economy, the state is leaning on vice to stay afloat.

Drug addiction rates rank among India's highest. Synthetic drugs like MDMA and methamphetamine have flooded cities like Kochi and reached rural schools. Drug seizures rose 40 per cent between 2020 and 2023, with over 1,200 kg confiscated in 2023 alone. Addiction cases among youth aged 15-29 have surged 25 per cent in five years, overwhelming the state's limited rehabilitation capacity.

Between 60 and 120 individuals in Kerala are suspected to have ties to extremist groups like ISIS-Khorasan, many of them educated and from middle-class families. Arrests between 2022 and 2024 reveal that nearly 70 per cent of suspects were aged 18-30, and 40 per cent held college degrees. Airports in Kochi and Trivandrum have emerged as smuggling routes, while online propaganda preys on disillusioned young people.

Kerala now stands at a crossroads. To preserve its social gains, it must confront structural weaknesses head-on:

- Reset wage floors in line with productivity so jobs are both viable for employers and accessible for new entrants.
- Align education with market needs through vocational training and stronger industry partnerships.
- Build a competitive industrial base using targeted incentives and faster approvals.
- Expand the tax net and shift from consumption-driven to production-driven growth.
- Counter radicalisation with community-driven programmes addressing identity, opportunity, and belonging.

The once-celebrated Kerala Model risks becoming a cautionary tale — proof that human development without economic dynamism is like a glass palace built on sand. The rigid socialist framework that once lifted Kerala to global acclaim now struggles to generate jobs, attract investment, or sustain growth.

Yet hope remains. Kerala's coastline, dotted with natural harbours and lying close to global shipping lanes, is still underdeveloped. Ports like Vizhinjam could become powerful trade gateways with proper investment. Tourism, though well-known, remains seasonal and under-diversified; it could expand into eco-tourism, medical travel, and high-value cultural experiences. Agriculture and food processing, supported by Kerala's biodiversity and organic farming traditions, could become competitive industries.

What Kerala lacks is not capacity, but coherence — a clear, long-term strategy that matches its unique strengths to the demands of a modern, inclusive economy. The next chapter will depend on whether its leaders can move past self-congratulation and face hard truths. Otherwise, the state's proud literacy rate may one day be remembered not as a symbol of triumph, but as an epitaph. *Pichu*

**The Pioneer**  
SINCE 1868



# Managing The Shift

*Engineers & non-engineers both have a key role, as long as they are bilingual in human & AI languages*

There's no taking comfort in these numbers. India produces 1.5mn engineers every year (ahead of US and China outputs) but their unemployability is widely decried. A big disconnect between academic training and the market leaves a majority of these engineering graduates without the skills that employers need. There is, however, a creamy layer that has hitherto flown in a different orbit. Turns out, even its engine is getting rusty now. One indicator is how engineering dominance is retreating from India's top B-schools. IIM-Ahmedabad's share of non-engineers has jumped from 33% to 50% in three years. Among IIM-Indore's and IIM-Lucknow's new batches, engineers are now the minority.



In the AI era, India needs smart engineers more than ever. But producing 20 times more engineers than US is a failed strategy, obviously. In the MBA game, what is looking like a dramatic shift in India today is already commonplace in US, where management programmes have always recruited from diverse academic backgrounds. Still, better late than never. At least the elite engineering schools are reading the writing on the wall, and focus is gradually shifting to producing creators rather than coders.

That means, as countless LinkedIn posts point out, enabling curiosity, interdisciplinary collaboration and risk-taking. It doesn't mean picking whether engineers or non-engineers make better managers. That's a swampish debate. The future belongs to professionals who respond to technological and other transformations inventively and strategically, irrespective of their precise pedigree. The important thing is that they are fluent in both social and machine languages. Consider that top GenAI experts say its real bottleneck is creative reasoning. Humans are still far, far ahead in listening, innovative insights, and rallying fellow humans around a shared vision. In the new world under construction, soft skills may be the real superpower.

TOI/20



# The ceding of academic freedom in universities

Everyone engaged in higher education recognises that academic freedom is primary because universities are the places for raising doubts and asking questions about everything. Exploring ideas, debating issues and thinking independently are essential in the quest for excellence.

After all, knowledge develops only if we question existing knowledge. This means that students must have the freedom to ask questions just as faculty must have the freedom to question received wisdom in their respective disciplines. Indeed, universities, as institutions, must have the freedom to raise questions, express opinions or articulate criticisms in the wider context of economic, social and political spheres.

In fact, the development of knowledge is central to university education. Students enter the world of higher education to learn. Understanding existing knowledge is a first step. The ability to ask relevant questions, a capacity to critique conventional wisdoms, and the confidence to resist the authority of the spoken – even printed – word are the next successive steps. Of course, learning is a continuous process that never stops. Thus, it is for universities to decide what is taught to students, which must not be controlled from elsewhere.

There should be no restrictions on who is invited to address a student audience. Circumscribing this space, in any way, can only stifle learning, which, in turn, can hurt economic and social progress.

The world of research needs similar freedoms. It is for universities to decide their research priorities. It is for faculty members to decide their research agenda. Of course, financial support for research must be based on peer review without preference or prejudice. Dissenting opinions or unorthodox thinking, irrespective of disciplines, should be encouraged for that is how knowledge develops. In fact, fundamental research needs far more in terms of not only freedoms but also resources and time. Such an environment is essential for brilliant scholars or thinkers to surface, blossom and flourish.

## The disturbing reality in India

The unfolding reality in India is disturbing. Curricula are regulated and straitjacketed. Readings are prescribed. Indeed, what is excluded or what is included in prescribed reading lists is decided elsewhere, not necessarily by the teachers. Some readings are explicitly excluded. Promising research, which departs from the mainstream, particularly in social sciences or humanities, is stifled. Research funding is controlled, directly or indirectly, by the central government through its research councils and departments. In this milieu, fundamental research in universities in India is rare if not impossible. It is no accident that our universities have not produced any Nobel laureates.

Even the freedom for students and teachers to organise discussions or debates on campus, which are perceived as critical of the Bharatiya



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Janata Party or its governments at the Centre and in States where it rules, is circumscribed everywhere, often by administrative fiat or penal action. Freedoms are curbed further, as social media posts sometimes lead to disciplinary action by universities or legal action by governments.

At many central Universities, if a faculty member applies for duty leave to participate in a conference abroad, he/she has to provide a written undertaking which says: "I will not participate in any anti-Government activities...while I am abroad whether on official duty or a personal visit, I shall be subject to all the provisions of Government Servants Conduct Rules including those relating to connection with the press and criticism of Government...Further I understand that... any breach of these provisions whether committed in India or abroad shall render me equally liable to disciplinary action."

Such intrusion, in different forms, is now being extended to private universities. Dissenting or critical voices of students or faculty members are silenced with disciplinary action. In some cases, it goes much further, essentially because risk averse promoters fall in line, since they do not wish to displease or antagonise the central government, or the State governments where their universities are located.

## Autonomy and accountability

Just as important, the autonomy of university spaces is also sacrosanct in the wider context of political democracy, where universities perform an important role in addition to imparting higher education. In the economy, they are a source of ideas for science, technology, research and development, innovation, and economic or social policies. In society, they are the conscience-keepers as public intellectuals, from among the faculty, who engage with the public domain, informing citizens in their columns or lectures. In the polity, their evaluation or assessment of the performance of governments fosters accountability.

Of course, this autonomy must have a corresponding accountability. But it is essential for governments to recognise that the provision of resources to universities does not endow them with a right to exercise control.

The resources are public money for public universities, which are accountable to students and society through institutional mechanisms that exist or can be created. For this purpose, it is imperative that structures of governance in universities are appropriate for, and conducive to, accountability. Good governance is necessary but not sufficient. There must also be checks and balances in the public domain.

Rankings of universities perform an important role in this context. Such rankings, despite their limitations, provide students, their parents and society at large, such an institutional mechanism for accountability.

It is absolutely essential that regulatory structures provide complete autonomy – administrative, financial and academic – to universities. Liberation from the shackles of the

University Grants Commission is a necessary condition.

The existing parliamentary or legislative acts that created our universities also have many constraints and fetters. Thus, as an approach, it would be far better to reform regulatory structures, provide autonomy to universities and ensure accountability through systems – rather than interventions or controls – to create an environment that encourages freedom of thought and is conducive to learning.

The quest for uniformity is the worst enemy of thinking, creativity, understanding and knowledge, which can thrive only in open societies. One-size-fits-all is a flawed presumption. Indeed, diversity and differentiation are an integral part of the quest for excellence in higher education.

## Governments and their quest to control

Academic freedom in universities is circumscribed not only in India but also in countries such as Argentina, Hungary and Türkiye which have democratically elected governments.

Of course, academic freedom is highly restricted in countries that are ruled by dictators in Africa and Asia. It is also curbed in countries that have one-party rule, for example, China, Russia and Vietnam. China is somewhat different. Even if the freedom for academics – especially in the social sciences and humanities – to write or to speak in the public domain is highly restricted, there is no compromise, driven by preference or prejudice, in the quality of academic appointments at leading universities and research institutions.

The real surprise is the United States, where academic freedom in universities has been sacrosanct for more than a century. The federal government of U.S. President Donald Trump is slashing research grants and imposing curbs on its leading public universities. If this continues, the leading edge of American universities in education, research, science, technology and innovation is bound to erode.

Governments seek to control universities essentially because they are worried about criticism or dissent. Just as important, there is a sense of discomfiture, if not insecurity, since universities, empowered by academic freedom, ask questions that are perceived as difficult. Of course, in some countries, governments just want ideological conformity. Most universities cede their autonomous space because they are largely dependent on government grants to support their teaching and research. The reasons why academics, as individuals, are often silenced are because of fear or compromise, while a few are willing to trade their beliefs for rewards.

The moral of the story is simple. The absence of academic freedom in universities will inevitably harm the teaching-learning process just as it will stifle thinking and creativity in research. Students and teachers will obviously be the worse-off. Ultimately, however, the economy, society and polity will be the losers. *WJ*

It is harming the teaching-learning process while stifling thinking and creativity in research; in the long run, the economy, society and polity will be the losers



# How can SC/ST scholarships be expanded?

What is the current parental income limit for students who come from marginalised communities availing of pre-matric and post-matric scholarships? What did the Parliamentary Committee on Welfare of OBCs recommend? What is the eligibility criteria of these scholarships?

## EXPLAINER

Abhinav Lakshman

### The story so far:

**A**head of the upcoming financial cycle spanning FY 2025-27 to FY 2030-31, the Union government is considering revising the parental income limit for eligibility in availing post and pre-matric scholarships administered to students from marginalised castes and tribes.

### What will be the new limit?

These scholarships require eligible candidates to have parental annual income below ₹2.5 lakh. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is looking to raise parental income limit to ₹4.5 lakh for post and pre-matric ST scholarships, and the Social Justice Ministry is discussing revising the limits for post and pre-matric scholarships for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Denotified Tribes (DNTs). In addition, discussions are also on to raise the parental income limit of college and school scholarships for OBCs, and DNTs.

### What are these scholarships?

The post and pre-matric scholarships for SCs, Scheduled Tribes (STs), and OBCs, are run as central sponsored schemes by the government. This means that it is funded by both the Union and State governments on a 60:40 ratio (Union:States), except for in northeast States where the ratio is 50:50.

The post-matric scholarships for SCs, STs, and OBCs, require the student to be an Indian national, studying at the post-matric stage, that is, after 10th grade. Pre-matric scholarships are mostly available to students of grades IX and X, but for SCs pre-matric scholarships are available from grades I to X, if their parent or guardian is involved in a "rural or backward" occupation. Both post and pre-matric scholarships require students' annual parental income to be below ₹2.5



**Big dreamer** Students in a class of a Govt school in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra in March. newswar.com

lakh to become eligible.

In the ongoing fiscal year's budget estimates, centrally sponsored scholarship schemes for SCs, OBCs, Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs), and DNTs accounted for 66.7% of the Social Justice Department's ₹3,611 crore allocation.

In the Tribal Affairs Ministry, centrally sponsored scholarship schemes for ST students accounted for about 18.6% of the department's ₹14,925.81 crore allocation for FY 2025-26.

### How many avail of the scholarships?

According to available government data,

beneficiaries dropped from 58.63 lakh in 2020-22 to a little over 20.25 lakh in 2023-24. A similar drop was seen in post-matric scholarships for these sections in the same time period, reducing from 43.34 lakh beneficiaries to 38.42 lakh. For STs, there was a drop of 4.63 lakh beneficiaries in this time period for pre-matric scholarships, and a drop of 3.52 lakh beneficiaries for post-matric scholarships.

### What have House panels said about these scholarships as well as eligibility criteria?

In a report on schemes for OBCs run by the Social Justice Ministry, the Parliamentary Committee on Welfare of OBCs earlier this year recommended a "suitable rise" in the income limit from ₹2.5 lakh that is currently set for scholarships for OBC students. While the panel asked the government to double the income limit for beneficiaries of pre and post-matric scholarships for OBCs, it has asked for "suitable rise" in the income limits for beneficiaries of top class scholarships for school and college education.

The panel also said it was puzzling why the pre-matric scholarship for OBCs was only being offered for Class IX and X, recommending that the scholarship start covering students from Class V onwards.

A separate House panel, which was set up to oversee the working of the Tribal Affairs and Social Justice ministries this March, noted the same about post and pre-matric scholarships for ST students, recommending that the parental income limits be revised for those schemes.

These House panels have stressed the importance of these scholarships, and observed that the existing parental income limit was too low, adding that this was preventing many families who need the scholarships from getting access to it. They have suggested that the parental income limit be raised for these scholarships so that the coverage can be extended to as many beneficiaries that need it. *WJS*

## THE GIST

➤ The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is looking to raise parental income limit to ₹4.5 lakh for post and pre-matric ST scholarships.

➤ Data from earlier this year further showed that for pre-matric scholarships for OBCs, EBCs, and DNTs, the beneficiaries dropped from 58.63 lakh in 2022-23 to a little over 20.25 lakh in 2023-24.

➤ House panels have stressed the importance of these scholarships, and observed that the existing parental income limit was too low.



# No excellence sans autonomy

Political intervention and excessive centralisation are major factors in the decline of higher education institutions



DEEPAK NAYYAR

EVERY GOVERNMENT Laments the absence of world-class universities, without realising that their interventions and the growing intrusion of political processes are an important underlying cause. The downward trajectory of universities in India is no surprise. Political interference by the central government or state governments, which encroaches on the autonomy of universities, inevitably accentuates problems in higher education.

Such political intrusion in universities is not new. Starting in the early 1970s, state governments began to interfere in universities. It was about dispensing patronage and exercising power in appointments of vice-chancellors, faculty and non-teaching staff.

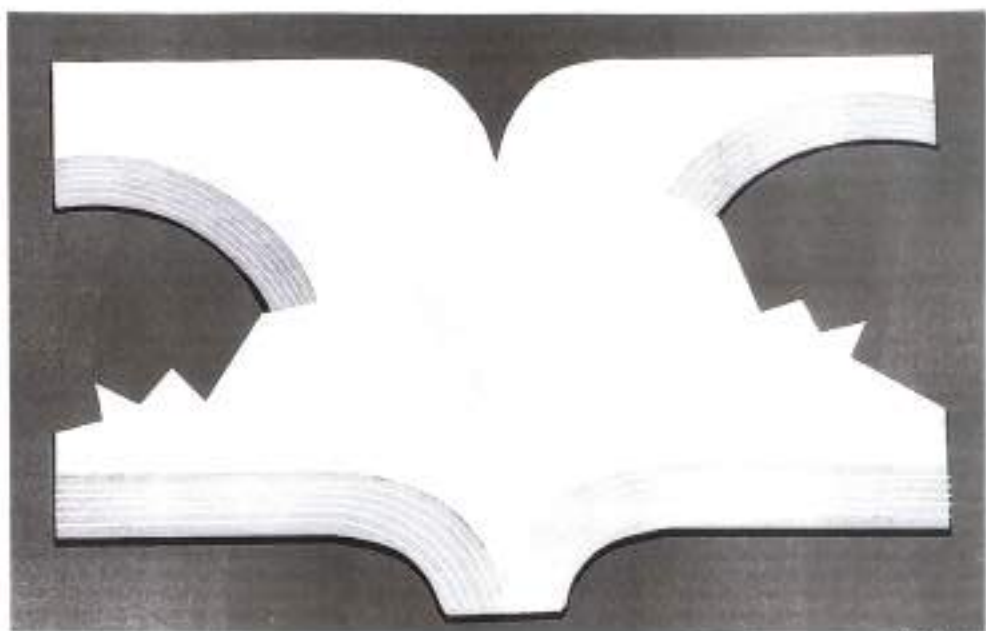
It was not long before similar reasons began to influence the attitudes of central governments towards universities. The turning point might have been the Emergency (1975-1977). This phenomenon increased in its incidence and spread during the quarter-century of coalition governments from 1989 to 2014. The competitive politics unleashed by changes in governments soon spilt over into universities not only as spheres of influence but also as arenas for political contests. Both Congress and the BJP were part of this process. Yet coalition governments provided a few checks and balances.

Political intervention and encroachment by governments with an absolute majority gathered momentum after the general election in 2014. The period since then has witnessed a pronounced increase in intrusion and government intervention in universities, which has gathered further momentum since mid-2019.

The blame for the state of our universities cannot be laid at the door of politics and governments alone. Universities as communities, and as institutions, are just as much to blame. The quality of leadership at universities has declined rapidly, in part because of partisan appointments by governments of VCs who are simply not good enough as academics or administrators, and in part because most VCs simply do not have the courage and the integrity to stand up to governments, but have an eye on the next job they might get. The professoriate is mostly either complicit, as part of the political process in teachers' unions, or silent, preferring to look the other way, engaged in their narrow academic pursuits. Those who stand up are too few. The students are either caught up in the same party-political unions or opt out to concentrate on their academic tasks.

For university communities, it is imperative to recognise that such compromises are self-destructive as acts of commission. So is opting out, as an act of omission. Indeed, if universities want autonomy, it will not be conferred on them by benevolent governments. They have to claim — indeed, consciously protect — their autonomy, simply because autonomy is as autonomy does.

At universities, the appointment of VCs is the essential first step. If not a necessary condition, for subsequent intervention, in central universities, it is the prerogative of the Visitor — the President of India — who is not bound by the advice of the Council of Ministers in this matter, to select the vice-chancellor from the panel submitted by the search committee, which includes two distinguished persons from outside, nominated by the executive council of the university. Alas, these checks and balances embedded in the statutes are now circumvented by design



C R Sankumar

with purposive choices.

Once the VC is appointed, the appointments of deans of faculties and heads of departments are now an administrative decision, as the non-discretionary principle of appointment by seniority or rotation has been dispensed with. Deans and heads are no longer independent voices. Thus, the process of shortlisting candidates cannot be objective or fair. The checks and balances built into university statutes for appointments of faculty members are circumvented further through purposive manipulation in the choice of subject experts in selection committees, who are mostly not qualified for the role. And these subject experts often refuse to sign the minute unless the specified candidates are selected.

It would be no exaggeration to state that faculty appointments at universities, as well as constituent undergraduate colleges, are increasingly driven by RSS ideology and BJP preferences in politics, with a focus on loyalty rather than talent or merit.

The ideology of the BJP and the RSS, which shapes their social and political perspective, is now exercising a profound influence on higher education in India. There are two apparent manifestations of this unfolding reality. First, there is a visible emergence of institutionalised control mechanisms that decide what universities can or cannot do. Second, appointments at universities, which should be the domain of universities alone, are increasingly influenced, if not shaped, by the political motivation and the invisible hand of governments in office.

The primary instrument of control in the sphere of teaching, whether appointments or curricula, is the University Grants Commission (UGC). There are subsidiary instruments of control in the sphere of research, indirectly through institutions such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR), Department of Science & Technology (DST), etc. Even admissions processes have been centralised in the National Testing Agency — CUET, JEE, NEET — the competence and integrity of which has been repeatedly questioned as leaks and scandals have surfaced. The rationale for such a centralisation is questionable and flawed.

In principle, determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examinations and

research at universities is among the primary functions of the UGC. How can it independently evaluate the quality of university appointments if it is such an integral, if not complicit, part of the process? The UGC is the problem — it cannot be a solution. It performs the functions of licensing, regulation and disbursement. These three functions are not performed by one institution anywhere in the world because this eliminates all checks and balances.

Such power enables the UGC to exercise enormous control over universities. Its interventions at political behest and its belief that one-size-must-fit-all drives its fetish for standardisation, whether curricula, appointments, promotions, salaries, evaluation, administration or institutional architecture. Such levelling crowds out or pre-empt excellence, because it stifles diversity, pluralism and differentiation in higher education, all of which are necessary to develop academic excellence.

It is clear that the process of appointments at universities, undergraduate colleges and other higher education institutions in India is now seriously flawed. It is no longer objective. Selections are shaped by political preferences and political networks. The quality of those appointed to leadership positions in higher education, even if for limited tenures, is critical, because they willingly cede the autonomy of their institutional space for their political commitment or simply their career paths.

The quality of those appointed to faculty positions is perhaps even more critical because it will shape the future of higher education. If persons who are not fit to teach are appointed, it is bound to hurt successive generations of students, as there are permanent positions until the age of retirement at 65 years. This can only mortgage the future of public universities or other higher education institutions in India, for there are long-term consequences of what appear to be short-term interventions at a point in time. Moreover, it is exceedingly difficult to reverse such processes, even if and when governments change, because the time lags in implementing correctives are long.

It takes decades to build universities or higher education institutions, months to destroy them, and at least a decade to rebuild them.

The writer is an economist and former vice-chancellor, University of Delhi

The ideology of the BJP and the RSS, which shapes their social and political perspective, is now exercising a profound influence on higher education in India. There are two apparent manifestations of this unfolding reality. First, there is a visible emergence of institutionalised control mechanisms that decide what universities can or cannot do. Second, appointments at universities, which should be the domain of universities alone, are increasingly influenced, if not shaped, by the political motivation and the invisible hand of governments in office.



# IS UNIVERSITY-LED WHITE LABELLING THE FUTURE OF **JOB-READY** DEGREES?

WHITE-LABELLED PROGRAMMES ACT AS POWERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION & REAL-WORLD JOB SKILLS

ANINDITA ACHARYA

**P**icture this: a business school joins forces with a fintech edtech. Sure, students learn corporate finance theory, but they also get to run live simulations on payment gateway platforms, explore blockchain in finance, and tackle case studies from real fintech startups. By graduation, they're not just walking away with a degree, they've got a portfolio that can speak for itself. Or take a computer science department that partners with a cloud computing edtech. Students still earn their BTech, but now they also bag AWS certifications, because the curriculum is constantly updated to match the latest in DevOps, AI, and cybersecurity.

A decade ago, getting a credible degree usually meant showing up to campus every day, following a set-in-stone syllabus, and hoping your skills would still be relevant by the time you graduated. Today, university-led white labelling has flipped the script. In this model, a university lends its name, faculty expertise, and accreditation to a programme co-created and often delivered with an edtech partner. The university brings the trust and official



stamp; the edtech brings cutting-edge tools, flexibility, and industry smarts. The result? Degrees that are as career-ready as a LinkedIn profile stacked with real-world projects.

"White labelling works best when universities lead on academics and edtech provides the infrastructure. The university should define pedagogy, assessment, and academic governance. This includes setting learning goals, rubrics, and evidence of Assurance of Learning (AoL). Edtech partners then enable scalability and quality through learning platforms, modular content, AI-driven personalization, and secure assessment tools. The result is programs that remain true to the university's standards while staying aligned with industry needs. We already see credible examples of

this approach, where universities offer online degrees and micro credentials on third-party platforms while maintaining full academic oversight and brand integrity," said Abhay G Chebbi, Pro-Chancellor, Alliance University.

Like the University of London white labels its Bachelor of Science in Computer Science through Coursera. The degree carries the university's name, but the course videos, platform technology, and interactive tools are Coursera's. Students from over 150 countries can get a UK-recognized degree without ever setting foot in London. IIM-K has partnered with TPL to deliver executive education programmes. The academic input and final certification come from IIM-K,

opportunity to bridge the gap between traditional education and real-world job skills, especially for diverse and underserved learner populations.

"With adaptive learning tools, students can progress at their own pace, revisit complex topics, or accelerate through what they already know, helping each learner succeed on their own terms. Also, online programmes allow us to reach learners from remote or marginalised communities, creating access to education that was previously out of reach," he said.

University-led white labelling, where a university's academic credibility meets an edtech's speed, technology, and industry connections, is reshaping higher education into a flexible, globally accessible, and job-ready experience. With the global EdTech market set to hit \$404 billion in 2025 (and \$610 billion by 2033), 67% of edtech startups now partner with universities, often adding AI-powered tools projected to grow from \$5.3 billion to \$98 billion by 2034. Studies show sharing digital credentials can boost employment chances by 6-8%, and real-world collaborations like University of London-Coursera, ASU-Starbucks, and JGU-upGrad are proving that degrees can be both prestigious and industry-relevant from day one.

"EdTech and university partnerships can stay aligned with industry needs by treating the collaboration like a live lab, using labour market trends, employer feedback and learner data to shape curricula. Modular, stackable credentials that count toward degrees can be updated faster than full programs, keeping content current. Combining AI-driven personalization with hands-on learning such as simulations, case studies and industry mentored projects helps students prove real skills. Many platforms already offer credit-bearing micro credentials valued by employers, which universities can adopt while maintaining academic standards," said Chebbi.

**WHILE THE UNIVERSITY BRINGS THE TRUST AND OFFICIAL STAMP, THE EDETECH BRINGS CUTTING-EDGE TOOLS, FLEXIBILITY AND INDUSTRY SMARTS**

but TPL handles delivery, marketing, and integration of case studies from current industry trends.

Sardar Simarpreet Singh, Director JIS Group, said white-labelled programmes, when developed thoughtfully and led by academically committed institutions, can transform the way the world learns and works. In fact, report says that white-labelled online programmes effectively close the 80% employer-reported skills gap while catering to diverse student needs worldwide. Singh views online white-labelled programmes as a powerful





# Sports governance

New law is a good attempt to clean the mess

**M**ISMANAGEMENT, misconduct and lack of transparency have been the bane of Indian sports administration for decades. The National Sports Governance Bill, passed by Parliament this week, aims to set things right at long last with an athlete-centric approach. It provides for the setting up of the National Sports Board (NSB), an independent regulatory authority that will have overriding powers to grant or suspend recognition of various national sports federations (NSFs) and also collaborate with international federations for the welfare of athletes. The ills plaguing some NSFs have adversely impacted the training and performance of players. An obvious example is the Wrestling Federation of India, whose then chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh — a BJP MP at that time — was accused of sexual harassment by a group of wrestlers. Brij Bhushan had to step down, but he seemingly continues to call the shots through his successor.

The question arises: Will the new law loosen political and bureaucratic hold over Indian sports bodies? That depends largely on the composition of the NSB and its relationship with the ministry. The government has claimed that it is seeking to be a facilitator and is not keen on exercising control or resorting to interference. However, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. A sea change is possible if administrators focus on the players rather than on their own political games.

The governance legislation and the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill are steps in the right direction for a country that aspires not only to host the 2036 Olympics but also to become a sporting powerhouse. India has been a perennial under-achiever in the global sports arena, and it is hoped that a robust legal framework will help in turning the tide. However, the alleged attempt to keep the cash-rich Indian cricket board out of the RTI's ambit has revealed the absence of a level playing field. *trile*



# Degrees without borders: India's rise in transnational education

JAHNAK PUSHPATHAN

In recent strategic discussions with academic leaders and international collaborators, one topic recurs: the evolving aspirations of Indian students and the shifting dynamics of global education. The conversation is no longer just about where students wish to study, but how, why, and at what cost.

A 2024 IC3 Institute survey found that 45% of Indian parents exploring international education cited uncertainty in immigration and higher education policies as a key concern—up from 28% in 2022. Changing political climates, fluctuating visa norms, and evolving compliance requirements have made the journey less predictable.

Others are reassessing the cost-benefit equation. A 2023 RedSeer report estimated that families now spend Rs 5-7 lakh more on preparatory services, standardised testing, and admissions consultants. The study abroad journey—promoted as a high-investment pathway to global success—

inspires ambition but demands students navigate increasing complexity.

These concerns point to something deeper: a quiet reckoning about the shifting terrain of global education and a growing interest in transnational education (TNE)—earning international qualifications without leaving India.

The recent growth of UK universities launching dual-degree programmes and branch campuses here reflects this shift. According to a 2024 British Council-FICCI report, India is now among the top three target countries for UK TNE expansion, signalling a model of mobility in which the knowledge, not the student, moves.

The desire for high-quality education and global exposure still drives Indian students abroad. In the past five years, their numbers have risen by 52.2%. The US, UK, and Canada remain top destinations, with India recently surpassing China as the largest source of international students in the US. In the UK, Indian student numbers have grown nearly 300% in just five years.

However, this is not an unmitigated success—

it comes with two caveats.

First, India's higher education ecosystem is expanding rapidly. The country now has 1,158 universities, 48,473 colleges, and 12,002 stand-alone institutions. To reach a 50% gross enrolment ratio (GER), capacity must more than double—a challenge, but also an opportunity.

Second, the number of Indian universities in international rankings has risen by 388%, a result of deliberate reforms under the National Education Policy (NEP), which champions "internationalisation at home".

Building global bridges

Indian universities are embracing global best practices through online courses, faculty exchanges, dual and joint degrees, and twinning programmes—not as symbolic gestures, but as part of a strategic shift towards sustainable, high-impact TNE.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced enabling regulations for twinning, joint, and dual degree programmes. Programmes like GIAN (Global Initiative for Academic Network) and SPARC (Scheme for Promotion of Ac-

ademic and Research Collaboration) are fostering partnerships and bringing global expertise into Indian classrooms.

The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has also opened doors for foreign universities—including the UK's Coventry, Qatar's University of Education, and the University of Surrey, along with Australia's Deakin and Wollongong—to establish campuses in GIFT City, Gandhinagar. The US's Illinois Institute of Technology will soon open in Mumbai. Other leading global universities are setting up campuses across India: Imperial College London and the University of Liverpool in Bengaluru, the University of Southampton in Delhi NCR, and the University of Aberdeen and York University in Mumbai.

Under the British Council's Going Global Partnerships, 108 India-UK collaborations have been launched with 63 million in grants, involving 115 Indian and 58 UK institutions. These partnerships are co-developing TNE strategies, globally comparable curricula, and joint degree pathways.

The recent endorsement of India-UK Vi-

sion 2025 by the two prime ministers will further bolster education and skills partnerships, nurturing the next generation of global talent. Initiatives like the UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) are also strengthening research, leadership, and skills links. UKIERI's latest round includes 34 research grants, climate change, AI, net-zero, and sustainable development. Targeted scholarships—such as the GREAT and Women in STEM awards—are widening access to high-demand fields.

The Annual Status of Higher Education (ASHE) 2024 report names Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka as frontrunners. Their GERs—47% for Tamil Nadu, 41.3% for Kerala, and 36.2% for Karnataka—far exceed the national average of 28.4%. They also lead in institutional density and per-student expenditure, creating more supportive learning environments.

Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are collaborating with UK institutions to reform curricula and enhance student mobility. Telangana has partnered with the Welsh Government to

deepen research and academic ties. Both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have participated in the British Council's SCOUT programme (Scholars of Outstanding Undergraduate Talent), sending students to the University of East London and Durham University, respectively. Karnataka has signed MoUs with nine global universities for its upcoming KWEN City education hub.

Kerala, meanwhile, is investing Rs 25,000 crore in its 'Study in Kerala' initiative to position itself as a global education destination. Inbound student mobility is also rising, with increasing numbers from Asia and Africa choosing Indian institutions—a trend likely to grow if southern India's model is adopted more widely.

For many Indian families, studying abroad remains a financial stretch. The appeal of internationally branded degrees within India offers a compelling alternative. It combines the prestige and exposure of global education with the accessibility and cost-efficiency of a domestic degree.

(The author is Director of South India, British Council.)



# Sources in journalism can be great teachers

How V. Vasanthidevi and others shaped a reporter's  
understanding of a beat

**Meera Srinivasan**

**T**he first decade of this century was critical for school education in India. Notably, the Union government launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme, aimed at achieving universal elementary education, and Parliament enacted the Right to Education Act. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu was experimenting with new initiatives, including introducing Montessori-inspired learning methods for primary students in the State's public school system, and Samacheer Kalvi, an attempt to bring uniformity in standards of school education.

It was a great time to be on the education beat. Each of these initiatives, both at the national level as well as in the State, sparked debates on making education more accessible and better for all. They laid bare both the challenges within the public education system and the resistance from private schools to changes. They made clear the downside of hasty policy shifts without adequate groundwork, as well as the blatant class bias of private schools. There was a lot to learn every day, as we tried reporting on these crucial developments.

However, not all of us immediately grasped the full import of the policy changes. We regularly spoke to government officials, teachers, principals, students, and parents. Luckily, we were also exposed to several committed practitioners and activists, who were closely engaged in the unfolding shifts.

As a cub reporter covering school education, I was especially drawn to two of them: Professor V. Vasanthidevi, a former Vice-Chancellor and well-known activist, who passed away recently, and Dr. S.S. Rajagopalan, a retired headmaster who had decades of teaching and administrative experience. I would go to these senior activists and several others, including Aruna Rathnam, then an education specialist at UNICEF, and feminist scholar V. Geetha, for perspective.

Their positions stemmed from an unwavering commitment to social and eco-

nomic justice. Their interventions sought to democratise education. They would painstakingly expose the inequalities and inequities within our education systems, offering grounded solutions to address those. Their views, along with generous pointers from colleagues who had been on the beat before me, shaped my political understanding of education. As senior activists with busy schedules, they were always willing to spare time and explain their ideas at length. I remember thinking "they must be great teachers."

I recall Prof. Vasanthidevi's involvement in an exercise on children's learning outcomes – found to be very low – and her comprehensive analysis of the problem as one of resources, pedagogy, and home environment, and not merely a student's "ability", as is often claimed. With her persuasive argument in simple language, which zoomed into class inequality, and disparities of caste, gender, and geographic location, she tore apart the "meritocracy" argument.

Over the years my beats and location changed, but I was in touch with Prof. Vasanthidevi and Dr. SSR, as he is known. They, too, would check in from time to time or share feedback on a story. I last met Prof. Vasanthidevi in 2016 at her apartment in Chennai. This was for an interview when the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi fielded her in Dr. Radhakrishnan Nagar (R.K. Nagar) in north Chennai, against Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa. Prof. Vasanthidevi seemed clear about her prospects in that election, but saw the campaign as an opportunity to interact with voters from the largely working-class locality, and highlight the neglect there. I asked about her own political beliefs and the factors that shaped them. She said, among other things, "Politicisation is such an important part of education."

In a lifetime of activism, Prof. Vasanthidevi worked on a range of issues, and invariably circled back to the role of education for critical thought and change.



# देश की लड़कियां शिक्षा में लड़कों से आगे हैं और नौकरी में पीछे बेटी पढ़ी, फिर कहा गई



मनीष गुप्ता,  
न्यूयॉर्क से

'बेटी बचाओ, बेटी पढ़ाओ'। उसने पढ़ा और लड़कों से आगे निकल गई। न सिर्फ संख्या, बल्कि परफॉर्मेंस में भी बेटियां बाजी मारती रहीं। शहरों में, गांवों में, इंजीनियरिंग में, मेडिकल कॉलेज में - हर जगह बेटियां छाई रहीं। 'बेटियां फिर से अक्ल' - कई

बरसों से ये सुर्खियां हम गर्व से पढ़ते आ रहे हैं। भारत जैसे देश में, जहां परंपरागत रूप से लड़कों को प्राथमिकता दी जाती थी, लड़कियों का आगे निकल जाना एक ऐतिहासिक जीत थी। लेकिन उनका चमकना धूमकेतु की तरह है। वह चमकती हैं, फिर दिखती नहीं। न बोर्डरूम में, न ऑफिसों में और न उस GDP में, जिसे तरक्की का पैमाना कहा जाता है।

**काम के कम मौके**। नारियों की भागीदारी U-shaped curve है। कम पढ़ी-लिखी महिलाएं काम करती हैं। जैसे-जैसे शिक्षा बढ़ती है, नौकरी में भागीदारी गिरती जाती है। और सिर्फ कुछ ही 'एलीट' महिलाएं उस वक्र के ऊपरी छोर तक वापस पहुंच पाती हैं। कारण हैं - शादी, मातृत्व, समाज की चुप अपेक्षाएं। यह कोई संयोग नहीं, यह हमारी संस्कृति है।

**वापसी का अवसर नहीं**। लड़कियों की शिक्षा को 'शादी के बाजार' में उनकी 'क्वालिटी' बढ़ाने का जरिया मान लिया गया। नौकरी शौक के लिए एक-दो साल कर लो, फिर आराम से घर संभालो! करियर, स्वतंत्रता, अपनी कमाई से जिंदगी जीने का सपना - इन सबको अक्सर 'संस्कारहीनता' का नाम दे दिया जाता है। बहुत-सी शिक्षित महिलाएं खुद भी इसे अपनी नियति मान चुकी हैं।

**इंडियन पैराडॉक्स**। इस विरोधाभास को विकास विशेषज्ञ 'इंडियन पैराडॉक्स' कहते हैं। एक ओर तो लड़कियां शिक्षा में लड़कों से आगे निकल रही हैं, दूसरी ओर नौकरी की दुनिया में उनकी कम भागीदारी चिंता का विषय है। इसे 'feminization of education, masculinization of work' कहा जाता है।

**लगातार गिरावट**। विश्वविद्यालयों में महिलाओं की भागीदारी 50% के करीब है, लेकिन औपचारिक रूप से काम करने वाली महिलाओं की संख्या केवल 22% है। चीन में यह आंकड़ा 60% है, अमेरिका में 56% और केन्या में 47%। हमसे आगे तो सऊदी अरब



## बेटी बचाओ बेटी पढ़ाओ

### समानता चाहिए

■ कामकाजी आयाती में महिलाओं का हिस्सा केवल 22%	■ चीन, अमेरिका ही नहीं, बांग्लादेश से भी पीछे है भारत	■ महिलाओं की भागीदारी बढ़े तो GDP होगी बेहतर
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(28%) और बांग्लादेश (36.9%) भी हैं। हैरत की बात है कि 2005 में कामकाजी महिलाओं की संख्या 32% थी और लगातार गिरावट के बाद 2021 में यह 19% रही। यानी शिक्षा बढ़ी, नौकरी कम हुई।

**लंबा संघर्ष**। लड़कियों को शिक्षा का अधिकार बहुत संघर्ष के बाद मिला है। 1848 में, जब लड़कियों को पढ़ाना गुनाह समझा जाता था, ज्योतिराव और सावित्रीबाई फुले ने पुणे में पहला कन्या विद्यालय खोला। राजा राम मोहन राय और ईश्वर चंद्र विद्यासागर ने नारी शिक्षा की वकालत की। आजादी के बाद, जवाहरलाल नेहरू ने कहा था, 'आप एक पुरुष को शिक्षित करते हैं, तो एक व्यक्ति को शिक्षित करते हैं। जब आप एक महिला को शिक्षित करते हैं, तो एक पूरी पीढ़ी को शिक्षित करते हैं।' उनके कार्यकाल में UGC और Women's Education Committee बनीं।

**योजनाएं और कानून**। 1968 की पहली शिक्षा नीति ने लैंगिक बराबरी को स्पष्ट लक्ष्य बनाया। 1986 नीति में महिलाओं की व्यावसायिक ट्रेनिंग, साक्षरता को प्राथमिकता दी गई। अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी के कार्यकाल में सर्व शिक्षा अभियान (2001) ने शिक्षा को जन आंदोलन बनाया। मनमोहन सिंह सरकार के समय में RTE Act, कस्तूरबा बालिका विद्यालय और NSIGSE जैसी योजनाओं से स्कूल छोड़ने वाली लड़कियों की संख्या में गिरावट आई। फिर मोदी

सरकार ने 2015 में 'बेटी बचाओ, बेटी पढ़ाओ' का नारा दिया जो आज तक हर जुबान पर है। इतने वर्षों की मेहनत, इतने कानून, योजनाएं और सुधार, इसलिए सवाल और भी तीखा हो जाता है कि बेटियां वर्कफोर्स से गायब क्यों हो रही हैं?

**अर्थव्यवस्था का नुकसान**। बेटियों के लिए रास्ता न होना राष्ट्रीय संपत्ति का भी नुकसान है। विश्व बैंक कहता है, अगर हम महिलाओं की भागीदारी सिर्फ 10% बढ़ा दें, तो भारत की GDP 16% तक बढ़ सकती है। McKinsey का अनुमान है कि भारत 770 बिलियन डॉलर अर्थव्यवस्था में जोड़ सकता है अगर महिला-पुरुष बराबरी हो। हम यह सुनते ही रहते हैं कि भारत एक वैश्विक महाशक्ति बनने वाला है। लेकिन क्या कोई महाशक्ति आधी आबादी को घरों में बंद रखकर बनती है?

**सबका हित**। अब हमें सिर्फ 'बेटी पढ़ाओ' नहीं, 'बेटी को जीने दो, कमाने दो, सपने देखने दो' कहना होगा। और यह काम सिर्फ सरकार का नहीं है - कॉर्पोरेट, पंचायत, समाज और खुद महिलाओं को अपनी भागीदारी को प्राथमिकता देनी होगी। जब हम लड़कियों को पढ़ाने में इतना निवेश करते हैं, तो उन्हें ऊंचाई छूने का हक भी दें। यह महिला, पुरुष, परिवार, समाज और देश - सभी के हित में होगा।

(लेखक फिल्मकार, कॉलमनिस्ट और राइटर हैं)



{ ENGENDERED }

Lalita Panicker



# Empowering young women to enter higher education

**T**he recent suicides by young women students in Balasore, Noida and Kharagpur underscore the critical shortcomings in the ecosystem designed to protect and support female students, ultimately undermining public trust in the effectiveness of gender equity initiatives.

"Young women in India, especially from underprivileged backgrounds, face many challenges in their pursuit of higher education. Beyond the obvious struggles like money and society's 'no', it's the daily battles that wear them down. They juggle housework and caregiving. Getting to college means risking unsafe buses. There is pressure on them for early marriage. And then there is a crippling feeling of inadequacy, lack of self-worth and finally a lack of agency," says Dr Kiran Modi, founder and managing trustee of Udayan Care, which works in facilitating higher education for girls. According to a longitudinal study conducted by her organisation in partnership with Duke University, at least one-fifth of the girls surveyed had harboured suicidal tendencies.

Systemic change can only happen if girls are empowered from an early age. The Udayan Shalini Fellowship (USF) has for the past 23 years has addressed the obstacles that prevent girls from pursuing their educational aspirations. These include lack of family support, challenging socio-economic backgrounds, and restrictive cultural norms.

USF has 38 chapters across India and provides education, agency, and leadership pathways to over 18,000 primarily first-generation learners. It actively identifies and supports at-risk adolescent girls who demonstrate a passion for higher education and a commitment to achieving their academic goals. Each fellow receives five to six years of comprehensive support, creating a holistic environment with interconnected services designed to address their individual needs and challenges.

USF alumni have gone on to excel in

diverse fields. A 2023 impact evaluation that of USF found that 73% of fellows are first-generation college attendees, breaking the cycle of poverty and limited educational opportunities in their families. Notably, 42% of fellows choose to pursue science streams, contributing to the diversification of women's representation in STEM fields.

Anurag Behar, CEO, Azim Premji Foundation, says, "Women face the same challenges in higher education as they face in the rest of our society. Two things can help: First, having more women in leadership roles, and second, any violation must be dealt with quickly, decisively, and fairly. What concerns me equally, or perhaps, even more are the challenges faced by women that are outside their institution ... If there is an everyday pressure on money not being available for commuting to college, or for food at the canteen or for buying books, it's a huge strain."

Since the 1950s, the government has launched numerous initiatives with the primary goal of enhancing educational opportunities for women. The Kothari Commission (1964-1966), offered a comprehensive review of the Indian education system that emphasised the importance of gender equality, and the National Policy of Education (1986) outlined a long-term vision for education reform.

These efforts led to a significant and measurable increase in women's access to higher education institutions. Data reveals a substantial rise in female enrolment. There has been a notable increase of 23% in women's enrolment in STEM courses.

It is clear that if young women's access to higher education has to grow, families, educational institutions and society at large must come together to provide responsive and safe spaces. Young women must be ensured access to counselling services, and mentoring support, enabling them to build a degree of agency.

*The views expressed are personal.*

17/8/24



# Meghnad Desai: Who he was in his thoughts

**L**ord Meghnad Desai and his wife, Kishwar, were sitting in the first row when, on April 29 this year, my latest book, *Echoes of Eternity: A Journey through Indian Thought from the Rigveda to the Present*, was launched. Meghnad looked in fine fettle, avidly following the ensuing discussion between Nitin Gadkari, Shashi Tharoor, Shoma Chaudhary, and I. After the event, Kishwar and he were very keen that my wife and I join them for a drink, but we could stay only briefly. The next day, we heard he had been admitted to hospital.

One never knows in life what the next moment will bring. But Meghnad's passing on July 29 at the age of 85 brought back memories of over two decades. My wife and I were witnesses when Kishwar and he were married at the Marlborough registration office in London in 2004. After the registers were signed, I can never forget how Meghnad pulled out a small pouch from his pocket. It contained sindoor, and he took a pinch and put it in the parting of Kishwar's hair.

This public acknowledgement of his cultural roots surprised me, because this was the same man who told me that when he left India at the age of 21 to do his doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania, he felt "no special wrench, and thought to myself that at last my Indian chapter is behind me". He taught at the University of

California in Berkeley, before moving to teach at London School of Economics (LSE). I remember in February 2005, when I was posted in London as the director of The Nehru Centre, we were at their home for dinner, and in the book-lined living room, he spoke at length — while twirling his glass of red wine — about his life's journey.

"I did not see myself as an Indian," he said. "I married an Englishwoman. We had three children. Nor did I come across racism. I gave up my Indian passport in 1976. In fact, even before, in 1971, I had joined the Labour Party (of which he was the chairperson from 1986 to 1992). In 1995, when I was made a member of the House of Lords, I made it clear that I did not want to be a community leader or the spokesperson of the Gujaratis. I am British."

But was he? The truth is there are four things you cannot leave behind at immigration — religion, language, colour and culture. For all his denials, Meghnad was more Indian than he was willing to admit. That is why ultimately, he emotionally returned to India when he married Kishwar Ahluwalia. I've known Kishwar for much longer, before she met Meghnad. She was then working in a publishing firm, and editing his book on the iconic actor Dilip Kumar. As she laughingly admits, Meghnad fell head over heels in love with her, overwhelming her with



The great thing about Meghnad was that he was a well-informed and civilised conversationalist, from whom you always learnt something.

MINT/ARCHIVE

champagne and flowers, until she accepted, even though, given the age gap, and the fact that from her previous marriage she had two children, she was initially reluctant. Marriage did not reduce Meghnad's unabashed and happy rotundity, but I seem to recall that — like some latter-day Desdemona — Lady Kishwar Desai did persuade him to slightly prune his trademark halo of white hair. They were happily married for 21 years.

Over the years, through innumerable interactions, I realised that under his easy-going demeanour, Meghnad had a razor-sharp mind. As professor-emeritus at the LSE, and as Lord Desai, he contributed significantly to the public discourse both in India and Britain on economics and politics. He wrote several scholarly books, including two on Marxian eco-

nomics, established the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at LSE in 1992, and was conferred the Padma Bhushan in 2008.

Meghnad and Kishwar were a much-loved part of Delhi's social circle, and divided their time between London and Delhi, and Goa where they had bought a home.

For me, the great thing about Meghnad was that he was a well-informed and civilised conversationalist, from whom you always learnt something. And, of course, he was a loyal friend, who will be deeply missed. My deepest condolences to Kishwar.

Pavan K Varma is author, diplomat, and former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha). The views expressed are personal.



Pavan K Varma

NT/14



# IIM in city

**W**ith the Centre approving an IIM in Guwahati – the second in the Northeast and the 22nd in the country – Assam will have another flagship institution. Institutions such as these can go a long way in bringing in long-term transformation in the educational spheres. Education holds the key to overall, inclusive progress and no amount of investment can be too high to make the Northeast's educational scenario at par with the advanced regions of the country. The IIM will add to the cluster of higher educational institutes comprising IIT, National Law University, AIIMS, and the proposed Forensic University in and around the city. Having a large number of premier institutes in and around the city has put it in a position to emerge as a hub of quality higher education in the years ahead. Having said this, it is also equally imperative that other parts of the State, too, have their share of development in the educational spheres. This is essential for ensuring a more balanced development across the State. Since the State is in need of many different higher institutes of learning, the government can facilitate setting up those to meet the goal of regional aspirations and balanced development.

Of late, there has been a lot of talk about transforming Assam into an educational hub in eastern India. But the path for the desired transformation will be an arduous one and overcoming the challenges will require a vision backed by sincerity, perseverance and hard work. As of now, hardly any of the State's universities figures among the country's top hundred and that itself indicates where the lacunae lie. As every great thing begins from scratch, it would also be interesting to know what the government is planning to revamp the public school education system, which is in complete disarray largely because of the lack of adequate government attention. We also need to ponder why we are not able to produce successful candidates in all-India recruitment examinations, especially the prestigious IAS and allied services, on a regular basis. More than loud utterances, a sincere and long-term approach taking into account the ground reality is what we need. The Chief Minister had, a couple of years back, set a rather ambitious goal of propelling 50 percent of the State's universities into the top hundred varsities of the country. A varsity, in order to rank among the best, will have to be mindful of achieving excellence on many fronts. A wide gamut of issues, such as curricular aspects, teaching-learning and evaluation, research, consultancy and extension, infrastructure and learning resources, student support and progression, governance and leadership, and innovative practices will serve as the basis for assessing an institution's worth as a leader in the academic domain.

Ar/16/14



P. John J. Kennedy  
S.P. Mishra

India's higher education sector has grown remarkably, boasting 1,168 registered universities and 45,473 colleges serving millions of students. Despite this expansive network, the government's move to allow foreign universities to establish campuses in India raises some concerns.

#### Studying abroad

Each year, eight to 10 lakh Indian students choose to pursue higher education abroad, even as over 4.33 crore students enroll in institutions within India. However, the decision to study overseas isn't driven by academic quality alone. Many of those who can afford the high costs often see international education as a worthwhile investment. What they're really seeking is not just a degree but the experience of living in a new culture, building global networks, and gaining professional exposure, which cannot be replicated by foreign campuses located within India.

Career prospects also play a significant role. Many students believe they stand a better chance of securing high-paying jobs in developed economies after graduation. In fact, education often becomes a stepping stone toward long-term goals like permanent residency in or citizenship of countries such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, or Australia, which attract stu-

dents with their stronger economies, higher salaries, and robust career opportunities. While foreign universities operating in India may offer excellent academic programmes, they could fall short of delivering these broader, more aspirational benefits.

#### Challenges

The idea of global institutions setting up campuses in India may sound progressive or even visionary, but it comes with several serious concerns that deserve closer examination.

A pressing issue is the

potential financial drain without corresponding benefits to the local education ecosystem. Foreign universities will likely repatriate profits to their home countries instead of reinvesting in India. In contrast, domestic institutions typically use their earnings for faculty development, fund research, and upgrade infrastructure. This means foreign campuses could create a steady outflow of resources that benefits their countries of origin more than India's education sector.

Another major concern

is the limited alignment of these campuses with the real aspirations of Indian students. Indian students seek overseas education for immigration benefits, international job markets, and cultural exposure. Without these incentives, their appeal remains limited.

There's also the risk of competitive displacement. India already boasts an extensive higher education network. Bringing in established global institutions could marginalise smaller or less-known Indian universities. The brand pow-

er of foreign universities might attract the best students and faculty, leaving local institutions to struggle for relevance and resources.

Cost is another major factor. Global universities tend to operate on a high-cost model, charging tuition fees far above what most Indian institutions ask for. If they follow a similar pricing strategy here, access will likely be limited to affluent students, creating an elitist and exclusionary education system. Such a model goes against the broader national goal of inclusive and equitable education for all.

Further, the long-term benefits of foreign campuses remain unproven. India already enables international education collaborations through IITs, IIMs, and other premier institutions. The effectiveness of standalone foreign campuses in significantly improving education standards remains uncertain, making the policy a risky experiment.

#### Alternatives

Given these concerns, India would do well to consider alternative strategies that enhance its higher education sector while maintaining economic and academic autonomy.

A more sustainable approach would begin with strengthening Indian universities themselves. This means increasing funding, expanding research opportunities, and investing in faculty development so that domestic institutions

can offer globally competitive education without depending on foreign players.

Another promising strategy involves encouraging global collaborations within Indian campuses. Joint research projects, faculty exchange programmes, and integrated curricula can bring international standards and perspectives into Indian classrooms without leading to large-scale financial outflows. Technology also offers an effective and affordable pathway to global exposure. Virtual exchange programmes, international webinars, and global faculty lectures could offer students exposure to world-class education at lower costs, making international learning more accessible.

Finally, if the objective is to facilitate global education, increasing scholarships for Indian students seeking international opportunities would be a more effective and targeted approach.

The focus should be on strengthening Indian institutions, fostering international collaborations, and expanding global exposure more effectively. For now, this policy seems like a miscalculated opportunity rather than a strategic advancement for India's higher education ecosystem.

(Views expressed are personal)

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# Promise or pitfall?

While the idea of foreign universities setting up campuses in India may sound progressive, it comes with serious concerns.



SHUTTERSTOCK/PHOTO



# India's patent landscape: universities as changemakers

The country is steadily moving from being merely a consumer of global technology to becoming its creator

## DATA POINT

**Twinkle Halder**  
**Vidhya Soundararajan**

For 'Make in India' to succeed, India must "first discover, then invent, and then make," said David Gross, American theoretical physicist and co-recipient of the 2004 Nobel Prize in Physics, at the inaugural Quantum India Bengaluru Summit 2025. Investment in research and development (R&D) and the strengthening of innovation capabilities are particularly relevant, given the growing uncertainty in global trade and financial flows.

How is India faring on the innovation front? Are we moving towards producing technology of our own? Statistics from the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks are telling. In the early 2000s, countries such as China, the U.S., Japan, Germany, and South Korea dominated global filings, with Indian institutions accounting for less than 20% of the patents filed domestically. That picture has shifted dramatically (Chart 1). For the first time in 2023, Indian-origin filings surpassed those from any single foreign country. Indian applicants accounted for 57% of all patent filings – a milestone marking India's growing role in the global intellectual property ecosystem. Even among granted patents, India's share has been rising, overtaking the U.S. as the second-largest recipient in 2021.

This transformation did not happen overnight. India is steadily moving from being merely a consumer of global technology to becoming its creator. This shift reflects the government's sustained efforts to build an innovation-friendly environment and support local inventors through initiatives such as the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy and the Atal Innovation Mission, which

have encouraged startups, students, and researchers to think big and protect their ideas. Amendments to patent rules have introduced reforms such as expedited examinations for specific groups, simplified timelines, reduced application fees by 80% for educational institutions, MSMEs, and startups, and full digitalisation of filing and communication. With continued investment in faster, more efficient patent systems, stronger inventor support, and better linkage between patents and commercial value, India's innovation story could strengthen even further over the next two decades.

Historically, mechanical and chemical engineering dominated the patent landscape. By contrast, filings in computer science rose from just 1.27% in 2000 to 26.5% in 2023, while electrical engineering grew from 8.27% to 16.41%. Physics-related patents increased from 2% to 4%, and biomedical patents jumped from 0.6% to 10% over the same period.

Nearly 80% of patents filed in the past two years are still "awaiting decision," reflecting both rising volumes and bureaucratic and legal complexities. Nonetheless, processing times have improved. In the early 2000s, patent grants could take 8-10 years; by the late 2010s and early 2020s, many were approved within 2-3 years, with some granted in the same year of filing (Chart 2). This acceleration reflects the maturing of India's intellectual property infrastructure and its alignment with the government's innovation push.

Even the face of patent filers in India is changing. In 2000, about 43% of Indian patents were filed by companies. But by 2023, this share fell to under 17% (Chart 3). Meanwhile, the share of filings from individuals jumped from under 10% in 2000 to around 32% by 2023. Government bodies and hospitals remained minor contributors. Educational institutions also in-

creased their share steadily, reaching nearly 43% in recent years.

Government initiatives have helped drive this change. For example, KAPILA (Kalam Program for IP Literacy and Awareness), launched in 2020, promotes IP awareness in higher education institutions. The Atal Innovation Mission, launched in 2016 by NITI Aayog, fosters problem-solving skills and entrepreneurship within universities and research centres. Awards for outstanding patents by government and industry bodies further incentivise innovation.

Universities have also taken the lead by establishing dedicated IP cells and legal support units to assist faculty, researchers, and students with patent filing, technology transfer, and IP monetisation. For instance, IIT Madras doubled its patents granted from 156 in 2022 to 300 in 2023, while IIT Bombay led nationally in 2023-24 with 421 patents granted.

With government and universities creating an enabling environment, sustained increases in research funding are essential to maintain momentum. Foundational and technology-driven research often starts in university labs or early-stage startups – long before patenting. India's R&D expenditure currently stands at just 0.67% of GDP, far below the U.S. (3.5%) and China (2.5%). Raising this to around 2% of GDP is critical if India is to become a global knowledge leader. This investment is even more urgent in today's uncertain global trade and financial environment, as India must strive for self-sufficiency in both consumer and advanced technologies.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the relentless efforts of professors and researchers, often working with limited resources, to expand the boundaries of knowledge. Strengthening their work through greater funding is not just support for academia; it is a strategic investment in India's long-term growth and global standing.

## Changing patent landscape

The data for the charts were sourced from the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, and Trade Marks



Chart 1: Country-wise share of patent filings (left axis, in %) and the total number of filings over time (right axis)

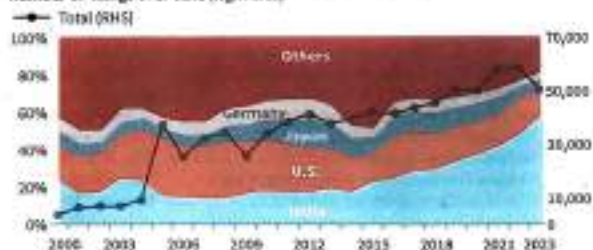


Chart 2: Average time taken to grant patents in India since 2000 (in number of years)

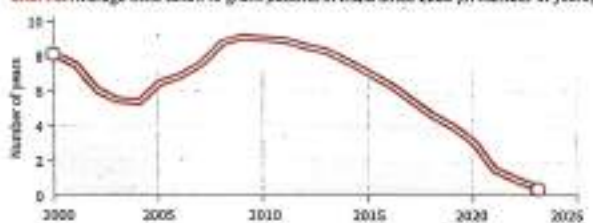
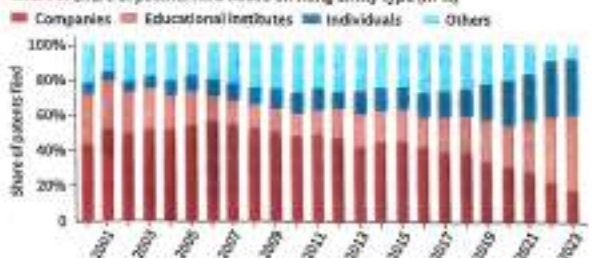


Chart 3: Share of patents filed based on filing entity type (in %)



Twinkle Halder and Vidhya Soundararajan are affiliated with Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning



# How to plan for 10X rise in education expenses

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for taking investment decisions. Yet, some are universally applicable and financial experts consider them the thumb rules for attaining the target

## FOOTING BILL

Vaishali R. Venkat

**A**mid uncertainties of life, lie some certainties. For instance, children growing up, school education expenses, rising cost of higher education, career goals of children, etc. Above all, it is certain the money required for education today would leapfrog at least tenfold by the time children enroll in higher education. So, is it possible to meet the 10X rise in education expenditure in the future?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for investment decisions. Yet, some are universally applicable and financial experts consider them the golden rules. Let's dive into details.

### Career goals

First and foremost, understanding the career goals of children plays a major role in planning. For instance, if your son/daughter wishes to study abroad, you might have to earmark more money for meeting the educational expenses. If they do not want to go abroad, your actual educational expenditure might be comparatively less.

Moreover, the courses they are interested in also play a major role. Not all courses are costly. If they are really interested in courses that are less competitive and relatively cheaper, you are relieved to some extent. However, the decision must be pure



Investment portfolio must have a combination of fixed/recurring deposits (emergency fund), mutual funds, gold and stocks

ly based on their wish not on financial condition.

Next, understanding the educational capacity of your son/daughter is essential. If they are good at studies, you might expect some scholarships or fee waivers. If not, the expenditure would be more.

### Financial investigation

You must understand your current financial position. A thorough, honest analysis of income, expenditure, debt, luxury and lifestyle habits, risk appetite, savings, investments, short-term and long-term goals, dependents (not just children but also aged parents) and the presence/absence of family-support system must be made.

Luxury and lifestyle habits play a spoilsport in savings and investments. The two are inversely related. The more you spend on luxury, the less you save or invest.

You should clearly zero-in on a target; that is, to which level would you want to reach regarding the above variables. Often, quantification of the above variables to the approximate levels is beneficial. For instance, let's say the current savings is ₹1,000 a



To avoid touching savings or investments, in times of emergencies, you must be well protected by various kinds of insurance policies

month and your target savings is ₹10,000 per month.

Next, analyse the gaps from where you are, to where you want to be, again quantification helps. In this case, ₹9,000 a month is the gap between the current and the target level. You should also figure out the time available for reaching the target, say how many years you have in between.

### Budgeting exercise

The moment you realise there are gaps and aware of the time available, start budgeting. Cut down on lifestyle expenses and expenses on instant gratification. Know the difference between needs and desires and far as possible, spend on needs, not desires.

### Start early

The key solution to attaining the target is to start early. Only then can you enjoy the magic power of compounding. Say, if you start when your child is just two or three years old, you are giving money ample time to grow and when it multiplies, goal attainment is easier. In contrast, if you start when your son/daughter is in Class IX or X, you are losing the potential power

of compounding and on top of it you must save more money per month for attaining your target.

### Educate your child

Teach your child about the importance of cutting down on expenses, money, savings, investments, education, financial discipline and financial responsibility.

### Insurance coverage

The first expenditure towards securing your future must be insurance policies. To avoid touching savings or investments, in times of emergencies, you must be well protected by all kinds of insurance policies. Say, a term policy for at least ₹1 crore; family-floater health insurance policy for at least ₹10-₹25 lakh; if you have own house, buy a Bharat Griha Raksha policy with the sum insured covering property value.

### Risks/rewards

Do not put all eggs in one basket. Your investment portfolio must have a combination of fixed/recurring deposits (emergency fund), mutual funds, gold and stocks. If you have 8-10 ten years for your goal, invest a portion of savings in equities. Though equities might be highly risky if less than five to seven years, they have the potential to give inflation-beating returns if invested for more than 10 years or so.

(The writer is an NISM & CRISIL-certified Wealth Manager and certified in NISM's Research Analyst module)



# Library notes

*Scholars today wear many hats, old-timers grab many desks*

**Anupam Srivastava**



The demands of scholarship are such that these may deter ordinary folk. For one, even while undertaking the most serious research in the library, the scholar must fulfil his or her social obligations. Most libraries allow scholars to bring their phones inside and use these with discretion. At times hectic texting by the scholar may give the impression that he is not serious about his work, but the grim expression on his face should dispel such a notion.

The day is long. In the throes of work, a scholar may wear many hats. If you lift your eyes and view the laptop screens in the neighbourhood, you may even see a shopping website or a movie playing. It is necessary for the scholar to rest his mind after grappling with a difficult academic challenge. Occasionally, a web page with a stock market trading account seems to pop up, but it is probably a mathematician working on an algorithm, or beta-testing a data exchange tool.



Today's libraries are well-equipped and comfortable. Unbearable summer and dreary winter days inspire intense scholarly engagement. On such days, finding a seat in coveted public libraries is extra difficult. Some scholars reserve desks by leaving laptops and books on them. It is a coincidence that the couple you saw strolling near the trees, or sipping coffee outside, returns to claim these desks.

One may try to move to the upper floor, but the few desks there are taken over by old-timers who arrive first and leave at the end of the day.

Such scholars go through the demanding post-lunch hours with practised ease. One may find someone drooping in front, their eyes closing. But then a finger that moves on the keyboard, and a head that nods just when you thought he was napping, are evidence enough that academic rigour was not abandoned on a soporific afternoon after a sumptuous lunch in the nearby canteen.

The scene outside is one that can lift a sagging spirit. It is like a lounge where people talk and exchange greetings, like a ship's deck minus food and drinks. After a day of study, when the scholar stops here briefly, the eruption of greetings by other scholars makes him forget disappointments such as the congested academic space and limited funding. He says his goodbyes and returns home to a restful evening.

*TBT/16*



# Why are we still battling ragging?

DR KRISHNA KALITA,  
DR SAYANIK DEKA

*Persistent ragging in higher education institutions demands deeper psychological and systemic interventions beyond existing regulatory measures.*

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in shaping the academic, personal, and professional journeys of millions of students every year. These institutions aim to produce citizens who are productive and can contribute to society. As such, higher education engages in three-dimensional functions – teaching, research and extension. A key factor in determining the quality of these functions is the environment of the institution, which includes the administrative environment, teaching-learning environment, research environment and an overall socio-ethical environment.

In the Indian context, HEIs include Central universities, State universities, deemed universities, colleges, private institutions, IITs, NITs, and other autonomous institutions. With over 1,100 universities and 45,000 colleges across the country, India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. In the last 25 years, the higher education sector has seen a steep surge in quantity, resulting in a more than fourfold growth in the number of universities and colleges. But, the question is – how much are these institutions able to contribute to society? Is the environment in these institutions safe and enriching enough to let the learners realise their optimum potential?

A safe environment in HEIs is not just about physical safety but also includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Safety encompasses the absence of violence, harassment, discrimination, and bullying. While HEIs have a responsibility

to model an ethical environment to society, unethical issues within it constitute an irony.

One of the many challenges that the HEIs face is ragging. Ragging was once used as an 'initiation ritual' in higher education institutions, but it has now been recognised as a serious human rights violation. It often includes verbal, physical, and psychological abuse. One of the most painful and persistent issues in Indian HEIs is student suicides. A total of 51 deaths occurred between 2022 and 2024 due to ragging in educational institutions, as per the latest report 'State of Ragging in India, 2022-24' by India's largest anti-ragging NGO – Society Against Violence in Education. The report also identified medical colleges as hotspots for ragging incidents across the country. This raises a disturbing question: if anti-ragging measures and counselling centres exist, why does ragging persist and, therefore, unfortunate cases of suicide continue?

The Supreme Court of India had issued landmark judgments in 2001 and in 2009 with regard to banning ragging. As a consequence, the UGC issued elaborate guidelines in 2009 to ban ragging in higher educational institutions. The anti-ragging framework in India includes an anti-ragging monitoring committee, UGC regulation, UGC anti-ragging cell, UGC Inter Council Committee, various monitoring agencies, various councils acting as regulatory bodies, anti-ragging committees and anti-ragging squads of universities and colleges, a transparent complaint process, and multiple and easily accessible points

for the victims of ragging or someone who comes to know about any ragging event. The UGC Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions (2009) mandate preventive steps, including mandatory affidavits from students and parents, display of anti-ragging helplines and notices, national Anti-Ragging Helpline (1800-180-5522) and online complaint portals in the HEIs. Moreover, Anti-Ragging Day is observed on August 12 followed by an Anti-Ragging Week. The measures for ensuring a ragging-free campus include disseminating information on anti-ragging regulations through admission brochures, leaflets, posters, institution website, meetings, publicity campaigns, seminars and workshops, professional counselling, orientation programmes, large-scale cultural, sports and other activities. The 'Information Education Communication: Guidelines for Councils, Universities and Colleges (Curbing the Menace of Ragging)' prepared jointly by the Ministry of Education, Govt of India, and the UGC in the year 2022, states that any student found guilty of ragging will be subject to a very stringent punishment.

With such preventive and regulatory mechanisms in place at both governmental and institutional levels, one would expect that not a single case of ragging would occur. But, the fact is that despite all these measures, ragging persists in many educational institutions. We have still not been able to make every single campus ragging-free. Apart from the cases that are registered in the anti-ragging portal or the com-

plaints, many cases may go unreported. Some students hesitate to report ragging due to fear of retaliation.

A recent case in West Bengal even highlights negligence in ragging cases to protect the reputation of the institution. As reported by a national daily recently, a 25-year-old research scholar tragically lost his life following alleged harassment by a fellow researcher. Despite filing multiple complaints, he reportedly received no response, as the authorities appeared more concerned with protecting the institution's reputation rather than addressing his grievances.

In another incident that took place in November last year, an 18-year-old MBBS student in Gujarat died after allegedly being made to stand for three hours by his seniors.

The time has come to look for and act upon the root cause of ragging. It is really dismaying that the youth indulging in ragging do so only to derive sadistic pleasure or assert their superiority. Some indulge in it only to continue the legacy and take a kind of revenge for being the victims of ragging. Also, some scenes in films based on ragging may trigger enjoyment in some students to act in the same way. Are we not losing valuable human resources through suicides, under-performance or wastage of time due to ragging? Does this indicate that we need to delve deeper into the issue of ragging and not stop at merely taking some measures? Though there are several measures to curb the menace, their implementation depends solely on the institution concerned. *ART/14*



# Creamy layer 'equivalence'

The criteria laid down to identify 'creamy-layer' OBCs are not comprehensive. There are anomalies that prevent the uniform application of quota benefits. The government proposes to correct this situation

SHYAMLAL YADAV  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 18

THE GOVERNMENT is considering ways to ensure "equivalence" in the application of the 'creamy layer' condition in reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) across a range of jobs at central and state government organisations, public sector enterprises, universities, etc.

A proposal has been prepared after consultations among several government ministries and departments, and bodies such as NITI Aayog and the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC). The Indian Express reported last week.

The effort is to ensure fairness and uniformity among candidates who are eligible for reservation, and to remove certain anomalies that have arisen in this regard from circulars issued over the years by the Union government's Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), which formulates policy on recruitments and service conditions.

## The concept of 'creamy layer'

In its landmark verdict in *Indra Sawhney vs Union of India* (1992), the Supreme Court upheld the government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, but said that affluent sections among the socially and educationally backward classes, the so-called 'creamy layer', must be excluded from job quotas.

Thereafter, on September 8, 1993, DoPT issued a circular identifying the creamy layer that would be ineligible for OBC reservation. Sons and daughters of high constitutional functionaries, and government, PSU, and armed forces officers were included in the list, along with "professional class and those engaged in trade and industry", and "property owners". An "income/wealth test" was also mentioned.

Specifically, an individual either of whose parents was a direct recruit to a Group A/Class I government job, or if the parent was promoted to Group A before the age of 40, was not eligible for the OBC quota.

An individual both of whose parents were direct recruits to Group B jobs would be part of the creamy layer. Children of armed forces officials only up to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel could avail of the quota.

For those outside the government sector, the income ceiling was set at Rs 1 lakh per annum. It was subsequently revised upwards, and the limit has been Rs 8 lakh since 2017. However, income from salary and agricultural income is not included.



The implementation of the Mandal Commission report by the government of Prime Minister V P Singh (above) was upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Indra Sawhney* case in 1993. Swadesh Tolwary/Express Archive

## 2004 'clarification' and after

The above criteria were not comprehensive, especially with regard to jobs outside the government sector.

So, on October 14, 2004, DoPT issued detailed "Clarifications regarding creamy layer amongst OBCs" in order to determine "the creamy layer status of sons and daughters of persons employed in organisations where equivalence or comparability of posts vis-à-vis posts in Government has not been evaluated".

It was determined that: "Income of the parents from the salaries and from the other sources (other than salaries and agricultural land) is determined separately. If either the income of the parents from the salaries or the income of the parents from other sources (other than salaries and agricultural land) exceeds... Rs 2.5 lakh per annum [which was the creamy layer income ceiling for private persons at the time] for a period of three consecutive years, the sons and daughters of such persons shall be treated to fall in creamy layer."

However, these "clarifications" were not widely implemented to deprive individuals of reservation benefits during the UPA years (2004-14), as the government sought to woo OBCs in pursuit of various social justice goals.

In late 2014, DoPT started examining caste certificates issued by various authorities to determine their compliance with the 2004 "clarification".

Between the Civil Services Examinations

(CSE) of 2015 and 2023 (batches of 2016-24), DoPT rejected caste certificates of more than 100 successful candidates who would have qualified as OBC under the September 1993 criteria, but who were put in the creamy layer in accordance with the new criteria. Interestingly, many of these individuals have appeared in other competitive examinations, and have been considered OBC on the basis of the same caste certificate.

## Efforts to find 'equivalence'

The unresolved case of the more than 100 candidates determined by DoPT as being in the creamy layer led to consultations among various stakeholder ministries.

While 'equivalence' has been established with regard to the various central PSUs, the process remains pending for others — and the sons/daughters of a wide range of employees are put in the creamy layer based on their incomes, thanks to "clarification" issued in 2004.

In June this year, Home Minister Amit Shah and NCBC chairman Hansraj Ahir recommended to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment that the policy under consideration should be implemented retrospectively so that these more than 100 candidates are also able to benefit.

Views of the Ministries of Social Justice, Education, Law, and Labour, the Department of Public Enterprises and DoPT, as well as NITI

Aayog and NCBC were sought in the matter.

According to sources in the government, some of the issues in the proposal to establish 'equivalence' are:

- Since the salaries of university teachers from assistant professor upward typically start from 'Level 10', which is equivalent to entry-level Group A posts in the government, it has been proposed that children of university teachers be categorised as creamy layer.

- For central/state autonomous and statutory bodies, it is proposed to establish 'equivalence' with central government officials, depending on their level/group/pay scale, which is aligned with the corresponding pay in central and state governments.

- Non-teaching staff of universities are proposed to be placed in the creamy layer depending on their level/group/pay scale.

- It is proposed that all executive-level positions in state PSUs be treated as creamy layer, akin to the 'equivalence' that has been in force for central PSUs since 2017. However, it has been proposed that executives whose income is within Rs 8 lakh — which is the ceiling for private persons — will not be categorised as creamy layer.

- It is proposed that employees of government-aided institutions, which usually follow the service conditions and pay scales of the central or respective state government, be placed under appropriate categories based on the 'equivalence' of their post and service conditions and pay scales.

## The likely beneficiaries

If the proposals are implemented, sons/daughters of lower-level government employees with annual salaries of more than Rs 8 lakh are likely to benefit the most. It will correct the anomaly by which children of government teachers get the benefit of OBC quota, but children of employees of similar rank at government-aided institutions are denied on the basis of income.

A similar situation exists in several state government organisations. In one of the cases before the government, the children of an individual who fills fuel in vehicles at a pump run by a state-owned oil marketing company have been declared creamy layer on the basis of income.

Not much is expected to change for children of employees in the private sector. Sources in the government said it is noted in the proposal that it is difficult to establish 'equivalence' given the vast range of positions, pay, and perquisites in private employment, and creamy layer can be determined based on the income/wealth criteria.

The income ceiling was revised in 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2017.



# What rankings don't tell us about our universities



ANIL PATHAK  
SOCIOLOGIST

**W**E live in a world that loves numbers and statistics. It reduces even a highly qualitative experience into some sort of measurable data. My discomfort with this obsessive craze for quantification has led me to interrogate the prevalent practice of ranking our colleges and universities and reducing the experience of exploring the frontiers of knowledge to pure metrics — the statistics of publications, the quantification of citations, the collaboration with industries, or the employability of students.

Don't get me wrong. Of course, a university should encourage its faculty members to publish research papers in good journals and it should be really concerned about the employability of young students.

However, there are many other socially meaningful and life-affirming tasks that our colleges/universities need to perform in order to pursue the objectives of libertarian education. And, ironically, the ranking

agencies seldom bother to reflect on these 'non-measurable' functions.

In this context, let me raise three questions, which, I am afraid, experts at a ranking agency such as the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) seldom ask.

The first, an uncomfortable question: Are our universities — including the 'top ranking' ones — truly celebrating the spirit of academic freedom and critical enquiry?

Accept it. A meaningful answer to this question cannot be found in an effectively packaged database that a college/university presents before the ranking agency.

As I write this piece, what comes to my mind is the anguish of Rashid Khalidi — the Edward S. Ford Professor Emeritus of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, USA. He feels that under the changing political circumstances, it is no longer possible to teach a course on Modern Middle East History — a course he has been teaching for many years at Columbia. The reason is that the university administration has completely surrendered before the Trump administration and accepted the official definition of 'antisemitism'.

Indeed, as Professor Khalidi has stated with intense pain, it has become almost impossible to teach about topics, such as the history of the creation



**NOT LIBERTARIAN:** Will the NIRF bother to know if professors and students fear asking questions that unsettle the status quo? (Image: NITD)

of Israel or the genocide being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza with the support of the US and much of western Europe. To quote Khalidi, 'Columbia — once a site of free enquiry — has been turned into a gated security zone with electronic entry controls. It has become a place of fear and loathing; it is the antithesis of academic freedom.'

Think of the paradox: an Ivy League university; yet, the absence of academic freedom!

As I reflect on the fate of Columbia University, I begin to wonder whether a ranking agency like the NIRF will ever bother to know if the professors and students in Indian colleges/universities too are living with the similar kind

of fear: the fear of asking the sort of questions that unsettle the status quo — say, the questions related to the cult of narcissism, hyper-nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

Who will tell the ranking agency experts that the management of citations, the performative acts in 'international' conferences and the narratives of 'placements and salary packages' does not necessarily indicate that a college/university is truly encouraging the spirit of academic freedom and critical enquiry?

My second question is related to the mental health of young students and researchers.

Look at, for instance, a 'top-ranking' IIT. Of course, it can

easily impress the ranking agency through showcasing its splendid infrastructure, the attractive CVs of its faculty, the collaboration with leading techno-corporate houses and the placement narratives of their 'products'. Yet, the same institution is possibly facing a harsh reality — the recurring suicides and the chronic depression and anxiety amongst otherwise bright students. This malady does not stop, even when these institutions collaborate with psychiatrists, counsellors and even spiritual gurus. Furthermore, in an extremely hierarchical and asymmetrical society like ours, it is not uncommon to find students from the deprived sections who experience diverse forms of marginalisation and humiliation.

Does a ranking agency have a scale to measure the intensity of this pain, agony and alienation? Or, for that matter, can it go deeper into the very root of this crisis?

Let the dark aspect of these much-typed academic institutions — academically brilliant, yet psychologically wounded, students — not be concealed beneath the fancy narratives that fascinate the urban/middle class: say, this or that IIT has occupied a prestigious place in the QS World University Rankings!

And finally, do these ranking agencies ever search for a libertarian university — a university that

seeks to see beyond the neoliberal doctrine of education as just a tool for economic productivity or education as the mastery of the 'skills' the techno-corporate world demands?

Amid the celebration of the university-industry nexus or the corporatisation of higher education, it is really important to assert that a libertarian university ought to generate a learning milieu that activates the moral conscience of the students and teachers and gives them the philosophical clarity as well as the intellectual courage to question what we are witnessing today — the glorification of war and militarism in the name of nationalism, the massive destruction of the ecosystem in the name of 'development', the promotion of some sort of techno-utopianism — the belief that technology has a solution to all social/human problems — marketed by a handful of billionaires.

The ranking agencies should realise that without this moral conscience and sociological imagination, even a 'top-ranking' university might fail to evolve as a libertarian university. It is like recalling what TS Eliot felt through his poetic wisdom:

"Where is the life we have lost in living?"

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

Are our universities, including the 'top ranking' ones, truly celebrating the spirit of academic freedom and critical enquiry?



# Human resource development in State

DR MANMOHAN DAS

*Sustainable socio-economic development in Assam urgently needs proper human resource planning, skill development and effective policy implementation.*

In any discussion on resources, emphasis is generally laid more on natural resources than on human resources. People are often regarded merely as agents who use natural resources for their own benefit, rather than as the most vital component in the concept of resources. Such a view very often leads to the misconception that a region or a country is rich simply because it is endowed with abundant natural resources. But this is not always true, as there is evidence that some regions or countries endowed with abundant natural resources still remain underdeveloped because of a low level of human resource development.

By contrast, there are other regions or countries with scarce natural resources which are highly developed because of a high level of human resource development. Bhutan, Brazil, Congo, Mongolia and some Latin American and African countries are either underdeveloped or developing, despite being rich in natural resources, while Japan, the Netherlands and Israel are developed countries, although they have limited natural resources. This clearly demonstrates the dominant role of human resources in socio-economic development in any region or country.

Within India, Assam and Punjab offer the best contrasting examples. Although Assam is endowed with rich natural resources, it remains an underdeveloped State, whereas Punjab, despite its deficiency of natural resources, is highly developed. Therefore, it is necessary to give serious thought to human resource development and management for socio-economic de-

velopment in Assam. If we accept that each person constitutes a potential human resource, it can be said that Assam possesses an abundance of potential human resources, in addition to its abundant natural resources, thus fulfilling both the necessary and sufficient conditions for development. Why, then, does the State still lag behind in socio-economic development?

Development depends not on the mere availability of potential natural and human resources, but on their proper utilisation by means of human skill, ingenuity, dexterity and management capability, aided by capital and technology, both of which are man-made products created by processing natural resources. From this viewpoint, it is clear that human resources in Assam have not been properly developed and utilised. In other words, there is no significant manpower planning or human resource development programme. Where are the schemes for improving the quality of life of the people? Where is the strategy to provide useful education and training for skill development, healthcare with sanitation, nutrition, and medical facilities, employment opportunities and empowerment of women and poorer sections of the population through employment and income generation? In developed countries, even persons with disabilities are trained to perform specific types of work for which they are made capable. But in Assam, there are more than 20 lakh registered unemployed youths (not to speak of unregistered educated and uneducated youths), and the number is steadily increasing. Some of our youths take up

arms, commit various crimes, and their lives on flimsy grounds, or become drug addicts and alcoholics. Our so-called education system is responsible for creating a large segment of youths who are neither physically prepared for hard labour nor mentally equipped for creative thinking. They blindly ape Western culture without understanding its positive qualities. There is a gross misuse of human resources.

How many people are active workers in Assam? Only 35.8 percent – 49.9 percent of males and 20.7 percent of females (according to the 2011 census). What are the remaining people doing? Is this not a huge waste of human resources? Leaving aside childre and elderly people, who together account for 61.85 percent of the population, the remaining 21 percent are non-workers in the active age group. Thus, only 35.8 percent of workers carry the burden of 64.2 percent non-working persons – including children, aged persons, and non-workers in the active age category. With such a large number of non-working people, how can the economy of Assam grow? Again, most of the workers are not properly trained, which results in labour efficiency among Assamese workers being much lower than that of their counterparts in other States.

Thus, there is an urgent need for human resource development and manpower planning in Assam. In this respect, geographers have an important role to play, as they can analyse problems of human resource management from a spatial perspective.

However, Muslim immigrants are very hard-working and are willing to do any kind of work. This is because they are compelled

to undertake hard labour in order to become firmly rooted in the soil of Assam. It does not mean that they are trained to perform their work more efficiently. In fact, they are often exploited by others who become rich at the expense of their labour. But can socio-economic development in Assam be achieved with such an ever-increasing number of immigrant peasants?

In the name of human resource development, higher educational institutions – degree colleges, universities, engineering colleges, medical colleges and even an IIT – have been established in Assam. But most of the degree holders from such educational institutions, with the exception of the IIT, who are educated at the cost of huge sums from the public exchequer, are simply adding to the number of unemployed. Most of the meritorious students migrate to developed States or countries in search of better education, training and employment with higher salaries and a better standard of living. Most of the IIT-trained engineers serve other States or countries. What, then, is the benefit of establishing such a high-level technical institution?

It should also be remembered that manpower planning through effective education and training to improve efficiency is not sufficient if a holistic and integrated economic plan covering all sectors of the economy is not adopted and implemented to employ them. The achievement of such a goal depends on a range of socio-cultural and political conditions. Ultimately, nothing can be achieved without strong government policy and a corruption-free administration. *AT/2016*





# A tribute to M.S. Swaminathan, 'the man who fed India'

**T**he *Viksit Bharat* aspiration, which has gained considerable momentum, will require a significant development of scientific capability, and some of this, especially in the new digital economy, will have to be *atmanirbhar*. There is much to learn in this context from the most successful experiment in *atmanirbharata* in the past, which was the achievement of food self-sufficiency in the 1960s. M.S. Swaminathan was the man who did it and he was a living hero to all of us. This is the centenary year of his birth and it has seen the publication of a new biography, *M.S. Swaminathan: the Man who Fed India*, by Priyambada Jayakumar.

Ms. Jayakumar had the benefit of detailed discussions with him on both the personal and professional side of his life and she has produced a book which is a great read. However, in this article, I will focus on some lessons from his experience which have relevance for the future.

## The planting of a seed of an idea

Scientific advancement was at the core of the Green Revolution and the book brings out that such advances are not achieved by dedicated scientists working in isolation in a lab. They involve collaboration with other scientists and a cross-fertilisation of ideas. It was known that wheat productivity could be increased through application of fertilizers and other inputs, but the problem was that the higher weight of grains caused the plant to bend and lodge if the stalk was not strong enough. Swaminathan was trying to use radiation to develop a genetic mutation that would have a stronger stalk, but this approach was not getting anywhere.

In 1958, a Japanese scientist visiting Delhi told Swaminathan that a dwarf wheat variety developed in Japan, and which had a shorter, stronger stalk, could hold the higher weight of grain without bending. Swaminathan found that the new variety had been taken to the United States where a seed breeder was working on it. The breeder told Swaminathan that they were developing a winter variety, which would not be suitable for India, but Norman Borlaug in Mexico was developing a different variety that might work. As it happened, Swaminathan had met Borlaug earlier at a seminar in the U.S. He was able to persuade him to send a small quantity of his Mexican seeds to India. These seeds did well and Swaminathan wanted to invite Borlaug to come to India to discuss ways of adapting these varieties to Indian conditions.

The proposal to invite Borlaug was promptly approved by the Director of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in 1960 but it took more than two years to get the bureaucratic approvals needed to send the invitation and Borlaug arrived only by March 1963.

Swaminathan often quoted Pandit Nehru's phrase, "everything can wait but not agriculture", but the bureaucracy was clearly unaware of it. It is interesting to speculate on what would have been the benefits if the Green Revolution had



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There is much to learn from one of India's most successful experiments — the achievement of food self-sufficiency in the 1960s and the scientist who made it possible

come two years earlier. The important lesson is that for science to flourish, our scientists must be much better connected to relevant scientists abroad and become familiar with cutting-edge work in their field. This means they should travel more freely to attend conferences abroad and build personal contacts, all of which means bureaucratic control must be drastically reduced.

The next step was to subject the seeds to trials on the fields of actual farmers. Swaminathan could not get the Ministry to fund the effort. Fortunately, Lal Bahadur Shastri, who became Prime Minister in 1964, wanted to give higher priority to agriculture and for this purpose appointed C. Subramaniam as Minister of Agriculture. This made a critical difference. Subramaniam called about 20 agricultural scientists for a meeting to hear their views on how to increase food production. When Swaminathan was asked to speak, he frankly told the Minister that he had identified the new seeds that would solve the problem, but the Ministry was unable to fund the necessary trials. Subramaniam promptly called for the file and ensured that the funds were provided. It is a pity that we have no record of what the other scientists said in the meeting, and in particular whether the more senior scientists (Swaminathan was then only 39) had a different view.

## The politician needs to listen to the scientist

This yields the second important lesson. In dealing with complex technical issues, the political leadership must hear the scientists/technical people involved directly instead of relying on the generalist bureaucracy to convey their views. Swaminathan greatly admired Pandit Nehru's commitment to science, but the book brings out that he soon realised that this "had few takers even in his own government, ministries and the bureaucracy". On page 48 the author puts it bluntly: "Most ministers barely supported, understood, or believed in research and development... this was also true of the Agriculture Minister in 1958.. (who) would order scientists like Swaminathan to go into the field and 'sort out the problems' without really understanding the ground realities."

One of the reasons China has done so well on the economic and technical front is that Ministers are usually technically qualified people, often engineers with a track record of successful management. Subramaniam exemplified that type of political leader: he was a physics graduate and had a good knowledge of science. If we want to achieve *Viksit Bharat*, and explore new and increasingly complex areas of science, we will need many more such Ministers in the years ahead, not only at the Centre but also in the States.

The field trials were a great success and the next step was to roll out the Green Revolution across the country. This required importing 18,000 tonnes of seed — the largest seed shipment in history — costing ₹5 crore in foreign exchange. There were objections from many

fronts. The Finance Ministry was not happy releasing that much foreign exchange. The Planning Commission opposed the proposal on the grounds that it did not believe that the new seeds would do better than what we already had. The Left also opposed the move because the seeds were developed under a grant from a U.S. institution (the Rockefeller Foundation).

Shastri was understandably concerned about these conflicting views. Fortunately, Swaminathan persuaded him to visit the IARI to see for himself how the new wheat was doing. Shastri was convinced and the import of new seeds was duly approved. Tragically, Shastri passed away in January 1966 but Indira Gandhi, who took over as the next Prime Minister, also gave Swaminathan full backing.

The lesson is that when dealing with new and untried ideas, there will always be conflicting opinions even among so-called experts. It is important that all the different points of view are appropriately aired and considered. However, this process may not always result in a consensus. In such a situation, a decision has to be taken at the highest level. Once taken, the thing to do is to back the effort fully. But it must also be subjected to truly independent monitoring, with course corrections.

In the case of the Green Revolution, the results were amply evident within a few years. We reaped a bounteous wheat harvest in 1968 and we were able to start phasing out PL 480 imports. Over time, new problems arose. The excessive dependence on water and also fertilizer use led to environmental problems. Swaminathan himself, having left the government by then, warned about the corrections needed to make the Green Revolution environmentally sustainable. It is a pity that we are yet to implement these corrections.

## The issues India needs to look at

Looking ahead, we know that climate change will have a severely negative effect on agricultural productivity. Once again, science will be critical and much will depend upon the performance of our research institutions. India was ahead of China in agricultural research in the late 1960s, but today, China has eight agricultural research institutions in the world's top 10 and India does not have any in the top 200. One reason is inadequate funding: we spend only 0.43% of our agricultural GDP on research and development, whereas the percentage in China is twice our level. But there is also the issue of the quality. Do our agricultural research institutions have the institutional autonomy and governance structure that they need to recruit and promote meritorious scientists? And can we ensure that our top agricultural scientists have the kind of access to political decision makers that Swaminathan had?

Filling these gaps is the best way of really honouring M.S. Swaminathan. And the lessons are relevant for other areas of scientific development also. *NS*



Students from some countries won't make it to class this fall because of President Trump's travel ban. Others can't get visa appointments. Some are scared. Universities are panicking

ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

**M**any Iranians are not going to American universities this fall. Students from Afghanistan are having trouble getting to campus.

Even students from China and India, the top two senders of international students to the United States, have been flummoxed by a maze of new obstacles the Trump administration has set up to slow or deter people entering the country from abroad.

Between the federal government's heightened vetting of student visas and President Donald Trump's travel ban, the number of international students newly enrolled in American universities seems certain to drop — by a lot.

There were about 1 million international students studying in the United States a year ago, according to figures published by the State Department. Data on international student enrolment is not expected to be released until the fall. But higher education is already feeling the pain and deeply worried about the fallout.

Many schools have seen the number of international students grow in recent years. But a survey of more than 500 colleges and universities by the Institute of International Education, a nonprofit which works with governments and others to promote international education, found that 35% of the schools experienced a dip in applications from abroad last spring, the most since the pandemic.

In China and India, there have been few visa appointments available for students in recent months, and sometimes none at all, according to the Association of International Educators, also known as NAFSA, a professional organisation. If visa problems persist, new international student enrolment in US colleges could drop by 30% to 40% overall this fall, a loss of 150,000 students, according to the group's analysis.

Some students have given up on enrolling in US schools entirely out of anxiety over the political environment in the United States. Others are staying away because they worry that even if they were to gain entry, they would effectively be trapped, unable to do things that other students can, like apply for internships or travel home over the holidays to see their families.

International students make up a significant portion of enrolment at elite universities like Columbia University, but also at public institutions like Purdue University. At Arizona State University, one of the 10 universities that enrol the most international students, the number beginning their studies this fall — 14,600 in all — is down by about 500 from last fall, a spokesperson said, mostly because of visa delays.

Many international students pay full tuition and are a revenue source that schools have come to rely on, including to help underwrite financial aid for other students. It's part of the business model.

Wendy Wolford, vice provost for international affairs at Cornell University, said the biggest loss from the drop in international enrolment is talent.

Wolford said she was also worried about the lost opportunity for domestic students to be exposed to students from different cultures, and for international students to spread goodwill toward the United States when they return home.

The Trump administration began focusing on international students last spring, taking a number of steps to target students



ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK RAMESH

## International students caught in Trump's visa war

who were already in the country and to increase vetting of those who wanted to enrol.

In one of its first moves, the Trump administration threatened to deport more than 1,800 international students studying in the United States. In many cases, the reasons were opaque. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that international students who were a part of campus protests over the war in the Gaza Strip, in particular, were not welcome. "We gave you a visa to come and study and get a degree," he said last spring, "not to become a social activist that tears up our university campuses."

Several groups have gone to court to challenge what they called an ideological deportation policy. Veena Dubal, general counsel for the American Association of University Professors, says the administration is violating the constitutional rights of noncitizens and citizens alike in choosing to deport people based on views that are protected by the First Amendment.

Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia, has argued that the crackdown is undemocratic. "This practice is one we'd ordinarily associate with the most repressive political regimes," he has said.

After an outcry, many of the students targeted for deportation were reinstated. But overall this year, State Department officials said they have revoked more than 6,000 student visas, on grounds of supporting terrorism, overstaying visas and breaking the law, a number first reported by Fox News.

And the State Department suspended new student visa appointments between May 27 and June 18, a time of year that is ordinarily the peak season.

When the government began issuing student visas again in late June, it was with a proviso that consulates would scrutinise applicants' social media more rigorously. That has made the process much slower, and students who have yet to clear the interview process may be in danger of missing the start of fall classes or may even have to postpone enrolment by a semester or more. "There does appear to be a heightened review of student visa applications," said Dubal, adding: "Their social media are being reviewed for expression of pro-Palestinian sentiment or critiques of Trump's foreign policy positions."

Trump signed a proclamation in late May barring foreign students from entering the United States to attend Harvard, citing security concerns, but a judge has blocked the order from taking effect.

In June, Trump signed another proclamation to fully or partially restrict the entry of people from 19 countries, including Afghanistan, Haiti, Iran, Yemen, Cuba, Laos and Venezuela, and to increase scrutiny of people from other countries, to make sure that the people "do not intend to harm Americans or our national interests."

Though the proclamation did not target students in particular, many students have been caught up in the travel restrictions.

"Because of the travel ban, it's just not possible to get student visas from certain countries," said Dan Berger, an immigration lawyer in Northampton, Massachusetts. "A lot of Afghan women had been offered full scholarships in the US and can't get visas."

Asked about delays, a State Department spokesperson said that the department had made its vetting of visa applicants more effective and more efficient. "But in

every case, we will take the time necessary to ensure an applicant is eligible for the visa sought and does not pose a risk to the safety and security of the United States," the spokesperson said.

Noushin, an Iranian student who was admitted to the University of South Carolina to study for a doctorate in chemical engineering, was caught up in the travel ban. She had a visa interview in September 2024 and was to start her studies in the spring of 2025, but she has yet to hear whether her visa will be approved. She is now helping to organise a lobbying campaign to end the visa delays, and says that a chat group on Telegram suggests that there are hundreds of other Iranian students in similar situations.

Noushin, who asked for her last name not to be disclosed for fear that it would affect her visa prospects, said she chose the US to study because she believed that it offered the best higher education in the world. Now she believes she is being punished because of assumptions about her political beliefs.

Michael Crow, the president of the University of Arizona, said he met with an American diplomatic official in India a few months ago to discuss the visa problem, and was told the State Department was doing the best it could. The uncertainty about getting a US visa is prompting some students to look elsewhere. Many US universities now have campuses abroad and have tried to accommodate international students at those campuses until they can get US visas. Cornell, for instance, gave students the option to start the fall 2025 semester at its campuses in Edinburgh, Hong Kong or Seoul, South Korea.

The New York Times



John J. Kennedy



## From dreams to drudgery: The PhD scholar's plight in India

Deepa (name changed) topped her postgraduate physics class a few years ago and earned a coveted spot in a Central university's PhD programme. She imagined long hours in the lab, cutting-edge experiments and the thrill of discovery. Instead, she found broken equipment, stipends delayed for months and a supervisor too burdened with administrative duties to meet her more than once a month. Three years on, she had two publications in obscure journals, not for breaking new ground, but because they were mandatory for thesis submission. The drudgery of research had shrunk into a desperate race to finish and escape.

Deepa's story is not at all unusual. The Indian PhD programme is a paradox. India speaks of becoming a global research leader, yet most universities barely register in international rankings. The failure isn't about a shortage of talent or ambition. It's about a system that, from the earliest stages, stifles the curiosity and originality that actual research demands.

From school onwards, students are trained to memorise, not question. Success is measured by marks, not by the ability to frame problems or pursue ideas. Many enter PhD programmes without ever doing hands-on, inquiry-driven research. In the United States or Germany, even undergraduate design experiments, take on independent projects, and debate ideas. In India, that foundation is largely absent, and the gap shows when doctoral scholars are expected to produce original work.

The All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22 states that nearly 113,000 scholars are enrolled in PhD programmes across Indian universities. This may seem impressive, but it accounts for just 0.3 per cent of total higher education enrolment, a reminder of limited research access. Each year, around 26,000 to 41,000 students are awarded PhD degrees. Yet these numbers mask deeper problems.

The UGC's 2022 regulations, effective from 2024-25, standardise PhD admissions via the NET, introduce weighted interviews, mandate research methods and ethics coursework, and require teaching experience. On paper, it's promising. In practice, progress is uneven. While PhD enrolment rose by 14 per cent in 2024, the number of scholars who secure the Junior Research Fellowship remains worryingly low. Most still face the same post-admission struggles: financial uncertainty, outdated infrastructure, and a lack of meaningful mentorship.

Funding remains one of the system's most crippling weaknesses. Stipends are meagre and frequently delayed. Research grants are few, and even accessing them is an administrative labyrinth. Outside the elite institutes, labs are antiquated, libraries poorly stocked, and faculty are stretched thin across teaching and bureaucracy. In this ecosystem, most scholars opt for "safe" topics that require minimal experimentation or originality. Research becomes a checkbox for degree completion, not an intellectual voyage.

This functional decay shows up in career out-

comes, too. While no comprehensive data is available for immediate employment after a PhD, sectoral insights paint a bleak picture. Many PhD graduates struggle to find relevant jobs right after completion. For instance, among the approximately 6,000 science PhDs awarded yearly, around 2,000 fail to secure appropriate positions. Only a minority manage to land academic or research posts immediately, and many take up jobs that don't require a PhD at all.

Besides, the academic job market is shrinking, and Indian industry remains hesitant to absorb PhDs, primarily because doctoral research often has little synergy with market needs. In contrast, about 60 per cent of PhDs in the US and Europe are absorbed outside academia, whereas in India, less than 30 per cent transition successfully into industry roles. The result? A growing population of overqualified, underemployed scholars.

Another invisible wound is the mental health crisis festering within this cohort. An internal study by IIT Kharagpur revealed that four out of five PhD students experience mental health challenges, driven by inadequate supervision, financial strain and career uncertainty. In the absence of peer networks and structured support systems, the loneliness of research is often overwhelming. Many struggle through the years in silence, internalising a system failing to support their basic academic and emotional needs. So, is a PhD in India worth it? It can be rewarding for those fortunate enough to secure fund-

ing, find good mentorship and align their work with institutional priorities. However, for the vast majority, it is a journey of endurance, not enlightenment — one that ends with a title, but often not a pathway.

The road ahead does not lie in simply importing Western models or tightening regulatory screws. What is needed is a cultural transformation — a shift from credentialism to curiosity. This requires long-term investment in research infrastructure, consistent faculty development and deliberate policy measures to strengthen industry-academia collaboration. Evaluation metrics must shift from quantity to quality, originality and societal relevance. Ethics must not be a one-time workshop, but a lived value embedded across the doctoral journey. Most importantly, mental health support must be systemic, not left to the initiative of a few sympathetic professors or overburdened deans.

We must ask ourselves: What should a PhD represent? At its best, it is a crucible for new knowledge, a space where bold questions flourish and intellectual integrity is sacrosanct. For India to reclaim that vision, we must go beyond symbolic schemes and foster a culture where research is not just performed, but lived. With the proper support and freedom, a PhD can still be a true mark of scholarship.

The writer is retired professor and former dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Christ University in Bengaluru.

WJC



# Youth and futuristic skilling

BHASWATI BHUYAN

*Today's youth must bridge skill gaps to thrive in a competitive world, by harnessing technology, innovation and inclusive education.*

In the age of technology, we see that our country is moving towards a digital education system along with the growth of the digital economy. The service and manufacturing sectors are fast-paced in today's world, and global connectivity is pushing the country into competition with the rest of the world. This competition is not silent but loud, impacting every aspect of our lives both in overt and covert ways. It is unwise not to discuss how education and its curriculum are intertwined with the rest of the institutions of the country, be it the economy or the polity.

The education system of a country shapes the youth into a future-ready, skilled and knowledgeable section of the population. With the population of India expected to reach nearly 2 billion in a few years and a major section being the younger population, it is vital that our youth are future-ready. Exploring different career options in the digital age, adopting skills for the future workforce, and getting acquainted with creativity tools and artificial intelligence are the need of the hour. The National Education Policy 2020 has brought about certain changes that make it easier for students to choose their preferred courses while pursuing higher education. It has broken some of the traditional ways of selecting and opting for subjects, so as to ensure students are motivated and guided to enter fields of their own choice and pursue the kind of career that best suits them.

There is a huge skill gap plaguing the

workforce. There have been efforts by the government to improve skilling, such as the recent enhanced budget allocations in youth skill development, and the Skill India Mission aims to show promising results in developing the necessary market-driven skills for the country. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an allocation of Rs 500 crore to establish a Centre for Excellence in AI. The motive behind this is to introduce AI tools in educational institutions. This is in line with the larger 'Industry 4.0', also called the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Smart factories provide a good opportunity for manufacturers to enter the Fourth Industrial Revolution and fulfil its requirements. The establishment of Assam Skill University in Mangaldai, Darrang, by the Government of Assam will benefit a large number of people from the state. The PM Research Fellowship Scheme will offer 10,000 fellowships for cutting-edge research at different institutions. The research will focus on high-demand topics like AI, manufacturing and sustainable energy.

With the use of high-tech Internet of Things (IoT) devices in factories, there is higher productivity and improved quality. The manual models require more time and effort, while AI-powered insights reduce manufacturing and human errors and also save energy and time.

The government has upheld a goal of skilling 20 lakh youth over the next five years to equip them with contemporary skills. The initiative is to modernise 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) by allocating Rs

1,000 crore. The focus on outcome-oriented training with updated curricula will help bridge the skill gap and also enhance employability. Along with this, the provision of internship opportunities to one crore individuals in the top 500 organisations will provide experience, exposure and readiness for work. The Model Skill Loan Scheme offers loans that will support 25,000 students annually. Furthermore, this year's budget contributes significantly to higher education, addressing gaps in access to quality education. This provision will make access to higher education easier, empowering more people to pursue advanced studies.

There has been immense scrutiny about how to make India future-ready, and the overarching aim of these schemes is to harness potential and to use the demographic dividend so that more and more people gain opportunities for empowerment.

As the youth grapple with different challenges, demanding more equitable and just solutions to their problems, the need of the hour is to address these multifaceted problems. For this, it is very crucial for the population to be aware of the scope of technicalities and tools available to secure their future. Sustainability-focused careers are on the rise, such as in renewable energy, green tech, climate resilience and waste management. Scholarships for women and training programmes with financial assistance to enter into fields of science and technology help to close the gender gaps.

In today's time, merely holding degrees does not guarantee a successful career op-

portunity. Today, we see a shift in the job landscape, the digital transformation and the evolving industrial systems. Although there are over 50 million young people who have been trained in technology and services, there is still a need for effective upskilling for all youths engaging in higher education and graduating.

Entrepreneurship and lifelong skills in AI tools are becoming the cornerstone for survival in today's world. There must be more discussions and awareness programmes to bring the general people into the ambit of skill training and spark their interest in this arena. More talk shows by the intelligentsia and thinkers from different fields should be organised to host programmes related to digital upskilling so that the general people can take part in them and even watch them on television. There is an urgent need to educate people about how the general knowledge acquired through our lifetime education can be utilised through social media and the digital world in order to be creative and create sustainable means of productivity.

Along with industry-based learning, soft skills are equally essential to survive in today's society, be it in the field of manufacturing, services, entrepreneurship, etc. Today's employers look for what individuals can deliver rather than merely what they have studied. Communication skills, emotional intelligence, adaptability, leadership, etc., are the basic requirements demanded in professional workplaces as critical components of success.



# A leadership vacuum in the varsities

**W**hen Karnataka's Higher Education Minister M C Sudhakar admitted in the legislative council that the state is struggling to find qualified candidates for Vice Chancellor posts, it struck a raw nerve in the academic community. For a state that prides itself on being India's knowledge hub – with an IIT, IIM, and a range of reputed universities – this shortage raises disturbing questions about the governance and future of higher education. On paper, the eligibility criteria appear straightforward: the Vice Chancellor must be an eminent academic with at least ten years of teaching experience. But behind this simple rule lies a harsh reality. Many accomplished scholars are unwilling to apply. Not because they lack ambition, but because they view the system as skewed. The perception that extraneous considerations, including caste equations, political patronage, and even allegations of monetary deals, outweigh academic merit has cast a long shadow. There is a general impression that transparency in appointments is at best patchy, at worst absent.

For those qualifying, the job itself can seem deeply unappealing. Universities in Karnataka are plagued by funding shortages, political interference, and chronic vacancies in faculty positions. Even an outstanding scholar risks being reduced to a bureaucrat navigating red tape rather than a leader shaping academic destiny. It is hardly surprising, then, that many of the state's brightest minds – people who have international exposure, research credentials, and reputations to protect – would rather focus on their academic careers or accept positions in central institutions. The leadership vacuum should be addressed with imagination. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has already suggested widening the eligibility criteria to include senior professionals from public administration or industry who have made academic contributions. IIMs, for instance, have shown how involving eminent professionals and industrialists in leadership roles can strengthen institutions without undermining their academic ethos. Karnataka would do well to explore, not reject, such ideas.

**Karnataka must restore credibility in V-C appointments, expand eligibility criteria**

The solution is twofold. First, and most critically, the state must restore credibility in the appointment process by making it transparent and merit-driven, insulated from political calculations and external pressures. Second, it must show openness to reimagining leadership in higher education, considering proven talent from wider fields. If these steps are not taken, Karnataka's universities risk a slow decline, governed not by the most capable but by the most compliant. For a state that aspires to lead India's knowledge economy, settling for mediocrity at the top is not merely a missed opportunity; it is an avoidable failure.

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# The skills check



FARZANA AFRIDI AND ARJITA CHANDNA

India's vocational training system needs to reinvent itself to boost employability

WITH A VOLATILE external sector increasing the challenge of demand-driven growth, the Prime Minister unveiled a slew of proposed reforms from the Red Fort's ramparts on August 15. While a recalibration of GST could induce higher domestic consumption and spur domestic investment with employment growth, India must seize this opportunity to also rethink its education system and increase the productivity and employability of its labour force. Our traditional education system — academic and rote-based — is unlikely to deliver a workforce equipped for the future of work.

In India and across the world, formal vocational or skill training is associated with higher chances of an individual being employed and obtaining a job in the formal sector. Yet, only 4 per cent of India's workforce is formally trained, even though the institutional coverage of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is extensive — with over 14,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 25 lakh sanctioned seats. Actual enrolment was only around 12 lakh in 2022, implying just 48 per cent seat utilisation. Our VET system struggles with not only low uptake but also modest employment rates for those who undergo training. In 2018, the employment rate among ITI graduates was 63 per cent, whereas countries with robust VET systems such as Germany, Singapore, and Canada reported employment rates ranging between 80 and 90 per cent. These statistics point to a VET system that is both ineffective and unattractive to our youth.

Why is the uptake and employment rate low for India's VET system?

The first factor is the stage of the education system at which VET is integrated. Countries that introduce VET earlier in the schooling system show a stronger association with better labour market outcomes. In Germany, for example, VET is integrated at the upper secondary level through a dual system, combining school education with paid apprenticeships. In contrast, in India, VET is an afterthought — offered post high-school education, which not only shortens the period available for hands-on training before the youth enter the job market, but also does not allow for orientation towards employable skills.

A second aspect is the absence of a defined pathway to higher (or academic) education via

We must invest more in human capital. India allocates around 3 per cent of total education expenditure to VET, compared to 10-13 per cent in countries like Germany, Singapore, and Canada. Public funding can be optimised with improved financial viability of ITIs through lower per-student costs of training and by allowing ITIs autonomy to generate their own revenue.

vocational skilling. For instance, Singapore offers VET either as technical education at the post-secondary level or via polytechnics at the tertiary level through dual vocational tracks, but has defined pathways from VET to traditional university education. India, in contrast, offers no formal academic progression from VET to mainstream higher education, nor does our education system offer credit transfers between systems. This reduces the uptake of VET by many who wish to keep the option of traditional, academic education viable.

Third, and possibly most important, is the perception and quality of VET in India. Singapore has industry-led curriculum design, high instructor quality, regular audits and a mechanism that seeks constant feedback from employers and trainees. Singapore also has a Skill Future Programme, where the government offers subsidies to upskill throughout one's career. In India, in contrast, many courses are outdated and misaligned with industry needs. Over one-third of ITI instructor posts are vacant due to limited training capacity at National Skill Training Institutes. Quality monitoring is weak, with irregular ITI grading and no feedback systems.

Relatedly, investing in robust public-private partnerships to deliver VET is critical for successful skilling. In Germany, Singapore, and Canada, governments fund VET institutions, while employers pay for apprenticeships, share training costs, and also help design curricula. In India, the engagement of employers in the private sector is limited, if not absent. ITIs depend heavily on government funding, with minimal private sector investment in infrastructure and training apparatus. Medium and Small Scale Enterprises drive local job creation, but have low engagement with ITIs due to capacity constraints. Sector Skill Councils, which play a key role in integrating training with industry needs, lack state-level presence.

What can India learn from international experiences to overhaul its VET programme?

First, integrate VET into early schooling. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 recommends such integration, but progress has been slow. Second, fast-track reforms to implement the National Credit Framework that defines clear progression pathways and aims to have a board for nationally recognised certifications. Third, to improve training quality,

align VET courses with local industry demand through regular market assessments, expand NSTIs and fast-track instructor recruitment to address capacity gaps, and strengthen ITI grading by incorporating trainee feedback. Fourth, scale models like the Private Training Partner approach by leveraging public infrastructure and private expertise. Involve MSMEs, and strategically use CSR funding to boost industry relevance. Fifth, increase public spending on VET and ensure the financial viability of institutions by linking public funding to their performance and granting them autonomy to generate their own revenue.

We must invest more in human capital. India allocates around 3 per cent of total education expenditure to VET, compared to 10-13 per cent in countries like Germany, Singapore, and Canada. Public funding can be optimised with improved financial viability of ITIs through lower per-student costs of training and by allowing ITIs autonomy to generate their own revenue.

Recent government schemes — such as the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme, the PM Internship Scheme, and the ITI Upgradation Initiative — reflect an increased focus on employment outcomes. ELI Part A offers up to Rs 15,000 for first-time EPO-registered workers, while the revised ELI, Part B gives employers Rs 3,000 a month for every new hire. Both ELI schemes push formalisation of jobs but have no skilling components. The Prime Minister Internship Scheme aims to provide one-year placements to youth in top companies, but lacks pathways to permanent jobs. The ITI Upgradation Scheme focuses on modernising 1,000 government ITIs in partnership with industry, but not necessarily the quality of training.

Policy initiatives, thus far, have either tinkered on the margins of our existing education system or are afterthoughts. They are unlikely to transform the level of productivity and employability of our workforce unless we overhaul a system that is becoming increasingly outdated. Such an overhaul is crucial for making vocational training a pathway to jobs — an essential step towards a Viksit Bharat.

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*ge/ia*



# A TRICKLE

**D**ata drawn principally from Expenditure Budget documents over the years reveal that India's welfare template is suffering on account of the lengthening shadow of governmental negligence. A report by a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education and Women and Child Development on Demand for Grants for School Education highlighted the dismal state of school education and the urgent need for the government to allocate greater funds to the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: more than 14,000 government schools have shut down between 2020-21 and 2023-24, delivering a blow to the goal of achieving universal education. The mid-day meal, which has worked wonders in improving both nutrition and enrolment for school children, is being starved of funds too, spiking school dropout rates and deepening gender disparities in education. Saksham Anganwadi, meant to address the nutritional needs of children between 6 months and 6 years, pregnant women and lactating mothers apart from adolescent girls from "aspirational districts" — whatever that means — has seen cuts in funding as well, leading to severe institutional shortages in *anganwadis*. Political wrangling and funds freeze have been reported in the case of the 100 day rural job guarantee programme. There is also an urgent need to review the purse strings for the National Social Assistance Programme, which plays a crucial role in providing benefits to vulnerable constituencies such as the elderly, the disabled and widows.

Taken together, this set of data bares monumental government lapses in supporting what are deemed as public goods. This is catastrophic given the fact that welfare is a moral commitment on the part of the State. Moreover, India's ambition of being a global economic powerhouse is contingent upon the claimants of its economic wealth being representative. This underlines the need for strengthening — not weakening — its welfare programmes, especially since the infrastructure of the delivery mechanism is mostly in place. The gradual enfeeblement of the State's investment in welfare may also signal a possibility whose repercussions could be serious for Indian democracy. The emerging, transactional compact on welfare with the underprivileged — provision of basic amenities in return for electoral patronage for the ruling regime — threatens to transform citizens' rights to a form of favour to be dispensed by whimsical powers that be. This would be an inversion — perversion — of the democratic ethos itself.

Telp-110





**Drishti Rakhra** has been a lecturer for six years. When she started out, the classroom was a place for real-time conversations. Now, she writes, AI has changed everything

# AI is reshaping my classroom

I fell in teaching naturally in 2018. I felt alive in the classroom even before I considered becoming a teacher. Even then, I realised that the classroom was a place of live conversation, jokes, and play. As a student, I especially enjoyed classes in which the teacher was accessible, and I could ask whatever questions came to mind.

As a teacher, I knew I wanted the same for my students. Every time I read a student's assignments, it was with a sense of fullness and curiosity. It wasn't mere marks on the data place next to campus. I knew that the experience was real and honest, and that when we talked about the always-grumpy man there, the experience was shared. All of this was temporarily removed when I was forced to look at them differently as my previously innocent and naive students seemed to have grown. All at once, it felt like.

For all of April 2024, I looked at student writing and pulled apart each submission line by line to try and figure out whether the words in front of me were written by a person or a machine. Reading their work stopped living less about the students and more about the strange mechanics of comparing. It became clear to me, as it did to others, that the classroom would never be the same again.

After some amount of my work, I had my list of delimiters in place. I called them to the department one by one and had long conversations with them. One of them, let's call him 'C', was a tall, gym-going boy who had already made clear that he wasn't interested in the subject (I teach journalism). But when he sat in front of me, his tallness curved into a smaller something, almost folding in on itself. I asked him why he felt the need to take distance from AI. He remained quiet. I lowered my voice, showed him that I mean no harm and asked him the question again. He finally said that he just didn't have time. C was a final year student, at the very edge of graduating. I then asked him if it was worth the risk of failing. This time, I didn't get an answer. He hadn't even considered the possibility of getting caught.

On campus, assignments that have been written in code using AI are simply not accepted. Students are warned regularly. Most teachers are pragmatic when it comes to AI. It's not to be used. When an assignment is suspicious, it's most delicate to see QuillBot agree with you. Yes, this was written by AI. Yes, I remained somewhat giddy, the irony ringing in my head. I supposed yes. According to my will, the student's work was enough to tell whether it's their own or AI's writing.

## Getting addicted

To not be addicted to AI, 'Nancy', an MA English student tells me. We are sitting in a corridor outside the English department as Nancy recalls a time when all aspects of her life led to ChatGPT. She was a second-year B.Ed student when AI took off, and she remembers the crash it triggered. The first time she used it, her teacher had damped an impossible as-

ignment on her part together a literature review of 40 pages. In a fit of desperation, she turned to the now and shined OpenAI software and received a clean-looking list. When I ask her if she edited the assignment, she says, laughing, "There was no need to." Three months after that, her college introduced strict rules about the use of AI assistance.

Generative Artificial Intelligence Adversarial Detection (GAID) is currently being tested as the newest behaviour disorder to succeed Internet Gaming Disorder. Nancy, like several other students, began using AI not simply for academic help but also for emotional support. She would ask it for advice and accept the judgment she would receive if it were with her friends.

"It almost made me break up with my boyfriend!" Her face mimics the words she says in her voice. She speaks of this same boyfriend now — an IT professional who reassured her that ChatGPT is just a bot, despite no one behind the screen.

The friends of AI and the makers. On Monday, a colleague tells me about catching a student using ChatGPT in class. On Tuesday, I am handed a long list of names put together by a barely boyish student. I need a pride he carries, chest extra pulled up the 2,000 words of notes are all AI. On Wednesday, another student hands me a 'customer report' of students benefiting from the mid-day meal scheme on the campus, a comprehensive report he managed to prepare after talking to a grand total of three people. I am stuck here at spotting this discrepancy now, a far leap from 2022 when ChatGPT was new and students dined with it with little excitement. I tried to read language generated carefully, I picked up on grammatical mistakes and student experiences. At the same time, I started to close in on the first my classroom was in danger of becoming, empty of students' experiences and their contents.

Christine Bonetto, one of my colleagues, describes a first-year General English classroom. She asked her class of 80 BSc students how many felt confident about conducting research without the help of ChatGPT or Google. "Guess how many raised their hands?" she says. "Only three. In a class of 80." She asked the classes if they used AI, and all the students raised their hands in the affirmative. One of them, she says, even showed her their conversation with ChatGPT. They shared intimate details about their days. Her face betrays some of the shock she is feeling. "You can even imagine," she joyfully, "the kind of things the tells AI."

Nancy's current smile seems little as she tells me something similar. "I was dealing with depression at the time," she says. "I would turn to AI whenever I was struggling with something, but I realised soon that it was not good. It was just agreeing with everything I said." At one point, she felt upset by something ChatGPT said, so she asked it to be nicer to her. Since then, it just continued to agree with her and she got used to it. "AI can't give us what human beings can," she says. The discovery took her a long time, but

the smile faded when she went to one of her professors one day and explained to him what she was thinking. He gave her a single piece of advice: go speak to your teacher. Her professor was able to deduce from the content that she wasn't relying on the people around her. When she did have a conversation with her mother, everything became simpler. How would AI know to give her this answer?

If you look closely enough at AI, patterns begin to emerge. I agree with you, very rarely uses any negative language, and is pumped with the bias of the data it is fed. There is endless research around the world looking into the effects of AI on therapy, brain function, and thought processes.

Karishk Nigendra, also an MA English student, paints out a similar pattern. He is generous with his use of AI but also careful about the work it gives him. After an AI session, he would be happy, he decided to pull back because he realised that AI agreed with everything he said. "It is designed to not keep you keeping back anymore," he says.

## AI-able education

Those who have come to rely on AI for everyday activities seem to believe that the rest of us are 'backward thinking'. At a meeting workshop I attended recently, the facilitator declared with enthusiasm, "AI should be used everywhere!" The blanket statement seems to imply that all teaching content are the same, but enough conversation with colleagues has shown me otherwise. A senior professor once discovered a badly submitted AI-written assignment. He decided to speak to the student, only to find out that she had a part-time job at a cafe because of financial constraints, and did not have the time to study. Hearing this gave me pause. I went back to the drawing board: what is a teacher supposed to do?

It has taken me six years of teaching

to learn that there is no clear answer to this. It changes from one classroom to the other, from one set of students to the other. The work of the teacher is to respond to the student, to facilitate spaces for conversation and learning. A one-size-fits-all approach reduces students to names, register numbers, and the fees they pay.

Mythali Sripad Shastri, a Communication Studies professor in another Bangalore college, believes using AI in the classroom "just makes no sense". It is impossible to script to AI outside of discipline-specific pedagogy. Nigendra reminds me that people are still taught to count numbers even though calculators exist. Similarly, why do people still attempt to read and write? The humanistic classroom requires more from the student, but it demands even more from the teacher: time, energy, heart and importantly, attention.

When I first discovered AI, it was in my class. It was with just one student's work. I remember sitting up in horror, the realisation making me look at students' work differently. When I started with one assignment, I became 20 and I experienced a feeling of horror. I thought back to the discussions we had had in class, and the work we had been talking about. They were all supposed to write essays and feature stories, but most of them had simply submitted AI-generated nonsense. When I called them to meet me one by one, they were taken aback. They looked at me with guilt, but they were mostly surprised at being caught.

I am reminded of a friend who teaches in a Delhi University college. "We often exchange screenshots of students' student assignments. We ask ourselves, 'Do these students think we don't read their work?' They seem to believe that all their work falls into a vacuum, that it is for reading."

## AI proofing

A teacher's job is one of care: to remind the student that their insights are valuable. Mythali says 'AI proof' assignments. She gives marks that require her students to really engage with whatever they are reading. She also does regular check-ins, and encourages them to maintain a daily journal where they could list and learn to express themselves regularly. Another senior colleague reminds me that most students do not really think of AI as 'cheating' while they would have some guilt if they cheated on an exam. They don't seem to worry about the ethical or moral implications of using AI.

The risk of the student not reading is by no means a new one, but the newest tests in the tilted exchange between students and teachers. Ananya Mehta, a student in Ambedkar University, describes getting assignments designed to be done by AI, with no inputs needed from the student — they ask for so much that it becomes impossible for the student to finish the task. "What is the point of doing it then?" she wonders.

She does not lose sleep over the idea of using AI regularly, but reminds me that several methods of education are simply impractical.

As a student, I remember helping out of exam halls to find my teachers to discuss the question paper with them. My classmates and I would argue about who we thought set the paper, and make small wagers. We learned to read each other's work and talk about it with such leisure that even a process as tedious as answering an exam became joyful.

Ananya tells me about a question that recently appeared in a Communicative English exam, where the students were asked to write their classroom as characters from Shakespeare's 'Macbeth', with reasons for why each person would not fulfil their role. "Our entire class was buzzing after the paper," she says, "it gave us so much to think about."

## Find your voice

Is this hyper-tech-charged sentence. Nancy discovered the importance of her own voice after a year of AI-education. "AI takes away my voice," she says. "When I write, I am able to understand what I am thinking. It makes things clear."

The variety of AI use takes me by surprise. Some students use it simply for research, while others use it to enhance creativity. A majority use it simply to write for them. Mythali finds similar patterns. "They don't want to think at all," she says. "One part of it is necessary, another is just laziness."

Harpreet, an Industrial Psychology student, who describes herself as an 'old school person', says, "AI helps me by giving me a starting point. I don't need to start from scratch." She found AI later than her classmates, being slightly uncomfortable with tech, but opened to a general complacency that has seeped into research. Most of us, she would see AI as a replacement of potential happenings.

A poem by teacher poet Joseph Pissano went viral in 2023 for a line that made it rounds on social media. Pissano ends the poem, addressed to the student using AI, with the line 'You are for the ones who love the work', a statement that collates learning and working with just simply living. Nigendra describes a similar experience as he speaks. He has found that the act of writing allows him to think through the concepts he is trying to understand, eventually allowing him to have original thoughts.

## What next?

As the semester began this year, I gave my students one clear instruction: you must have a new book for all your writing and note-taking. Classroom spaces are now fraught with suspicion and the only logical way to deal with it is to return to more 'archaic' teaching methods. When I looked at one of these students' work after a class, I experienced the unexpected pleasure of underlining their writing and pointing out exactly what could be improved. That one minute could be all more for what has been happening in the last three years.

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# Targeting research

## Attacks on research institutions reflect India's declining academic freedoms

**M**istakes and misinterpretations must not be confused with cases of malicious misinformation. The filing of FIRs against a researcher associated with Lokniti, a programme of the CSDS, and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)'s show cause notice to the CSDS, represent yet another troubling chapter in the recent erosion of academic freedoms in India. The trigger seems to be a post on X by Lokniti co-director Sanjay Kumar, which had erroneous data about reductions in the electoral roll in some constituencies in Maharashtra. Expressing regret, Mr. Kumar deleted the post. Yet, the BJP governments in Maharashtra and at the Centre have weaponised what is a mistake to launch broader attacks on the institution, despite the post having no connection to the Opposition's allegations about inflated electoral roll numbers during the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections. The ICSSR's insinuations about the CSDS-Lokniti's funding arrangements echo the treatment meted out to other premier institutions. The Centre for Policy Research faced tax surveys that resulted in the cancellation of its foreign funding licence and tax-exempt status. This targeting suggests a coordinated effort to silence independent research voices rather than address administrative concerns. Such acts have led to India's ranking falling to the bottom 20% among 179 nations in the 2024 Academic Freedom Index published by the V-Dem Institute.

Institutions such as CSDS-Lokniti serve a vital democratic function by conducting empirical research that helps understand policy implications. Through its National Election Studies and comprehensive data archive, Lokniti has helped transform the study of Indian politics to one based on rigorous, large-scale empirical inquiry. Its survey on the verification documents listed by the ECI during its Special Intensive Revision exercise in Bihar, among voters across five States and one Union Territory, exemplifies this. Rather than acknowledging the finding that the availability of such documents is rather low among a large cohort of voters in India, and places onerous burdens on voters in the event of a country-wide SIR, the ICSSR has characterised this research as an attempt to malign the ECI. How can policy effectiveness be assessed without rigorous empirical investigations such as well-designed and transparent opinion surveys? The current government has also undermined its own statistical apparatus. The delayed Census and suppressed statistical surveys point to discomfort with independent and critical analysis. As India navigates complex development challenges, it desperately needs the kind of critical feedback and evidence-based analysis that institutions such as the CSDS provide. Silencing these voices through administrative harassment and funding restrictions serves neither good governance nor national interest. *W/C*



LEGAL  
LEVERAGE

## A New Playbook of Transparency

*The National Sports Governance Act will herald a new era of accountability in India's sporting universe alongside ensuring athlete welfare, but shadows of commercialisation and politicisation still linger*



KDP RAO

THE WRITER IS A  
FORMER ADDL  
CHIEF SECRETARY  
OF CHHATTISGARH

The Bill was shared with international bodies such as the IOC, FIFA, World Athletics, and others, and incorporated about 700 responses from stakeholders with a view to integrate Indian sport with the global ecosystem

The sports fraternity has much to rejoice in with the passing of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, on August 12 by Parliament, which subsequently became an official Act when it received the assent of the President of India on August 18, 2025. While globally, various laws have been in force for decades for the regulation of sports and protection of athletes, for India this is the first time such legislation has been enacted. The Act replaces the National Sports Code of 2011, which was merely a model code lacking legal force, and addresses numerous issues hitherto pushed under the carpet, such as biased selections, mismanagement of sports bodies and federations, gender bias, exploitation of athletes, systemic corruption, and so on. Apparently, the thoughtful Central legislation is a response to various observations and directions on the matter by the Supreme Court on different occasions.

The Act is hailed by almost all as a landmark legislation since it aims to ensure transparency, accountability, and athlete welfare, which is reinforced by a provision of mandatory audits by the CAG of National Sports Federations that receive State support. The vision of the government behind the Act is to create a transparent, athlete-centric, and globally aligned sports governance framework with an ecosystem of encouragement, fair play, and justice. The Act is global in spirit, for it aligns with the Olympic and Paralympic Charters and international sports governance standards, helping mitigate the risk of derecognition by bodies like the IOC. Reprovedly, the Bill was shared with international bodies such as the IOC, FIFA, World Athletics, and others, and incorporated about 700 responses from stakeholders with a view to integrate Indian sport with the global ecosystem.

The provisions are revolutionary in the history of Indian sport:

a) establishment of a National Sports Board to oversee and regulate National Sports Federations (NSFs) with powers to both recognise and derecognise sports bodies;

b) constitution of a National Sports Tribunal (NST) with powers equivalent to a civil court for dispute resolution, with only the Supreme Court as the forum for appeals on NST decisions;

c) a mandate that every NSF's executive committee should include at least two outstanding sportspersons and four women to promote gender equality;

d) compulsory Athletes' Commissions for all National Olympic Com-



The new law is a turning point in the narrative of Indian sports

mittees (NOCs), National Paralympic Committees (NPCs), and NSFs to ensure participation of athletes in policy-making and governance; and

e) a mandatory Safe Sports Policy to protect women, minors, and vulnerable individuals from harassment and abuse, through provisions for internal grievance redressal mechanisms.

Most significantly, for the first time, the new law brings all recognised sports organisations receiving government grants under the RTI Act, 2005, doubly ensuring transparency.

While the legislation promises a bright future for sport in India, certain provisions could be a cause of concern. For example, the provision of three consecutive terms (12 years) for key positions like President, Secretary General, and Treasurer in sports bodies may become convenient for politicisation of the institutions, since incumbents may push for their self-serving agenda against the spirit of the Act. Instead, one term with no repetition of office could have been more effective as a disincentive for any possible shenanigans. Similarly, the exemption of sports bodies that do not receive state support and function on their own business models from the purview of the RTI Act, 2005, may lead to unfettered commercialisation of some sports.

Commercialisation—the increasing influence of business interests in sports driven by sponsorships, media rights, and profit motives—is an issue that is not sufficiently addressed by the Act. The ecosystem of sport has undergone a drastic change all over the world. Today, sport has metamorphosed into a full-fledged business industry worth Rs

5,894 crore (USD 796 million). The IPL is the pinnacle of such metamorphosis for cricket in India. There are 15 more leagues in sports like badminton, football, kabaddi, wrestling, and boxing, all with robust financial worth. A strong nexus between media, sport, and commerce has emerged as a viable model not only for business but also for the self-advancement of sportspersons. The sports industry also promotes investment and generates job opportunities such as commentators, experts, sports journalists, nutritionists, sports physiotherapists, umpires, referees, and data analysts. The industry reportedly has the potential to reach the USD 10 billion level in the next five years. Ergo, commercialisation, to reasonable limits, is necessary, for it helps in the development of infrastructure, training facilities, and athlete support, and facilitates global exposure, but the downsides often outweigh the advantages.

Commercialisation and corruption apparently have a close relationship, with serious implications for the integrity, fairness, and spirit of competition. The Commonwealth Games 2010 scandal exposed financial scams and mismanagement by organising committees. Revenue priority over athlete welfare or grassroots development, excessive focus on entertainment, and corruption nexus (such as match-fixing driven by betting syndicates) are the fallout of over-commercialisation. Cricket has been particularly vulnerable, with scandals like the 2013 IPL spot-fixing case involving players, bookies, and team officials. The Justice Lodha Committee (2016) report highlighted many systemic issues. Over 350 legal cases related

to sports governance were pending even as the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, was passed.

Equity has been a major issue all along. For instance, the BCCI's financial autonomy with revenues of around Rs 27,411 crore in 2024–25 contrasts sharply with struggling NSFs for sports like athletics or hockey. Selective games are marketed as products, dramatised with entertainment to create wider viewership. Data from the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) 2016 show that the IPL had 362 million viewers, followed by the Soccer League India (224 million), the Kabaddi League (220 million), the Wrestling League (109 million), the Hockey League (43 million), and the Badminton League (36 million).

Commercialisation, moreover, has also given rise to unethical practices under the garb of professionalism, which have become the new normal all over the world. The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) reported 116 doping violations in India in 2022. Globally, cases like Lance Armstrong (cycling) and Russia's state-sponsored doping programme (2014 Sochi Olympics) highlight the scale of the issue.

There are no specific legislations targeting over-commercialisation of sport in India. Only the Copyright Act, 1957, and the Trademarks Act, 1999, provide remedies for IP violations, but enforcement against ambush marketing is inconsistent. The US addresses commercialisation through specific IP, anti-trust, and labour laws, with a focus on NIL (Name, Image, and Likeness) rights and streaming regulations, whereas the European Union has competition law and IP protection, with harmonised anti-doping and broadcasting regulations. Strict gambling and broadcasting laws in the UK ensure fair commercialisation while guaranteeing easy public access to major events. In Australia, stringent IP laws and anti-doping regulations are in force, even as the focus has increased on e-sports commercialisation.

To sum up, the sports fraternity has plenty of reasons to celebrate, as the new law is a turning point in the narrative of Indian sports. However, sooner or later, we also need an institutional framework with proper checks and balances to address the evils of over-commercialisation. In the meanwhile, we must make continuous efforts to check the downsides of commercialisation. Effective governance based on ethical canons is all that we need to uphold the integrity of sport.

and / Views expressed are personal



# Return of Reading

Reading might just be making a comeback—and it's younger, social and perhaps cooler than ever

Nupur Amarnath

Three years ago, Mehra, 24, started an online book club, Delhi Reads, to reignite the love of reading in her city. She says she was inspired by the pandemic and the isolation it brought. "We (Gen Z) are just wired differently. The need for connection is very strong in my generation, reading and new books are all ways to reach out," she says. She is a member of the Delhi Reads club.

She is now writing Gen Z's first book on reading, according to the *Times of India* India. And they have turned reading, this quiet, solitary act, into a social performance. Delhi Reads, which calls itself "India's largest book club," on its Instagram, has grown from 11,000 members and 60,000 followers in 2020 to over 100,000 members today.

Reading has also been combined with other things. "It's not just about reading, it's about the community. If you read with the club, you get to meet people in person. It's a social thing," says Mehra. Delhi Reads has a weekly meeting, every week has a different book to read. It is a mix of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. The club has a WhatsApp group, a Telegram channel, and a Facebook page. It has also been featured in the *Times of India*, *India Today*, and *News18*. "Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Mehra.

When Shikha Bhat, a 24-year-old student at the Delhi Technological University, started her book club in July 2021, she had no idea it would become a social media sensation. "Reading is a group activity," she says. "It's not just about the book, it's about the people you meet while reading." She has a WhatsApp group, a Telegram channel, and a Facebook page. It has also been featured in the *Times of India*, *India Today*, and *News18*. "Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Bhat.

Manish Gupta, a 20-year-old student at the Delhi Technological University, feels similarly about Delhi Reads. "It has helped me to meet and connect with people that are like me. It's a place where I can be myself and share my thoughts. Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Gupta.

That "group" can be anything from a book club to a social media group. "It's not just about the book, it's about the people you meet while reading," says Gupta. "It's a place where I can be myself and share my thoughts. Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Gupta.

It is a sentiment the young generation has even on the other side of the world. The American author and editor Rana Durrani who co-edited the *Delhi Reads* book club, says, "I think that when it started reading, the idea was to create a community. It was not just about the book, it was about the people you meet while reading. It's a place where I can be myself and share my thoughts. Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Durrani.

But that pressure disappeared as soon as I began to discover the pleasure and fulfillment that comes from reading books. I am truly content with it. Reading is a social activity. It's not just about the book, it's about the people you meet while reading. It's a place where I can be myself and share my thoughts. Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Durrani.

**NEW WAYS OF READING**  
Gen Z has turned reading into a social media event, with the rise of book clubs and bookstagram. It's not just about the book, it's about the people you meet while reading. It's a place where I can be myself and share my thoughts. Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Durrani.



## WHAT'S TRENDING

Gen Z has brought in a new vocabulary and trends around reading that make books feel part of online culture



**Bookstagram:** Sharing books, reviews and book shelves on social media that makes reading part of a lifestyle. A portmanteau of "book" and "Instagram," bookstagram is inspired by the popular BookTok on TikTok in the West.

**Aesthetic Reading:** Sharing aesthetic photos of annotated margins, colour-coded tabs and underlined quotes.

**New Genres:** These include spicy books (romance erotica), speculative fiction, dark academia reading (as a precursor of gothic, classic literature and work exploring literature).

**Social media helps create an audience without anyone involved. Teacher-turned-writer Vicky Bhat became an overnight bestseller after her X post of her selling only two books went viral and the community of readers kicked in. It's beyond reviews or retail visibility.**  
KARTIKA W. publisher, Westland Books



**People get overwhelmed by choices and want to be told what they spend time on next is worth their while. That's why social media curation is the next big thing in books.**  
ANURAG SINGH, founder, Delhi Reads



**Subgenres:** Subgenres like cozy-to-libs, slow burn and found family help readers connect with specific story types and themes, guiding their reading choices.



**The growth of Bookstagram has made reading a part of a larger lifestyle statement, where sharing what you read is as important as reading itself. Sales trends show a marked increase in younger, first-time book buyers, especially in metros and tier-2 cities.**  
ANURAG SINGH, founder, Delhi Reads



on this platform," she says. "Readers connect to a sense of media in their own way. It's not just about the book, it's about the people you meet while reading. It's a place where I can be myself and share my thoughts. Reading has become a social activity for Gen Z. It's not just about the book, it's about the community. It's about the people you meet while reading," says Durrani.

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Richard Chakraborty

In 2023, when Aadil Shah joined ACE College of Engineering in Thiruvananthapuram, he imagined a fair bit of hostel fun, not weekends spent mopping floors. Now, as a palliative care volunteer, he has done everything from delivering medicines to helping elderly patients move homes. He doesn't mind the work. "Volunteering was a sort of fulfillment that came unexpected," says the 20-year-old who loves watching movies in his free time or hanging out with his hostel friends.

IT trainer Nihala Kathoon C.K. too began volunteering at 18, soon after joining college in Kozhikode. "Initially, I helped with fundraising and awareness events. Gradually, I began assisting with patient care and mentoring new volunteers. It soon became a part of my life," says the now 25-year-old.

Caregiving can be dring and thankless — not something we usually associate with youngsters in today's world of AI tools and Instagram reels. Yet in Kerala, a quiet culture of students tending to the elderly and terminally ill as palliative care volunteers has taken root over the last decade, aided by local community and voluntary organisations, and by collaborations with palliative care institutions.

"Youth involvement has been a part of Kerala's palliative care culture for the last 15 years or so," says Dr. M.K. Rajagopal, a palliative care pioneer and founder of the not-profit Pallium India. What began as a community-led initiative has now found official recognition. In September 2024, the Kerala government formally encouraged student involvement as was proposed in the revised state palliative care policy in 2019 after advocacy by palliative care groups. In June this year, the state announced a tech-enabled Universal Palliative Care Project integrating NGOs, volunteers, nurses, and institutions providing palliative care in real time.

Kerala has over 1,400 palliative care units. According to 2022 data by Pallium India, there were over 4,000 trained volunteers across ages in the state. The state's newly formed Universal Palliative Care portal is said to have registered almost 8,000 volunteers, according to news reports in July 2025.

Fulfilling a need Palliative care is not just for the terminally ill, clarifies Dr. Matthews Nuneppil, medical officer for Kerala's Universal Palliative Care Project. "In Kerala, palliative care is about supporting people suffering from serious health issues or any chronic ailment — whether from cancer, stroke, liver disease, neurodegenerative disorders, mental illnesses or childhood illnesses. It is about providing any kind of support — medical, nursing or psychosocial — that patients and their families need. And in the last 5-10 years, we have been conducting weekly long training programmes in schools and colleges. Training young people gives them the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to this care," says Dr. Nuneppil.

An estimated 5.4 million people in India need palliative care each year. According to a new study by Delhi non-profit Sunaka Foundation, in 10 years, one in four people in Kerala will be over 60. Age-friendly care planning is no longer optional.

Kerala's unique community movement in palliative care began



A kind word: Student volunteers with a patient at Pallium India in Thiruvananthapuram, and (below) at the Institute of Palliative Medicine in Washioke, Jharkhand, India.

## THE EMPATHY EFFECT HOW KERALA'S YOUNG ARE STEPPING UP

Across the State, students are training as palliative caregivers and offering support and comfort to the aged and terminally ill, fostering a culture of care

In 1993, when Dr. Rajagopal and Dr. Suresh Kumar of the Institute of Palliative Medicine (IPM) in Kozhikode launched a pain relief clinic for terminally ill cancer patients. Over time, through the community-owned, volunteer-driven Neighbourhood Network in Palliative Care model, this effort has expanded across the state, aided by its 2008 palliative care policy which mandated that local bodies set up palliative care services. Supported by doctors and nurses, the volunteers — including students — have aimed to improve quality of life for the ailing and their caregivers. The updated state palliative care policy of 2019 proposed specialised training for students in schools and colleges. They are also exposed to the initiative through youth platforms such as Students in Palliative Care (SIPC) that help in mobilising large numbers of participants for awareness programmes, fundraising, and direct patient care support. Training and WHO-aligned certifications often make volunteering a peer-led, structured activity for interested students and many have grown up seeing communities around them doing it.

While volunteering for palliative care does happen in other states, and some like Karnataka and Maharashtra have a palliative care policy, student involvement is



sporadic and not structured or ongoing as it is in many parts of Kerala. Schools and colleges in Kerala have been working with palliative care non-profits through NSS (National Service Scheme) and NCC (National Cadet Corps) units. This is how the seeds for the state's unique culture of young people volunteering for palliative care have been sown. "It could be a combination of IT, ethics, school enrolment, an ageing society, and the fact that the community movement started here," says Dr. Rajagopal.

### A social approach

What also works is that in Kerala, palliative care didn't emerge as a purely medical issue. "It was seen

as a social concern with medical needs," says Dr. Hari Mohan, veteran oncologist and palliative care practitioner. Schools and colleges, and other schoolchildren regularly visit his clinic.

"Women's are huge even at the high school level," he says. What this initiative does is teach compassion early in a highly individualistic world. As one volunteer puts it, the culture of care is a big part of people's way of life in Kerala because of strong local community involvement. For instance, in many places across the state, families cook and supply food as *poshakaru* (food parcels) to thousands of patients and bystanders in government

hospitals via a network of voluntary organisations.

"There's a very active palliative care culture in North Malabar where I come from," says Benra Padma, 25, a research scholar at Ashoka University in Sonapat. She began as a teenager, tagging along with her mother, a govt. member, and her brother who was already a volunteer. "We clean houses, help with daily tasks, or just spend time with patients. Care isn't just biomedical here, it's deeply social," she says.

This social side of care is on full display at Curius, IPM's annual carnival that draws over 20,000 visitors. Meant to raise awareness and funds for palliative care, it feels like a college festival — with calligraphy workshops, music, food stalls and colourful streamers across its verdant green campus. Volunteers take patients around in wheelchairs to mingle with the crowd and there is much camaraderie and laughter.

"Youth involvement has been a cornerstone of our approach," says Sufi Mohammed, consultant and faculty member at IPM. Since 2010, its SIPC programme has brought together over 10,000 volunteers via awareness sessions in colleges. Members agree that the youth bring in new energy and different ideas. "Those genuinely interested get trained, and choose how to get involved — in patient care, community awareness or fundraising. And what students do with the training often goes beyond what we could plan or imagine," says Mohammed.

Nihala Kathoon is one of those students. The Kozhikode resident started by organising activities, gradually moving on to working with patients, a task many students take. One memory stays vivid in her mind. "There was an 18-year-old girl addressed here with cancer. During Curius 2023, we performed Oppana, a traditional Muslim dance from this region, where one performer plays the bride. This girl brushed on being the bride and was thrilled to get that opportunity, often checking herself in the mirror, taking photos."

CONTINUED ON  
PAGE 6



### How Ashla Rani got her name back

Pallium India trustee Ashla Rani's life changed forever after a train accident. Four years in and out of hospitals and multiple surgeries had reduced her identity to her medical condition. "I was just that case of spinal cord injury." That was my identity. "Everything shifted when she became a recipient of palliative care. 'Suddenly people were calling me Ashla,' she recalls.

For the first time, Ashla, now 43, was not just a case of spinal cord injury, but a person. She was a primary caregiver, felt seen as an individual. Her mother was no longer just a bystander but a caregiver. She acknowledged her role as a caregiver, and her challenges in caring for someone else.

Ashla has been the recipient of palliative care from people across generations, including young people. From a volunteer teaching her how to use a wheelchair to a friend across the street who came to visit her at Ashla's house to watch a movie. In the process of a decade, she has learned to live with her condition and has received emotional and spiritual support.

She believes the youth bring in a different kind of energy when they volunteer for palliative care. It's about entering into the life of the opportunity and helping Ashla, she says. For both the recipient and caregiver, it's an important exchange. "It changes the attitude towards life as a whole," says Ashla.



### How to train the young

● Pallium India partners with 14 psycho-social level organisations in Thiruvananthapuram to run sessions for students in and out of school.

● All IPM volunteers are under-graduates between the ages of 17 and 21. Direct care volunteers complete a 20-hour IPM-aligned caregiver programme, with a 3-month psychosocial support option for weekly visits.

● Pallium and Palliative Care Society, Thiruvananthapuram, offers sensitisation programmes to student volunteers.

● Kozhikode College in Kozhikode runs a pain and palliative care clinic and a day centre that is managed and aided by teachers and students.







# Saving a language

**BILAL GANI**

**K**ASHMIRI, or Koshur, is one of the oldest spoken languages in the world. It originated in the Dardic region and is mainly spoken in Kashmir and Chenab valley, and in parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. However many scholars, including George Grierson, place Kashmiri in the Indo-European language family.

For centuries, Kashmiri had the distinction of being a medium of Sufi poetry and philosophical thought of such literary giants as Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Despite its richness and status as a classical language, Kashmiri has been in constant decline. Recently, UNESCO declared the language as "vulnerable" and in danger of extinction since its use has been restricted to certain domains. The lack of inter-generational transmission is one of the pivotal reasons for the decline of the language.

Kids are encouraged to speak in English or Urdu since these have taken on a hegemonic character over the native language. There's been a marginalisation of Kashmiri as a wave of urbanisation has swept the Valley, where social and economic mobility is often associated with proficiency in Urdu or English.

Noam Chomsky, a foundational figure in modern linguistics, often emphasises the deep connection between language, thought, and culture. According to the American theoretical linguist, "A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language."

As the use of Koshur declines among the new generation of Kashmiris, many young students and content creators have turned to digital platforms to preserve the language.

Touqeer Ashraf, a science graduate from Kashmir University, made it his mission to promote the language after witnessing a decline in its use among students in Srinagar. In November

**As the use of Kashmiri declines, digital platforms helmed by youngsters have taken the lead in promoting the language**



**Touqeer Ashraf's (R) digital platform has got an overwhelming response.**

2021, he launched Keashur Praw, a digital platform aimed at promoting Kashmiri among youth and raising awareness about the need to preserve this dying language.

Touqeer says, "While many Kashmiris are using digital platforms to earn money, I am using it as a medium to raise awareness about our rich language and the need to preserve it — purely out of passion. Despite this, platforms like YouTube do not recognise Koshur and have not monetised my channel, which is a prerequisite for earning through digital media."

Touqeer has received an overwhelming response, but believes the preservation of Koshur requires institutional intervention. "The government needs to conduct workshops involving various stakeholders and experts to devise strategies for promoting this language. It is essential for the University of Kashmir to col-

laborate with the government to initiate a multipronged approach for its preservation," he says.

Another digital platform working to make learning Kashmiri accessible to GenZ is Yikvot (together), a digital space started by 22-year-old Seerat Hafiz as an online reading club. Here, original and translated Kashmiri works are read every week.

Studying 'Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding' at Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, Seerat says she started the club just for the purpose of reading together, which is why the group is called Yikvot.

"I was young when I left Kashmir for better educational opportunities, and naturally I didn't have enough exposure to Kashmiri, and the literature. I knew of nothing the language has to offer. I thought it was a problem specific to me; I realised much later that living in Kashmir wouldn't have been any different. People don't really read their own literature, mostly because there is no proper structure or system in place. That's when I decided to look for Kashmiri books and began visiting Kashmiri departments and libraries which might house these. When I had a good rough sketch, I launched Yikvot, which meets every week to read original and translated Kashmiri works," she says.

Seerat believes that digital spaces are an effective medium to engage youngsters to learn their mother tongue. "As GenZ, we understand how trends can make a thing work. There is a good audience for it, because Kashmiri literature comes off as unheard of to the youth today."

Prof Shamshad Kralwari, a poet and translator who translated Fyodor Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment' into Kashmiri, believes in a multifaceted approach that blends cultural stewardship, education, media and technology. Kralwari feels that widespread promotion of Kashmiri can be made possible through reels, podcasts and storytelling formats that resonate with youth.

**The writer teaches at Govt Degree College, Beerwah, J&K**



Pavithra M.B.

In an academic campus, one hopes to see equality sitting as an honoured guest in every classroom, and liberty walking without fear along every corridor. Education should be the great equaliser. Yet, in our campuses, who speaks, who is silenced, and who is invisibilised is still decided by prejudice – sometimes wearing the old mask of tradition, sometimes the new mask of “concern”.

### Early beginnings

The seeds of exclusion are sown early. At school, a girl may be applauded in class, yet denied a chance at the sports meet; not because of lack of skill but because someone has ruled “it’s not for her”. By the time she reaches college, another invisible wall rises: that of “appropriate” choices. Certain courses – those promising professional advancement – are branded unsuitable, not by syllabus, but by parental caution masquerading as care. The lofty phrase “self-determination”, recited in Civics lessons, bends before the imagined ledger of marriage prospects.

Even after admission, the terrain is uneven. Opportunities for internships, research, and cultural work vanish with the early home-in hour for women. Meanwhile, the guardians of safety – the security personnel and CCTV in isolated spaces and ill-lit paths – are either absent or unreliable. Cameras stand vigilant in crowded quadrangles but blink blind in lonely stretches.

Gender bias comes wrapped in everyday language usage too. A “lady topper” is introduced, but a man is simply “topper.” Throwaway lines – “man up”, “don’t cry like a girl” – slip through unchecked, cementing stereotypes. For transgender and non-binary students, the refusal to honour pronouns is not mere oversight; it is a daily act of erasure.

The law has not been mute. The POSH Act 2013 mandates Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) in every institution. The UGC Regulations of 2015 require

awareness, transparency and prevention. The National Education Policy 2020 enshrines inclusivity as a pillar. Yet, these live in files, not in reality.

A college student said, “We had an ICC orientation once... I think it was sandwiched between a mehendi contest and a Zumba session.” That is equivalent to locking the first-aid box in an emergency. Some ICCs are names on paper, unknown to the students they are meant to serve. Gender justice cannot be a perfunctory compliance; it must be the cul-

ture of the corridors.

### Global practices

Elsewhere in the world, policy and practice walk hand in hand. In Sweden, every first-year student undergoes bystander-intervention training before attending a single lecture. In Canada, gender-neutral restrooms and inclusive hostel allocations are unremarkable facets of campus life, with forms allowing safe self-identification. In the U.S., pronoun options are as normal on exam forms as the student’s name. Australia combines inclusive housing

with mandatory staff training. The lesson is plain: gender justice must be built into the foundations of learning, not treated as ornamental architecture.

In India, adaptation need not mean imitation. Periodic campus surveys can map safety perceptions and unearth blind spots. We have some best practices followed in colleges, in which a professor began each class with a “gender minute”; a quick reflection on a gender-related issue. “I made me see the world differently,” a student confessed.

# No room for bias

Why gender justice must be embedded in India's campuses



What needs to be done  
Intent must be matched by infrastructure: well-lit walkways, functioning CCTV in vulnerable zones, equitable hostel facilities. “Inclusive space audits”, routine in Oxford and Melbourne, can be adapted here.

Language, too, must be cleansed of bias. Official notices, recruitment ads, and learning materials should speak the language of equality. Sensitisation cannot be a one-time event; it must be recurring, engaging, and campus-wide. Peer-led ambassador programmes can serve as the first door on which the students can knock on, often before they dare approach formal authorities.

Accountability must not be reduced to the ritual of an annual report. ICC findings must be reviewed independently, and violations met with corrective – not cosmetic – action. The worth of a university lies not merely in its stone facades or its placement statistics but in the citizens it shapes. A degree may certify learning; the courage to challenge injustice certifies leadership.

True gender justice is not sentimental charity; it is a constitutional duty. In a society as plural as ours, campuses are rehearsal halls for democracy itself. If those who walk out of our gates carry with them fairness, empathy, respect and gender justice, then the institution has not only educated it has civilised.

The writer is Assistant Professor, PG Department of Human Rights and Duties Education, Dharm College for Women, Chennai.

ILLUSTRATION BY RAGAN



# Teacher burnout: Impact of the silent strain on teachers



SAKSHI  
SETHI

## 2<sup>ND</sup> THE PIONEER OPINION

When people think of teacher burnout, the image that often comes to mind is of a frazzled educator battling noisy classrooms and restless students. But ask any teacher, and they will say the same thing: The students are not the problem. In fact, they are the best part of the day. It's the sparkle in a child's eye when a concept clicks, the quiet "thank you" after extra help, or the laughter that brightens a morning that keeps teachers going. These moments rarely cause burnout. What drains teachers is everything else—the responsibilities far removed from nurturing young minds. Endless paperwork, shifting policies and unrealistic expectations consume hours that should be spent inspiring curiosity. Teachers today spend as much time on screens as they do with students, uploading lessons, filling compliance

reports and completing inspection notes. A 2023 UNESCO survey showed over 60 per cent of teachers in India cited non-teaching duties as their biggest stress. Added to this are vast syllabi, board exam pressures and workplace politics — favouritism, micromanagement and unfair appraisals. The job often feels like a tightrope walk with little reward. Technology, though essential, has become a double-edged sword. Smart classrooms and AI-driven assessments promise innovation but often overwhelm.

With little training, teachers struggle to navigate complex systems, increasing workload instead of reducing it. As one remarked, "We're expected to fly the plane while building it." Teachers also wear many hats: counselors, mediators, even social workers. They notice when children struggle emotionally but are expected to handle it with minimal resources. The pandemic magnified this burden. Overnight, teachers became tech experts, recording lessons and adapting to virtual classrooms while managing their own families. Their resilience was immense, yet unlike doctors or nurses, their struggles rarely made headlines. Policy reforms, though well-intentioned, often arrive without support. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and new assessment strategies add to pressure when rolled out hastily. The obsession with standardised testing compounds the problem, pushing teachers to "teach to the test" rather than nurture critical thinking. Unrealistic

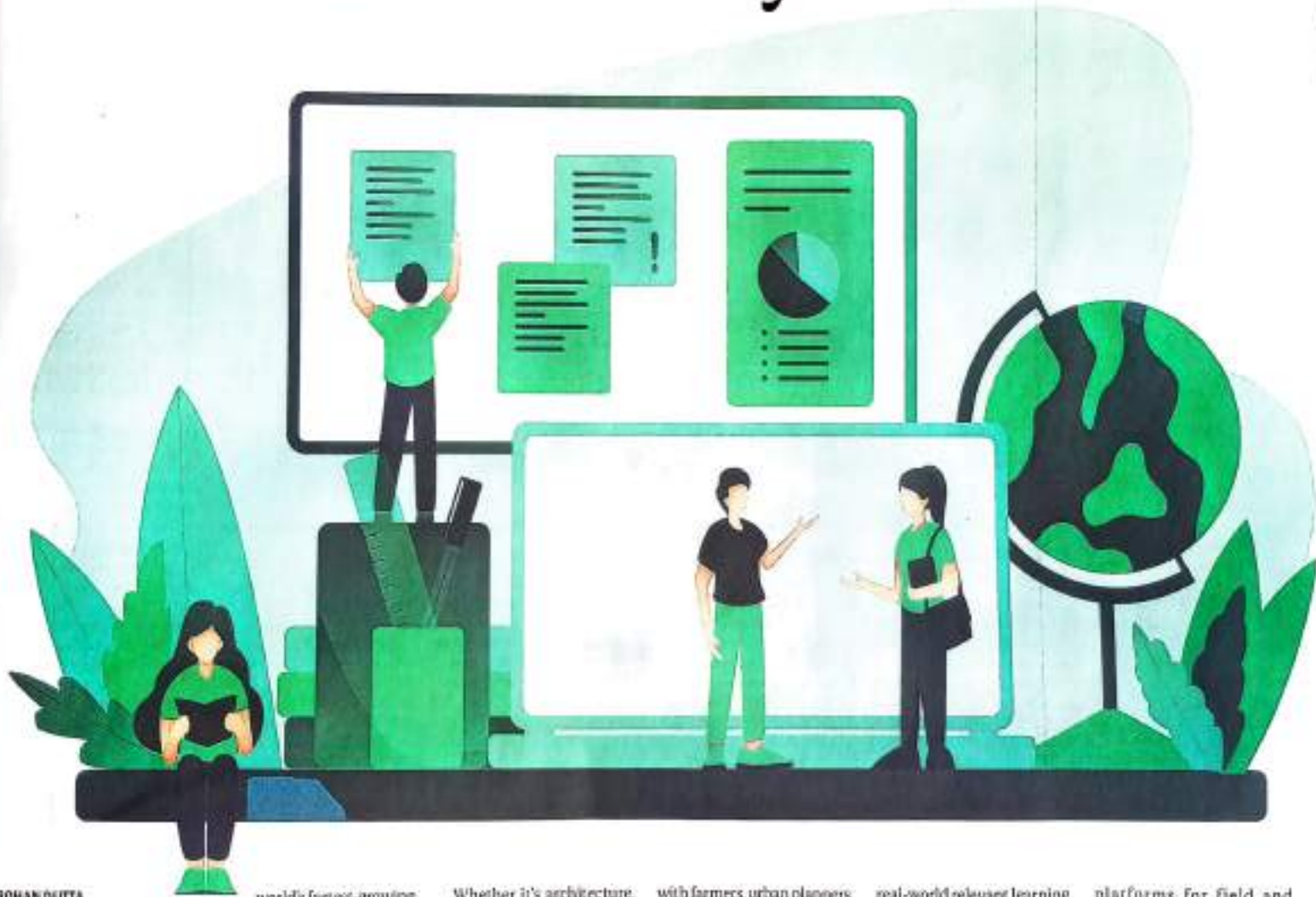
expectations from management and parents further erode autonomy, reducing teachers to data managers rather than mentors. Perhaps the most disheartening factor is the lack of recognition. Teachers work long hours—marking papers, preparing lessons, mentoring students—yet their pay rarely reflects the effort. Professional development is limited, and mental health support almost non-existent. As one veteran summed up: "I can handle forty students, but what breaks me is fighting for resources, constant scrutiny, and never feeling valued." The cost of burnout is high. Talented educators leave, or worse, remain disengaged.

And when teachers suffer, students inevitably pay the price. As the saying goes, "When the gardener is weary, the flowers suffer." The solution lies in fixing the system, not toughening teachers. Schools must cut unnecessary paperwork, streamline platforms like UDISE+, ensure fair practices, and provide proper training for technology. CPE must be meaningful, not token. Above all, real appreciation is needed: Better salaries, lighter workloads, greater autonomy and public respect. Teaching is a calling, but passion alone cannot sustain it. If we ease these burdens, we keep the joy of teaching alive and ensure every child benefits from inspired, supported educators.

The writer is an educator.



# How institutions are powering the climate economy



ROHAN DUTTA

**A**s evident that we are in the middle of a climate crisis, and the global economy is undergoing a drastic transformation. Starting from energy to infrastructure, from finance to food systems, a huge shift toward sustainability is underway. And at the heart of this change and beyond is not just policy or technological interventions, but education. In India and across the globe, universities, institutes, and new-age Ed-tech platforms are becoming engines of the emerging climate economy. The stakes could not be higher. We, in India, which is home to over 1.4 billion people and is one of the

world's fastest-growing economies, stand at a critical juncture. While we are bearing the brunt of drastic climate change and its impacts, including deadly heatwaves and erratic monsoons to rising sea levels and substantial biodiversity losses, such events are also uniquely positioned us to lead. With our demographic dividend, indigenous knowledge systems, and rapidly expanding innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems, we can become a global hub for climate solutions. But this can only happen if we equip the next generation with the right tools, knowledge, skills, and the courage to act.

Across the country, a quiet revolution is unfolding in lecture halls, design studios, rural labs, and maker spaces.

Whether it's architecture, design and climate change, students designing passive cooling systems using earth-air tunnels, or developing frameworks for climate-resilient governance, the approach must be holistic and deeply hands-on. Students should not just study climate challenges; they should work on solving them.

Climate modelling tools and scenario-building exercises, and most importantly, climate finance must be integrated into curricula, empowering students to visualise the future and design accordingly. What's most powerful is the link between academia and community. In many of the institutions, the classroom extends into villages, city wards, and informal settlements. Students co-create

with farmers, urban planners, local artisans, and civic leaders. In doing so, they learn not only to design for the climate economy but with the people most affected by it.

Institutes of national importance, such as IITs, NITs, and emerging private universities, have also initiated interdisciplinary programs in climate science, energy transition, sustainable development, and circular design. Skill-building platforms and vocational institutes are creating green job pipelines in sectors like Industry 5.0, solar installation, EV maintenance, regenerative agriculture, and clean construction. Collaborations with startups, industry partners, and policy think tanks started providing a dynamic, future-ready, and rooted in

real-world relevant learning.

The bigger message is crystal clear that climate education can no longer be siloed. It must be integrated, immersive, community and impact-driven. With the growth of the green economy, it is projected to create over 50 million jobs globally by 2030, the role of education is not just to prepare students for employment but to empower them as problem solvers, innovators, and change makers. Our challenge, and opportunity, lies in scaling up this approach and ensuring that climate literacy and climate action become core to every stream of learning, from engineering to business, from humanities and health. With appropriate policy support, green investments in faculty development, and

platforms for field and community engagements, our education system can become a powerful force for climate resilience and economic transformation.

In the end, it is just not about degrees. It's about nurturing a generation that sees sustainability not as an obligation, but as a creative challenge worth pursuing. A generation that designs cities that breathe, economies that regenerate, and technologies that restore rather than extract and exploit. And a generation that understands, from the bottom of their hearts, that their learning has the power to shape not just their careers or lives, but the future of our planet.

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## PROFIT OVER PURPOSE

# Health, education failures signal deep strain

With quality services becoming increasingly unaffordable in India, the *viksit* promise is on wobbly legs

JAGDISH RATTANANI

Mohan Bhagwat, the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), has noted that health and education are out of reach of ordinary Indians, and in saying that he has, to use a cliché, hit the nail on the head. Speaking earlier this month at the inauguration of an affordable cancer care facility at Indore, Bhagwat was quoted as saying: "Good healthcare and education facilities and all its schemes have become a necessity for every person in society today, but unfortunately, quality services in both sectors are beyond the reach and financial capacity of the common man."

Some will see this as veiled criticism of the policies of the Narendra Modi-led BJP government and its model of development, coming from the head of the RSS, which is the BJP's ideological parent. The remarks, after all, touch on a key facet of development being packaged and sold by the government – a *Viksit Bharat* sans affordable education and health, the two legs development needs to stand on.

But away from any political reading, Bhagwat's and the RSS' amplified voice under BJP rule serves in this case to highlight a burning issue, one that is felt in the bones by ordinary citizens. It is a plain fact that education is getting out of reach without getting better and health is a business increasingly spoken of in terms of investments, IPOs, and incentives rather than patient care. Some scandalous practices thrive on both legs of development. At the same time, India also has pockets of world-class facilities in health and education available to the privileged few so that we live with islands of global excellence in a sea of mediocrity, even misery.

It is not uncommon to see some professions or services as noble because of what they do – education impacts a new generation of citizens and medicine heals the sick. The aspiration, then, is to

keep these activities outside the arena of the market, safe from the dog-eat-dog dynamic that works in other sectors to give us what we call growth. The RSS chief echoed this in a way by saying, "Earlier, (health and education) were done as a service, but today both have been commercialised."

But calling out to society to support these functions, to keep costs low or to broadly de-marketise them without radical policy change is to ask for charity and hope for kindness in an overly marketised society. Noted academic and author Michael Sandel speaks of the distinction between a market economy and a market society – the

or teachers settle for lower pay? Doctors and teachers, like the others, also need housing, travel, equipment, material and learning – all of which are out-priced and marketised. Sectoral charity will work in part, and indeed some of India's best hospitals and educational institutions are officially classified as charity institutions. But very few are truly charitable. Market imperatives rule and ensure that over time, most ordinary Indians are excluded.

A reductionist approach that seeks to inject the idea of duty, responsibility or in general a non-money mindedness selectively refuses to recognise that the ills are much wider. The failing health and education sectors are a symptom of a larger disease, of an imagined growth story and a fantasised giant economy that sees numbers but not the purpose, that has ignored those at the lower rungs of the ladder in the quest to shine in its fancy airports and bullet trains. It is this approach that leads to the statement of a minister quoted by Bhagwat as saying that education is a trillion dollar business, or indeed the NITI Aayog writing in a paper that noted the following: The healthcare sector has received heightened interest from investors (venture capital and private equity) over the last few years, with the transaction value increasing from \$94 million (2011) to \$1,275 million (2016) – a jump of over 13.5 times.

To stay on this path is to court disaster. No private equity or venture capital comes to serve. To get away from this trap, the government will have to rethink and re-ask the purpose of the growth story. India is the world's fourth-largest economy but what does that mean when the top 10% of its population holds more than 75% of the national wealth while the poorest half of the population sees only a 1% increase in their wealth, as Oxfam noted in a recent report.

Yet, around us are models that have worked wonders. They show a path not only to India but to the world by building on what is the true meaning of dharma. It takes a different resolve, rooted in a high sense of purpose and humility to achieve that, not marketing hype or machismo talk that has become the currency of India today.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR, Syndicate – The Billion Press)



former can bring efficiency while the latter puts a price on everything so that there is nothing that money cannot buy. It is possible to argue that India has become almost a *de jure* market economy but *de facto* works as a market society, which is remarkably out of place for a nation that has the word 'socialist' in the preamble of its Constitution. There is hardly anything the top 1% cannot buy – pay your way to safety, security and success. But since only some can pay, the rest will suffer and bring on the lament and the pain of how inequality plays out in every field, but most notably in hospitals and in schools.

## Exclusionary model for imagined growth

In such a system, how do health insurance companies not collect their pound of flesh, how does the thriving industry in medical education survive without exorbitant fees and why should doctors

30/8/18



# Play-based learning for India's future

If we are to build a Viksit Bharat, we must start where life begins – by nurturing the potential of our youngest citizens. It is in the joyful laughter of a child at an Anganwadi centre, in the rhymes they sing and the blocks they build, that the promise of our nation's future takes shape. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has placed its youngest citizens at the heart of its development journey. Mr. Modi has redefined our national priorities – not only by investing in universities and digital infrastructure, but by recognising the critical importance of the first classroom a child steps into: the Anganwadi.

In today's India, play is no longer just a pastime; it is policy. And the results speak for themselves. Over the past decade, the Modi government has fundamentally reimagined its approach to early childhood development. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognises that 85% of brain development occurs before the age of six. If we seek a smarter, healthier, and more productive population, we must invest where in the first six years of life.

Scientific evidence supports this shift. A study by the Department of Clinical Epidemiology at CMC Vellore found that children who received 18 to 24 months of structured early childhood care and education (ECCE) showed significant and lasting IQ gains – up to 19 points by age five, and 5 to 9 points by age nine.

These findings are aligned with global research. As Nobel Laureate Dr. James Heckman famously said, "The earlier, the better – and the smarter the return." His research estimates that investments in early childhood yield returns of 13-18%.

**A child's first school**  
Recognising both the economic and social importance of ECCE, the Ministry of Women and Child Development launched Poshan



**Annpurna Devi**

Union Minister for  
Women and Child  
Development,  
Government of India

Anganwadi  
Centres across  
the nation are  
being  
transformed  
into nurturing  
spaces for  
holistic early  
learning.

Bhi Padhai Bhi – an initiative that transforms Anganwadi Centres into vibrant early learning hubs. For the first time, Anganwadi workers are being systematically trained in ECCE, focusing on activity-based and play-oriented approaches using local and indigenous materials. Budget allocations for teaching-learning materials have also been significantly enhanced, and monthly ECCE days have been institutionalised. Today, the Anganwadi Centre is not just a place for nutrition – it is every child's first school, nurturing curiosity, creativity, and holistic development in the most critical years of life.

## Holistic development

To guide this transformation, the Ministry has introduced Aadharshila, the National Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education for children aged 3-6 years. Aadharshila focuses on the holistic development of children – emphasising not only intellectual growth but also emotional, physical, and social well-being. It approaches learning through structured play, allowing children to grow and thrive in a nurturing environment.

Children are instinctively drawn to play – turning every corner of their world into a space for discovery and joy. With the right environment, this instinct becomes the foundation for lifelong learning. Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi nurtures this spirit by providing safe, structured, and stimulating settings where children can thrive through guided play and learning. ECCE plays a foundational role in shaping the future of our nation.

Under the Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi initiative, Anganwadi Centres across the nation are being transformed into nurturing spaces for holistic early learning. A structured Aadharshila's 5+1 weekly plan ensures that the day begins with 30 minutes of free play, followed by structured

activities that enhance language, creativity, motor skills, and social interaction. After a nutritious lunch and rest time, the day concludes with outdoor play and conversation that reinforce values and build emotional connections.

This balanced approach to structured and unstructured play is critical, especially in the light of NEP 2020 which has raised the formal school entry age to six years. Structured ECCE ensures that children are ready for school – emotionally, socially, and cognitively. What is truly heartening is the growing trust of parents across the country. Families who once viewed Anganwadis as just nutrition centres now see them as the first stepping stones in their child's educational journey.

Every child deserves a strong start, right from birth. Recognising the foundational importance of the birth-to-three age group, the Ministry has also introduced Navchetna, the National Framework for Early Childhood Stimulation. This initiative empowers parents and caregivers with simple, play-based, age-appropriate activities to nurture young minds at home.

Parental involvement is key to a child's development. While families in higher-income households may invest in toys and books, it is the role of the state to act as an equaliser for those with fewer means. Through Navchetna and Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi, we are bridging this gap, ensuring that every child, in every corner of the country, receives the stimulation, care, and nurturing they need to thrive from the very beginning.

If India is to truly become Viksit, our youngest generation must be empowered with the right start in life. Play is not a luxury; it is foundational to learning. The Ministry of Women and Child Development remains committed to ensuring that every child gets the opportunity to learn, grow, and flourish, because building the nation begins with nurturing its youngest citizens.



# With Sci-Hub gone, will the 'One Nation, One Subscription' scheme step up?

Internationally, publishers such as Elsevier and Wiley have used the courtroom to buttress the legitimacy of their business model and portray shadow libraries like Alexandra Elbakyan's Sci-Hub as rogue actors rather than as symptoms of dysfunction

Vasudevan Mukundh

**W**hen the Delhi High Court ordered internet service providers to block access to Sci-Hub and its mirrors, it closed a chapter in one of the more fraught debates in contemporary research: who gets to read research papers, and who must pay. The verdict followed years of litigation by Elsevier, Wiley, and the American Chemical Society against Sci-Hub founder Alexandra Elbakyan. The court held that Ms. Elbakyan had violated an undertaking not to upload publishers' articles, and that Sci-Net, a mirror service, was being used to circumvent judicial orders, leaving her *primi facie* in contempt.

This seemingly straightforward case of copyright violation – private corporations defending intellectual property against piracy – is transformed by its context. The publishers' legal win must be weighed against the case for public access to knowledge, the economics of scholarly publishing, and the arrival of 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS), which together suggest that depending on courtroom battles might be misplaced.

## An endeavour apart

Scientific publishing is unlike other enterprises where piracy drains income from creators. Scientists who produce and review research are not paid by journals: their work is largely funded by public money in India. Yet publishers charge institutions exorbitant subscription fees, sometimes lakhs of rupees per journal. Publishers have defended these figures on grounds of quality control and peer review. But with profit margins of 30% or more and a voluntary review system, the system has often resembled rent-seeking.

On the other hand, Sci-Hub was always vulnerable to the charge of copyright

infringement. Courts in the U.S. and Europe have consistently ruled against it, and now the Delhi High Court has joined that chorus. While this is uncontroversial from a strictly legal standpoint, the larger implication is troubling. The judgment risks reinforcing the idea that legal strategies to restrict access are valid even in settings where no affordable or equitable alternative exists.

Internationally, publishers have used the courtroom to buttress the legitimacy of their business model and portray shadow libraries like Sci-Hub as rogue actors rather than as symptoms of dysfunction. In fact, the outcome in the High Court fits a pattern: publishers protect a lucrative business model, courts apply the letter of the law, and the underlying lack of access stays unresolved. Experts have been steadfast that the dysfunction is the real disease that needs to be cured.

## Unified subscription

The Indian government recently put forward the ONOS initiative as an alternative. Whether it succeeds will determine if future generations of researchers must still look for back doors. The Union Cabinet approved ONOS in 2024 with an outlay of ₹6,000 crore for its first phase (2023-2026). Under the scheme, the state has negotiated a bulk subscription with 30 major publishers so that research institutions – all public and, in phase II, many private ones – have equal access to some 13,000 journals.

Thanks to the rise of preprints and institutional repositories, more than half of the scientific papers worldwide are now open access. From 2026, all federally funded research in the U.S. must be openly accessible; the EU's Horizon Europe programme has similar requirements. Paying crores for subscriptions at a time when openness is expanding could render ONOS an

expensive detour. Until phase II, independent researchers and those at private institutes and centres – who may outnumber their counterparts at public centres – will still have to pay considerable non-ONOS fees to access journals and still depend on platforms like Sci-Hub.

ONOS also doesn't address structural flaws in scholarly publishing, reinforces dependence on foreign publishers, and continues to force Indian researchers to transfer copyrights of their own work to journals. At the same time, the subscription model that ONOS pays for still encompasses several thousand journals, including those that many researchers wish to be published in. Blaming ONOS on this count rather than a long-awaited culture change, especially not one the state could have forced, wouldn't make sense.

Ms. Elbakyan's attempts to (further) incentivise scholars to contribute to Sci-Hub's collection of papers using the Sci-Net portal and its cryptocurrency-based rewards system also don't seem to be succeeding. Whatever moral force Ms. Elbakyan's project once had has since been squandered by technical unreliability and increasing redundancy. The High Court's injunction may thus be decisive less because of its punitive sting than because of the fact that the Indian community is already moving on.

## Pathology of publishing

At the time the publishers sued Ms. Elbakyan in 2020, there was no realistic prospect of universal access. For countless researchers outside elite institutions, Sci-Hub was (and remains) often the only path to knowledge. Both legal experts and researchers have thus contended that on principle alone, courts could have acknowledged the unique nature of scientific publishing – that the

absence of author royalties, prevalence of public funding, and exorbitant pricing by publishers set it apart from creative industries like music or film – and refused to privilege corporate margins over public good.

Today, ONOS provides a legal path to broader access and its success could render shadow libraries unnecessary. It needs to prove it can seamlessly deliver equitable access at a fair cost while India must foster greater indigenous publishing capacity. On both counts, however, it's not clear if ONOS can do so in its present form. For example, on the first count, the concerned authorities will have to improve the efficiency of use by regularly consulting researchers on which journals are useful and keep other options, like a per-article fee for esoteric journals, open.

On the second, ONOS frees funds at many individual institutes and the scheme currently intends to redirect them towards pay-to-publish (rather than pay-to-read) open-access journals. Instead, governments may consider using them to install and manage institutional repositories. Experts have said this service could in turn be complemented by a national rights retention policy, like those at Harvard University and MIT, that require researchers to deposit their work in the repositories regardless of publishers' restrictions.

This could keep researchers in control of their work, force pay-to-publish journals to modify their terms, and allow people who aren't linked to university and/or public libraries to access papers, including journalists, activists, and independent researchers.

Sci-Hub in many respects remains a symbol of resistance against publishers' profiteering. Following the Delhi High Court order, the question is whether ONOS will step up to eradicate the disease rather than simply manage the symptoms. w|9



# Self-Learning is the Future of Management and Education

As artificial intelligence reshapes education, the challenge lies in building a culture of self-learning—one that goes beyond classrooms to create lifelong learners capable of adapting, innovating, and thriving in a rapidly changing world



**VINAYSHIL  
GAUTAM**

Anyone dealing with management learns the 'how' of a process. This is important because the 'how' explains the steps that have to be undertaken for the completion of tasks. It focuses on the skills. It focuses on the sequencing of the acts. It focuses on the resources needed to discharge the action. All this, and more, is a foundation of skills to accomplish a task. There can be no two opinions about that.

Whereas this is useful, it is not enough, because the timing of the intervention is very often the fulcrum of the successful reaction. This is judgement. This is not an operational skill. Similarly, every skill and action has an intensity, and that intensity has to be acceptable to the group for the individuals of the group to be galvanised into action. Likewise, there are other gentler and subtler inputs required to take the action from inception to conclusion. Some of them cannot be learnt without practice and without an internal, innate aptitude for self-development and the ability to relate to people.

Ultimately, successful completion of an act is a subtle process involving many attributes beyond the gross skills of the steps in doing the job. Management theorists have no ready-made answers to this but believe the process of training and development is complete only when taken to its logical conclusion through practice. It can be said that, ultimately, of the many inputs needed for the successful completion of a task, the most critical is self-development and the instinct to grow. The parameters of this have yet to be worked out to elevate it to a level of teachability and skill sharpening.

The net conclusion is that all components of learning are important, but perhaps among the more significant ones is the linking of one ability with another, one skill with another, and above all, having the auto-motor ability of the mind sharpened enough to put it all together in a holistic perspective.

Thus, it is the learning that requires an openness of the mind to receive inputs without judgement and without any additions in the free flow of receiving, doing "trades". This last phrase is not yet common in management literature and, inter alia, will cover knowledge, skills, insights, instincts, and above all, practices for getting on with the tasks. The list elaborated has no claim to be exhaustive and needs to be a continuous process. This will be a differentiating factor in the level of skills that people have in being successful or otherwise.

There is a clear need to further strengthen the theory of learning, not only with gross skills but also with subtler predilections, as well as with



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**EACH COURSE MAY  
REQUIRE CLARITY  
ON WHAT THE  
KNOWLEDGE  
CONTENT IS AND  
WHAT THE  
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CONTENT OF BOTH  
THESE STREAMS  
IS. THERE SHOULD  
BE FACILITATION  
FOR THE LEARNER  
TO BE ABLE TO  
TEACH HIMSELF  
AND KEEP THE  
LEARNING ALIVE**

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the positioning of the mind to keep inventing as one goes along, meeting the challenges.

This is based on the need to encourage organic talent and grow one's skills alongside the growth of the mind, not to overlook the knowledge components. It would be useful to recognise that an enumeration would have its own classification and its own sub-narratives, depending upon the nature of the action at stake.

Consider the mechanical action of an engineering variety, where the nature of the material and the ultimate nature of the outcome determine the distance which has to be covered between the two to lead to the crux of action. On the other side of the spectrum would be abstractions that are rooted in ideas and require a cognitive approach, which is far more cerebral than operational situations that need skills in the fingers, the hand, and indeed the body parts themselves.

It would be useful to recognise that learning theory is a continuation of levels of fulfilment of the task from A to Z in all areas of action, and that a useful way of segmenting skills to be taught is to see what is presently termed as 'learning' at the school level, the collegiate level, and the postgraduate level. Indeed, the postgraduate level is merely one level of learning, as indicated earlier in the text. It has to become self-generating with the parallel stream of learning through one's own life. This would raise the question of the formalisation of the teaching-learning process, and it may be a good idea to have a parallel stream of teaching for each operational content, along with the knowledge inputs.

Put simply, each course may require clarity on what the knowledge content is and what the operational content of both these streams is. There should be facilitation for the learner to be able to teach himself and keep the learning alive. This raises the subtler question of self-learning beyond classroom learning.

For this, it would be necessary to generate literature which can be acquired by an adult to train himself independently, even when formal learning has ended. But what one is hoping to focus on is the whole third leg of learning, which is self-learning, to keep the torch of learning alive throughout one's career.

This itself is a challenge and calls for the creation of literature which needs attention from the ab initio level to levels that can encompass all types of challenges. It is about time human resources specialists started the creation of a talent pool, faculty-wise and domain-wise, to respond to this need.

Whereas some thought has been given to learning on the job, more attention needs to be paid to learning beyond the classroom at the self-orientation level to keep in touch with the requirements of problem-solving.

Artificial intelligence is adding a new dimension to education as it permeates the curriculum, the learning process, and curricular planning. There is a basic revolution waiting in the paradigm of teaching and learning. The future appears exciting and challenging to a point where only time will tell how it is going to take shape and affect the life processes of those in the learning and teaching profession. 9/09



# Prime Movers of National Education Policy 2020



**T SENTHIL SIVA  
SUBRAMANIAN**

National Education Policy 2020 is a successful game-changer of the educational ecosystem in the era of the 21st century and a torchbearer of Yuva Bharat (युवा भारत). NEP 2020 acts as a learning tool by reinforcing the concept of learning by doing (करके सीखें) and learning by experience (अनुभव से सीखें). The NEP 2020 has brought about holistic development among Yuva Shakti, thereby creating many opportunities.

The vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi ji, on "Mann Ki Baat" episode 107 reverberates the theme of Intelligence, Idea, and Innovation. The initiative of "Lab to Market" by the Science and Technology clusters in India, under the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, has further strengthened the Government-Academia-MSME interface, thereby transforming India from a service to a production nation ("Vocal for Local").

The advent of the Government of India initiative of CSIR — Jigyasa Virtual Labs has kindled school students' interest in experiential learning by performing experiments through virtual mode. This is a tangible outcome of "Digital India". The programme "One Day as a Scientist" at CSIR has opened new avenues for youngsters to explore the scientific temperament within them through physical visits to 37 CSIR laboratories and interactions with scientists.

The tinkering initiative of CSIR-AIM (Atal Innovation Mission), Niti Aayog's Atal Tinkering Lab, acts as a think tank for various frugal jugaad innovations, thereby paving the way for youth to be "Think Tank Preneurs". NEP 2020 has astonishing driving elements through various initiatives in digital learning platforms such as SWAYAM (NPTEL), DIKSHA, Swayam Prabha, and e-PATHSHALA, enabling students to become competent in knowledge, skills, and future-ready complete professionals.

The initiative of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan, to adopt nearby villages by academic institutions has provided enormous opportunities for higher education students to reinvent digital transformation technologies of the fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0), such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and other disruptive technologies, to facilitate rural development in India. Additionally, RuTAG (Rural Technology Action Group) and IEEE Smart Village have further enhanced NEP 2020 by

enabling students to adapt community-based learning.

The technology-based Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), or Clean India Mission, has facilitated NEP 2020 by transforming India into a "Smart India" through the successful implementation of best practices and various innovative technologies such as integrated command control systems, Digital Health, SCADA, Data Centres, Intelligent Transport Systems, and Artificial Intelligence-based waste management.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) stated in NEP 2020 stands out as one of the strong pillars for promoting vocational education in schools and higher educational institutions, which has become an integral part of the academic system.

The successful implementation of various short-term and certificate courses on soft skills, called 'Lok Vidya', and Online Distance Learning (ODL), forms a primary vision of NEP 2020 to make youth more employable and industry-ready.

NEP 2020 has additional success stories, especially the recently introduced Prime Minister Internship, National Apprenticeship 2.0, and Apprenticeship Enabled Degree programme, which have played a vital role in establishing strong industry connections and facilitating hands-on experience for the youth.

NEP 2020 has also empowered women and acts as a catalyst for women's empowerment by addressing and promoting gender equality, thereby creating a more inclusive and equitable education system through the successful implementation of the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* policy.

NEP 2020 is playing a crucial role in transforming undergraduate programmes through a research-based curriculum, thereby inculcating research aptitude among students.

The National Research Foundation (NRF), also called the "Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF)", has been introduced in educational institutions with strong objectives to foster core scientific and technological research, innovation, and entrepreneurship among young research communities.

Overall, NEP 2020 has developed various qualities among youth, such as holistic decision-making, social responsibility, universal human values, creativity, and self-reliance, thereby paving the way to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG#4, 5, 9 & 10) and marching towards Viksit Bharat@20247. *Pid 9*

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SINCE 1863



# Special Needs

*Deficiencies in the system not only keep children with disabilities away from education but also create an unfriendly environment where special educators struggle to perform their duties effectively. It is thus not surprising that 45 per cent of individuals with disabilities remain illiterate, and only 9 per cent are able to complete secondary education, thereby severely limiting their socioeconomic progress.*

India's education system, known for its scale and diversity, is often celebrated across the globe. However, hidden beneath this wide spectrum lies a crisis that continues to go unnoticed - the severe shortage of special educators, a problem that prevails in both government and private schools. This scarcity is impacting the education and future of children with special needs (CWSN) in a significant way.

Special educators are indispensable in providing appropriate guidance and learning to children with visual impairment, hearing disabilities, autism, and various other challenges.

Though the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act) upholds equal opportunities for education, there exists no clear and enforceable mechanism to implement this promise effectively. According to UNESCO's 2021 report, around 75 per cent of children with disabilities are still unable to attend school.

While national initiatives like the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the National Education Policy 2020 commit to inclusive education, this commitment is rendered ineffective due to the dire shortage of trained special educators. As per 2023-24 data, although more than 25.48 lakh CWSN have been identified, only 12,000 to 15,000 trained special educators are available to cater to their needs.

One of the foremost reasons behind this shortfall is the limited number of training institutions for special education. Under the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI), there are fewer than 800 institutes, which together produce fewer than 5,000 educators annually - a number far below the national demand. Moreover, many general teachers are ill-equipped to handle the needs of children with disabilities, primarily due to the lack of formal training in this domain.

Secondly, under the SSA, special educators working in government schools are paid very low salaries that remain stagnant over years. This inadequate compensation compels many educators to leave the profession in



search of better opportunities. On the other hand, private schools often hesitate to employ special educators citing financial constraints, and as a result, children with special needs are frequently denied admission.

Thirdly, there exists a glaring urban-rural divide. While special educators are relatively more present in urban areas, their presence in rural regions is negligible. Ironically, it is in these rural areas that the majority of children with special needs reside. The absence of incentives and adequate facilities discourages teachers from accepting placements in such regions.

Fourthly, many parents in rural India still perceive the education of disabled children as unnecessary. A deep-rooted social stigma, coupled with lack of awareness, prevents them from sending their children to school, thereby further reducing the demand for special educators. Lastly, many schools still lack basic infrastructural support such as wheelchair ramps, separate toilets, Braille material, and hearing aids.

These deficiencies not only keep children with disabilities away from education but also create an unfriendly environment where special educators struggle to perform their duties effectively. It is thus not surprising that 45 per cent of individuals with disabilities remain illiterate, and only 9 per cent are able to complete secondary education (NSS, 2018), thereby severely limiting their socioeconomic progress.

This issue calls for a structured and long-term solution that truly integrates children with special needs into the mainstream education system. One potential solution could be the introduction of short-term six-month training programmes in each district, wherein general teachers are trained in basic aspects of special education. This rapid up-skilling could help meet the growing

demand for special educators.

Such training must include awareness about different types of disabilities, teaching methodologies like Braille and sign language, and preparation of individualized Education Plans (IEP). Both government and private schools should participate in this initiative, with the aim of preparing at least 50,000 special educators annually under the supervision of local education authorities.

Secondly, online platforms can be utilized to provide teachers with digital training, modules, and learning resources. A central portal can be created where teachers can submit queries and receive expert consultation. This model will reduce costs, save time, and provide equal access even in remote areas.

Thirdly, increasing the salaries of special educators is a step long overdue. Better compensation will ensure teacher retention. Additional incentives should be provided to those serving in remote rural regions. For private schools, tax exemptions and government grants can ease financial burdens and encourage more hiring. These benefits should also be accompanied by official recognition, opportunities for career progression, and promotions.

Fourthly, awareness campaigns involving parents, local organizations, and the media must be conducted to change societal attitudes toward disability education. Gram sabhas, door-to-door campaigns, and interactive sessions on the importance of education can help shift mind-sets. As acceptance grows, enrolment of children with disabilities will increase, helping them access not just



education, but dignity and opportunity.

Fifthly, infrastructural improvements such as ramps, accessible toilets, Braille books, and hearing aids must be provided through government funds or public-private partnership models. These additions will not only support the children but will also enable the educators to carry out their responsibilities more effectively.

For these solutions to bear fruit, their implementation must be monitored meticulously. Data regarding the number of trained and deployed special educators must be regularly updated and reviewed through government records.

Analysis of this data will help measure progress and identify gaps. In addition, improvements in the school attendance and learning levels of CWSN should be tracked through enrolment records, attendance sheets, and exam results.

Parental feedback surveys can also serve as a valuable tool to assess satisfaction levels and the actual impact of implemented changes. Feedback on facilities, educator performance, and student development can be collected and reviewed every six months. Initially an increase of 25 per cent in enrolment and 15 per cent in the number of educators can be set as benchmarks for success.

The shortage of special educators, although serious, is not insurmountable. Through appropriate policy interventions, community participation, and collaborative efforts from government bodies, private institutions, and civil society, this challenge can be met with resolve and responsibility.

If this proposed roadmap is followed with sincerity, it can open the doors of education to every child, regardless of their physical or cognitive limitations. This would not just be a success in terms of policy, but a historic step toward building an inclusive, just, and equitable future for all. *snat 16*



**BARENTA DAS**

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# STATE IDEAL

**T**he National Education Policy, 2020 envisaged a uniform educational system throughout the country. It changed the structure of class groupings in school, made multiple entry and exit points in the undergraduate system, and created a common entrance test for colleges. There were many other changes too. Education being a concurrent subject, however, education policies are being formulated by the states that do not comply with the whole of the NEP. The latest to propose one is Karnataka, which has insisted on a two-language policy in school like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu instead of the NEP's three languages. It has rejected National Council of Educational Research and Training textbooks for books with localised content. State education policies are declaring the need for unique regional content and an introduction to regional culture. Multiple entry and exit points in undergraduate courses have been rejected by Karnataka, keeping the three years for undergraduate plus two for post-graduate classes. The West Bengal policy keeps the school class groupings in the old system of five-four-two-two instead of the NEP's five-three-three-four. While the Indian knowledge system through scriptures is a thrust area of the NEP, the proposed Karnataka state education policy is introducing constitutional value education. A centre would be set up for studying traditional knowledge in Kannada.

The differences of the NEP with the state policies lay bare the former's weaknesses — not carefully thought out? — and the need for autonomy and decentralisation in education. For example, both West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have rejected the common entrance test as unfair to rural students and centralised. The aspiration is towards equity and inclusion. Karnataka has proposed a Karnataka State Quality Assessment Board, which will help universities and colleges achieve excellence. Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have objected to policy changes by the University Grants Commission too, such as more contract jobs, vice-chancellors brought in from industry, and the denial of power to the states to set up search committees for vice-chancellors. It is here that the KSQAB will have a crucial role to play in its interaction with the UGC over policy. It is unfortunate that the most fruitful aspects of the NEP do not appear to be producing the desired results. But depriving the states of autonomy in education is always problematic; the states will take up the reins whenever necessary.

27/10



# Coaching Mustn't Replace Classrooms

India's education system shows deep cracks — and that hardly bodes well for a nation aspiring to be a knowledge power. The CMS Education Survey, part of the 80<sup>th</sup> round of National Sample Survey (NSS), shows that state-run schools remain pivotal, accounting for 55.9% of total enrolments. Their role is even greater in rural areas, where two-thirds (66%) of students are enrolled, compared with 30.1% in urban areas. Yet, in otherwise price-sensitive Indian households, the contrast in spending is stark: while the average annual cost of educating a child in a private school is ₹25,000, the figure drops to ₹2,863 in state schools. But the most worrying trend — nearly 30% of students still rely on private coaching.



The steady decline in state school enrolment — from about 74% in the late 1970s to barely 51-56% today — is an ominous sign, as it risks prompting the state to retreat further from investing in education. This slide reflects the perception that state schools can't adequately meet students' needs. What's required is a serious effort

to make them the default choice for parents, rather than the option of last resort. But the problem runs deeper. The inadequacy of teaching in state schools has driven many parents toward private schools, yet, these too often fall short. This double failure has fuelled the rise of private coaching. Around 30% of students have relied on coaching since 2022.

This situation cannot be allowed to drift for long. Without urgent redressal — strengthening schools, ensuring quality teaching and curbing dependence on coaching — the consequences will be stark. No nation can hope to thrive if its schools keep failing its children.



# Education in a Burnout Society

The key necessity of the time is for higher education institutions to implement behavioural change programs and provide students with opportunities to practice sustainability, creativity, innovation, and social connection in their daily lives

ANANDAJIT  
GOSWAMI

The biggest fallacy of society today is that, despite being self-proclaimed progressives, we live in a burnout society. In the words of philosopher Byung-Chul Han, this is one that thrives on excess positivity borne out of a culture of overproduction and endless achievement, and marked by a deficit in understanding psychological and emotional health.

This discrepancy is felt most in the education ecosystem. The dilemma is that we are a part of the educational process, and the further we return to the classroom and the curriculum, the higher the burnout.

The current pressures of maintaining the metrics of education — through constant exams every week, grades, and the pressure to perform in assignments, classes, case studies, and every class project relative to the other in the classroom — have transformed the classroom into a combatant space. Here, the curriculum and educational institutions themselves have only led to the production of combatants. The process naturally takes out the learner from the students and often from the educator or administrator, making them silent combatants chasing the next check or tick box. The check box is ticked regularly to either scale a class ladder or an academic ladder to be better positioned in the metrics of the educational accreditation system. Along with students, the system often makes the educators record keepers of marks, certificates, and A/R scores without understanding their purpose and learning value. In the record-keeping process, silent lobbying and vested — interest group lobbying — human beings from different sections of society also persist. This leads to the infusion of a medicine, record keeping metric of promotion which is not based on true learning, value proposition and knowledge.

Education has been replaced by a metaphor of burning and burnout society where every participant of the system is either a pathologist or a pathological patient. Classrooms, lecture halls and study rooms often turn out to be not community spaces for discussion and deliberation but spaces of surveillance, combatant aggression. In such a space, faculty rooms, classrooms are not a community



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FIRST  
Column

Learning pedagogy must come out of curricula, academic grade-based grading, and align with a constructivist learning approach — where learners actively participate in their knowledge and skill-building through exploration, collaboration and experimentation — by investigating how innovation, both technological and social, affects and is affected by education as they create local, national, regional and global citizenship through education. Innovative learning methods play a critical role in revealing the learner's creative potential. STEM-based education can enhance the capabilities of students in innovation, creativity, scientific thinking and problem-solving skills as well as develop mindsets oriented towards sustainability. Globally, lecture-based, exam-based, and teacher-centered pedagogy is undergoing a shift towards more active learning, in which students build their own understanding of a subject through learning activities. This is an imperative to take education out of the combatant system and prevent the perpetuation of a burnout society. The key necessity of the time is for higher education institutions to implement behavioural change programs and provide students with opportunities to practice sustainability, creativity, innovation, and social connection.

To solve sustainable grand challenges, educational institutions must embrace their role as living laboratories for providing creative solutions that can be tested, refined, and scaled up to come out of a combatant education system. A key aspect of such an anticipated education system will be that the participant of the system is a learner first. The learner can be seen as a long-term investible resource which gives back values, principles, norms, empathy, kindness, learning and re-learning. To a society and a system which is becoming more of a combatant system.

Against the backdrop of an emerging society with humanities, robotics, AI, information, and its control over our consciousness, it is imperative that we immediately change the nature of the education system. If not, we will only thrive with combatant puppets and zombies in the near future, controlled by a string pulled by AI consciousness. Such a situation will only have burnout on one side of society as human beings and string controllers with AI consciousness on the other side. Today's education has to urgently break out of self-created Frankenstein's style of combatant and inhuman a more ethical, compassionate and equitable future for society.



# Remembering Sukanta

*Where does Sukanta stand as a poet? Some critics say that Sukanta's poems are too raw and that in his poetry he reveals his feelings too explicitly. That might be true for some of his poems. But we should keep in mind that he wrote most of his poems when he was in his teens. Interestingly, many of Sukanta's lines are still remembered by Bengalis. People use his words a lot in newspapers, protest placards, ads, and even on TV. History has shown us that this only happens with poets who are really great*



Sukanta Bhattacharya reached the 100th anniversary of his birth on 15 August 2025. This great Bengali poet has not gotten the recognition he deserves. For many of us who try to write poetry in Bengali, however, Sukanta Bhattacharya was as loved as Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam when we were kids.

But though at one point of time in Bengal his name was taken along with Tagore, Sukanta has never been compared with him. He has even been considered less important than Nazrul. But he was a poet for even less time than Nazrul was active as a poet as he died when he was only twenty-one.

Sukanta Bhattacharya, however, was not simply a poet. He was a political activist too. He worked for the Communist Party of India. He was also the first secretary of Kishore Bahini or the Youth Brigade, a left organization that still works with kids and teenagers.

Anandasanikar Bhattacharya, a communist student leader, had been trying for a long time to start a group like this for the teens. On 15 April 1943, Kishore Bahini was finally set up in Kolkata (1st Baisakh, 1350 in the Bengali calendar). Sukanta Bhattacharya, a close friend of Anandasanikar, took over as its chief a year later.

Sukanta set up Kishore Bahini's main office in a corner of the Students' Federation office with just an old tin box. He would often sit there and oversee the activities of Kishore Bahini. Under his leadership, Kishore

Bahini slowly grew beyond Kolkata to other parts of Bengal and even beyond Bengal.

Where does Sukanta stand as a poet? Some critics say that Sukanta's poems are too raw and that in his poetry he reveals his feelings too explicitly. That might be true for some of his poems.

But we should keep in mind that he wrote most of his poems when he was in his teens. Interestingly, many of Sukanta's lines are still remembered by Bengalis. People use his words a lot in newspapers, protest placards, ads, and even on TV. History has shown us that this only happens with poets who are really great.

Let me quote at random a few of his lines to show how popular some of his lines still are: "I will make this world a good place for this child to live;" "Your bright presence still moves me, even when things are quiet, as always;" "I'll pick a blooming morning from the deep stalk of night;" "Let eighteen come down on this land;" "Revolution beats in my heart; I feel like Lenin."

These are just five examples, but the list could easily grow to twenty-five. These lines show that Sukanta's name will live on as long as Bengali poetry does.

"Ekhi Moroger Kahini" ("The Story of a Rooster") is one of the most popular poems of Sukanta. While reading it, a reader is struck by how he made a simple rooster a symbol of all poor people. In the poem, the rooster dreams of entering the huge palace

of a rich man. The last line of the poem really hits one hard: the rooster does get into the palace, not to eat, but to be eaten!



ANANDASANIKAR BHATTACHARYA

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To be honest, even if I put aside my personal assessment and judge him by the strict rules of literary criticism, I have to admit that Sukanta was a great poet who died before he reached full maturity.

For instance, look at his poem "Chhapatra," which means "The Clearance Letter." He writes that a baby screams loudly when it is born to claim its rights. There, "The weak,

helpless body, yet clenched fists - raised, radiant. As if in some incomprehensible vow." The poem's power comes from the picture of a baby reaching for the sky and Sukanta seeing it as a promise. Only a true poet, a seer, can make such a leap.

Or think about this line: "I'll pick a blooming morning from the deep stalk of night." It is common to compare the morning to a flower. But it's not normal to compare night to the stem of a flower: it takes a lot of imaginary power to do so.

He also compared the moon with bread in one of his very famous poems. It might now seem like a cliché to compare the full moon to a burnt piece of bread. But when Sukanta wrote it, it was completely new.

His rhymes for kids were ahead of their time. He never changed his political views in writing rhymes, but his rhymes never seemed inappropriate for kids.

How many Bengali rhymes can compete with "Puroso Dhadha," "Black Market," "Bhalo Khabar," and "Sepoy Bidroho"? The last line of "Bhalo Khabar" still shocks us: the rich landlord Dhampati Pal doesn't like any food until he finally says, with a wicked grin, "The blood of the poor is the tastiest dish."

As a reader, and as I've gotten older, I've come to love Sukanta's letters the most. They show how deeply romantic he was - not just a revolutionary thinker but someone whose heart was broken by love. As we read his letters, we learn how much an unfulfilled love hurt him.

As one reads these letters today, one also notices he realised that money was necessary for a healthy life as he got sick. In a letter to his friend Arunachal Basu, he wrote: "I don't care about love anymore. I only want to make money. I need money for my health, to pay off debts, and even to buy a shirt. Life itself seems pointless because I don't have any money."

Sukanta really showed us that even a great poet needs care and attention. He needs social support. Too many talented poets have died too soon because they were poor, hungry, or didn't have a good life. But what they were able to write still amazes us.


A lot of them have stood the test of time and are now known as "immortals." But is the way they lived and died a good example of how people should live? If they had lived longer, wouldn't human civilisation have been richer?

What Sukanta wrote is already immortal. But we'll never know what he could have written had he lived a full life. Yes, poets have a duty to society. But does not society also have duties to the poets?



# CREAMY LAYER

Speaking at an inaugural residential workshop on journalism for students hailing from rural backgrounds, scheduled castes, and other marginalised communities, N. Ram, one of India's most respected journalists, stated that the lack of social diversity in the country's newsrooms is a matter of concern. Having an awareness about institutional segregation, he added, is not enough; what is necessary is the enforcement of change and for that State intervention is a must. A socially underrepresented newsroom is not only a travesty of the principle of justice; it also blunts the media's ability to tell stories of the life and the times of the Other India. But the lack of diversity is not a feature of newsrooms only; it is a pervasive feature of Indian institutions. Reserved posts for SCs, scheduled tribes and other backward classes remain vacant in Central universities — the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has described this as a wilful conspiracy to keep *bahujan* communities away from education. The marginalised are barely visible in the boardrooms of corporate India and private firms. Political representation of the marginalised in Houses of legislature, or in the tiers of the judiciary — even though it is not as minuscule as it was before — is not quite even. All this is apart from the myriad, everyday violence that is perpetrated on those occupying the margins of social acceptability and also the national consciousness. These grim realities are indicators of not just embedded discrimination; they are also a testament to the fact that the fruits of India's reservation policy continue to be plucked by a handful of constituencies.

A question must therefore be asked; a hypocritical rhetoric called out. Diversity, it is said, is integral to India's identity. It is consistent with and complementary to the spirit of pluralism that is also an ideal for this republic. But a shadow falls between diversity as an idea and its praxis. While the nation's minders seem to be receptive to diversity at the level of an idea, implementing it — making India's institutions truly representative — remains a formidable challenge. Reservation has only delivered patchy results. Political pledges towards the emancipation of the socially disadvantaged have been hollow. The country still awaits the perfect strategy that would bridge the gap between diversity as an idea and its reality. 



# COSTLY LESSONS

The pursuit of knowledge can be costly. Students enrolled in private or non-governmental schools across India end up paying nearly nine times more in fees when compared to those enrolled in government schools, according to data collected by the Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education, 2025 (April-June). This data, when supplemented with findings of other recent surveys which show that enrolment in government schools has been falling in recent years, paint a worrying picture. On the one hand, there are not enough government schools, especially secondary and higher secondary ones; those that do exist often lack quality infrastructure, trained staff, and accountability. On the other, those desirous of quality private school education are suffering high out-of-pocket expenditure which, incidentally, is the leading cause of school drop-outs, especially for girls. The State's failures to improve government school education, the reason behind private — profiteering — schools mushrooming, have ultimately led to the undermining of the promise of making education equitable and accessible. The consequences are telling. Children whose families cannot pay high fees thus face widening disadvantages when it comes to learning outcomes, hardening educational divides.

The expenses on education do not end with sending a child to a private school either. The CMS:E also revealed that almost 47% of urban Indian students and 33.1% of their rural peers in Classes XI and XII have to enrol in private coaching classes in order to gain the competitive edge needed to succeed in an economy with high unemployment rates. Households where children are in Classes XI or XII may be spending as much as 9%-12% of their annual consumption expenditure just on private coaching classes. The lack of personal attention from teachers on account of poor teacher-student ratios is one of the factors that force students towards private coaching, leading to the further ballooning of the education bill. Teachers, too, are responsible for pushing students towards private tuitions because it is an opportunity to earn more. There is also a consensus that private coaching offers the best possible shot at clearing recruitment exams. Education's prohibitive costs may stifle its reach. The challenge, therefore, is to improve infrastructure and learning outcomes in State-funded schools that have a wider reach. This requires a massive political commitment towards financing — subsidising? — education. Unfortunately, this commitment has been found wanting in governments of all political stripes.

20/8/25



# UGC, Please Do The Math

New undergraduate curriculum on mathematics is neither up to date with advances in the subject nor does it do justice to the serious mathematics of ancient India

Amber Habib



The undergraduate curriculum of Indian universities is going through a significant overhaul, in which a hattered system is sought to be replaced by one whose packaging is colourful and glossy. The outer box is covered with slogans in bold: "learning outcome based", "goal-oriented", "application-based learning", "interdisciplinary relevance", "designed to empower students".

Students who study this curriculum for four years are promised to be fit for careers in education, research, software, banking, insurance, policy or anything else that takes their fancy. It is implicit in these declarations that earlier systems have not delivered on these fronts.

There is no review of the earlier goals and achievements and thus it is implied that there were none worth noting. This is surprising to those of us who were fortunate to study in an affordable and good Indian institution and later found that our education was at par with the best in the world.

Just this week, University Grants Commission has released the draft curricula for a host of subjects. I shall focus on the one for Mathematics, which seems to have been given the same close attention that was earlier bestowed on History.

For context, let us recall that the National Education Policy of 2020 extended the three-year undergraduate programmes to four years. The extra year was intended to make the student fit for a wider variety of career options, especially for going directly into jobs or into PhD programmes, without the necessity of a Master's degree. Indeed, the possibility of going directly for a PhD in US has been one of the key benefits that has been highlighted by NEP proponents.

How does the actual curriculum fare when tested against these goals? The core or compulsory part of the curriculum turns out to be quite old-fashioned. It has courses on analytic geometry and mechanics that were considered obsolete 50 years ago, and whose prescribed textbooks were first published in years like 1910 and 1922.

Such inclusions result in less space for more relevant mathematics. The core portion short-changes both the 'pure mathematics' that is needed for research and the 'applied mathematics' that takes a student

towards a job in industry. For example, probability and statistics get a single course, as do algebra and real analysis, while programming and numerical methods are missing. The arrangement of the courses, especially the late placement of the crucial course on real analysis, ensures that the emphasis will be on memorising methods rather than on understanding them.



Uday Dutt

The extolled 'learning objectives' turn out to be a bit of a sham. They are at best summaries of the syllabi and often they are entirely meaningless. The only objective given for studying complex analysis is "to prepare the students to take up courses on Advanced Complex Analysis". Shall we laugh, or cry?

One would hope that the faults of the core curriculum would be compensated by a good choice of elective courses that would help the student specialise in a desired direction. While some of the missing core courses do

show up as electives, the obsession with promoting 'Indian Knowledge Systems' comes into play here.

The required diversity is sacrificed to give over one-third of the slots to courses on Indian mathematics, mostly of ancient times. It is quite possible that a graduating student would know a fair bit about ancient Indian mathematics but very little about modern mathematics, where their education would end at about the late 19th or early 20th century. The truth is that tomorrow's students will be worse off after four years than earlier ones were after three.

The syllabi of the courses on Indian mathematics do not suggest that the topic would be studied with due regard to the concerns of history, such as reliability of sources, communication between cultures, or the interaction with social structures. Instead, the syllabi are lists of methods to be learnt, which will surely become drudgery.

At least two courses promote so-called 'Vedic mathematics', which is a creation of the mid-20th century and has no relation with the serious mathematics of earlier Indians. It is a collection of tricks for speeding up certain elementary calculations. It can be a fun activity in middle school but is entirely out of place in a university curriculum.

While students of mathematics are being deprived of a serious study of their subject, non-mathematicians who wish to benefit from mathematics are also bereft. They are provided with courses bearing names such as "Mathematics for Life Sciences" and "Mathematics for Meditation". It is claimed that most of these can be studied by anyone having "a basic knowledge of mathematics". Either this description stretches facts, or these courses will be mathematically trivial.

It is notable that the Mathematics curriculum document omits the affiliations of the committee members, except for the chair. One of them is associated with books on 'Vedic mathematics' and these are included in the recommended texts. It is clear that the committee has been selected and encouraged to promote 'Indian Knowledge Systems' rather than mathematics and has delivered on this goal. While we may glory in our mathematical past, we have to fear for its future.

The writer is professor of mathematics at Shri Nidhar University. Views are personal.



# 'We're all struggling, but nobody's saying it out loud'

## STUDENTS' TAKE

Anythika.Pal@timesofindia.com

This July, at least four students felt the weight of the world on their shoulders. In this August, a student at Delhi's Hindu College, a professor of social sciences, and a dental science student at Sharda University (near Rohtak) whose mothers died in the last few days of the year. The tragedies also again highlighted the need to focus on mental health on campus.

Addressing this, Supreme Court on July 21 took up status quo of the Sharda incident. A bench of three judges, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, said there was a "legislative and regulatory vacuum" in the framework and enforcement to prevent student suicides and laid down guidelines on protecting mental health.

This month, ITI Kharagpur for the first time appointed a dean of student wellbeing. At Sharda, one more student, in fifth second year, died by suicide.

Students at several universities told challenges posing them to the edge were many — among them academic pressure, lack of access to career counselling and the burden of expensive education. "Ever since National Education Policy was implemented, students' life has become more difficult. Adding other subjects to our primary one puts pressure on them in all fields. One low mark can adversely affect overall CGPA," said a third-year psychology student from St Xavier's College, Kolkata.

"For students at institutes that charge high fees, there is an added psychological stress to make their parents proud and justify the cost. This results in the students of all ages carrying guilt and self-doubt, eventually resulting in mental fatigue," the student added.

"Sometimes I go two or three nights in a row with barely any sleep, just to finish assignments and study for back-to-back exams. Besides, I have this constant worry in my head that my parents are spending so much on my education, and I need to give them a good outcome. I thought of this too, but I was not ready to say it out loud."

and now it seems like a rat race," said a psychology student at the same college.

A third-year engineering student at a private college in Delhi spoke of immense pressure that students in technical services face.

"There's this never-ending pressure to stay ahead — to get the best grades, land the best internships, and continue every year. The fear of failure haunts me all the time."

The pressure isn't just from colleges. It comes from everywhere — family, society, even social media. "You're always being watched, judged, compared. We have to show results. The pressure isn't just from colleges. It comes from everywhere — family, society, even social media. "You're always being watched, judged, compared. We have to show results. The pressure isn't just from colleges. It comes from everywhere — family, society, even social media. "You're always being watched, judged, compared. We have to show results."

**'MANY OF THEM ARE BURNT OUT BEFORE THEY EVEN GRADUATE'**

own say you're struggling. So you bottle it up until you break," said a student of a journalism college in Chennai. "I have had students in college. There was a time when I felt wanted to run away."

According to latest National Crime Records Bureau data available, the number of student suicides in 2022 totalled over 1,000. Psychologists told spoke to said more students seem to be pursuing courses they never wanted. "They are often pushed into academic programmes that don't align with their interests or strengths. The race to secure a college seat has become so competitive that a student of young age feel they have no choice but to accept whatever they get. Additionally, the intense cost of academic programmes and high expectations from parents add to pressure," said Dr. Nandini Mishra, a clinical psychologist at Sri Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi.

"Career counselling is still an afterthought for many parents," said Soumya Arora, an education counsellor. "We see numerous cases where students

are pursuing courses solely based on parental pressure. If a child is not happy with the subject and the environment they are in, how can they survive? It's the duty of parents, teachers and counsellors to take care of these factors."

Arora shared the case of an industrialist who wanted his son to become a mechanical engineer. The son, however, was passionate about the medical field. When the boy was in Class 12, he started his own business of face masks and sanitizers, and made a profit of around Rs 1

"Sometimes I go 2-3 nights in a row with barely any sleep, just to finish assignments and study for back-to-back exams. Besides, I have this constant worry in my head that my parents are spending so much on my education."

"They feel pressure to maintain a perfect image — academically, socially, emotionally — even when they're falling apart inside."



Illustration: Anshu Singh

lakh. Despite telling his parents he wanted to go into business, he was forced to go to an engineering college in the US. He reportedly failed, and within a year, he suffered from clinical depression. Now he is back, but under duress," she said.

According to a study by NIMHANS and University of Melbourne in Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine (2022), one in five college students in India reported substantial symptoms of depression, and one in four exhibited significant symptoms of anxiety. The study was conducted on 6,842 students from 30 universities.

Connections said a big part of the problem is the lack of proper access to mental health care on campus. "Many of these are burnt out before they even graduate. Some colleges don't have full-time counsellors, and even when they do, students hesitate to reach out to them. The stigma is still very real. They fear being labelled 'weak' or 'lacking' by peers and teachers. They feel pressure to maintain a perfect image — academically, socially, emotionally — even when they're falling apart inside," said Dr. Aditi Aggarwal, a psychologist and student counsellor.

## WHAT SC WANTS EVERY CAMPUS TO DO

### Help students before they break down

- Hire trained counsellors — one per 200 students
- Assign mentors to small batches during exam season
- Give career counselling by professionals
- Regularly check in on struggling students, especially during transitions

### Make it OK to ask for help

- Train teachers & staff to spot distress and respond sensitively — twice a year
- Triage strategies: Make counselling accessible, private, and non-judgmental
- Don't label students or separate them into "good" and "weak" batches

### Build campuses that feel safe and humane

- Set up fast-response systems for sexual harassment, bullying, and ragging
- Put up clear signage for help lines like Tele MANAS and suicide helpline
- Install tamper-proof fans, limit mobile access, and keep campuses drug-free
- Make hostels and PGs part of the safety conversation

### Talk to parents too

- Run regular mental health sessions for parents
- Help them understand academic pressure, depression, and what signs to watch for

### Treat this like a public health emergency

- Coaching hubs (like Kailash) must regulate academic load and ensure counselling
- Every college must report no. of interventions and referrals they've done each year

"There is always this fear that someone might record you, upload the clip on social media, and you might end up losing your job."



**'It's taboo for a teacher to seek counselling for mental health'**

"Academic workload has increased so much that there is little time or energy to have interpersonal relationships with students."

"Students Dr. Divyendu, professor at Alliance University in Bengaluru, says 'we are now living in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world' in which the 'university environment has become more complex and demanding.'"

"There are so many things taking place — for all our teachers, be it excessive teaching, pressure, for not adopting teaching jobs in time and other issues. There is also a noticeable increase in administrative responsibilities, expectations for student engagement and adherence to institutional protocol," he adds.

On top of academic pressure, Delhi University professor Rajesh Jha feels the student-teacher ratio in college classrooms hampers the scope for one-on-one interactions. "When I was a student, we had a class of 20, so we had the opportunity to have

Students are burning out under tremendous pressure. Teachers are buckling under demands to be everything at once — mentor, performer, punching bag. They all feel overwhelmed, but few admit it. These voices from both sides of the classroom sum up what campus life really feels like today

personal rapport with each with stress has rightfully gained attention, teachers are also struggling to find their place — all the while under scrutiny not just for what they teach but also their aptitudes, political leanings, and what they do in their personal lives.

Academic workload has increased so much that there is little time or energy to forge interpersonal relationships with students, and some teachers. And teachers like the armed in Sharda University after a second-year student died by suicide, accusing them of mental harassment, have a chilling effect.

Teachers also feel the pressure to be "appropriate" at all times, for fear they might be misinterpreted. "We need to be cautious that we are not having any sentiments. Something said in a different context can get misinterpreted. There is always this fear that someone might record you, upload the clip on social media and you might end up losing your job," said a Bangalore University teacher.

There have been instances in the recent past of teachers being asked for expressing opinions. Earlier this year, a Sharda University teacher posted in Facebook last July after her son in which she called it the "worst year" in India witnessed. In 2022, a teacher with stock platform Unacademy was fired for saying that students should vote for "educated politicians."

Schools, too, are facing pressure. "The pressure has become more intense. Because parents are paying very high fees, they are, they think they are customers buying education and teachers should serve them. College management are market-oriented these days," says Kumar.

Teachers also feel in the current climate, quick reactions rather than weighed responses after listening to all sides have become the norm. "The psyche has become more impulsive. People are very reactionary-oriented. This leads to fast decisions on any work or failure, values like faith and trust have taken a backseat," Divyendu says.

With implementation of NEP, he adds, the number of periods per week for a subject has come down from five to three. "But the amount of syllabus a teacher needs to complete during the academic year has remained the same. All classes necessarily have to be focused on finishing the syllabus these days. It leaves little room for discussion, debate or dialogue," he says.

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# Classes, coaches and missed lessons

**T**he Comprehensive Modular Survey (CMS) on Education, conducted by the government early this year, reveals some unhealthy trends in India's schooling system. It shows that about 27% of India's school-going children had private coaching in the current academic year – 30.7% in urban areas and 25.5% in rural areas. In classes 11 and 12, 37% of the students take private classes. Urban households spend about Rs 4,000 a year on coaching. The spending in rural areas is lower but significant. It rises to Rs 10,000 for higher-secondary students. These numbers indicate a parallel education system. While they reflect the anxiety of parents about their children's education, they also reveal a lack of confidence in the mainstream schooling system. Competition and peer pressure are also factors that drive students to tuition centres. Private coaching, aimed at helping children overcome their academic challenges, are also known to mount pressure on them. School hours followed by private classes and homework can make a punishing schedule, leaving little time to relax or play. A healthy balance can be ensured by improving the trust in mainstream education, thereby reducing the dependence on external coaching.

The survey shows a declining trend in State school enrolment, falling from about 74% in the 1970s to 51-56% today. But CMS 2025 also underlines the significance of State-run schools in terms of expenditure – while the average annual cost of educating a child in a private school is Rs 25,000, it is Rs 2,863 in State schools. Government schools have lost out to private institutions in most parts of the country, except in states such as Kerala, and Delhi, where efforts were made in the last few years to improve the standards in government schools. The irony is that even after paying high fees in private schools, parents send children to private classes. The fall in enrolment in State-run schools is worrisome and warrants renewed focus and investment.

Apart from tuition centres that have come up across the country and private coaching at homes, bigger institutes offering targeted coaching for professional courses to thousands of students in hubs such as Kota, in Rajasthan, have come to symbolise the boom. Functioning of some of these centres has come under the scanner for the stress the schedules and expectations cause to the students, even leading some of them to suicide. Regulatory oversight has not been effective. There could be a solution in strengthening the school system, by realigning goals and methods towards wholesome and more personalised learning.

**The dependence on private coaching also reflects a lack of confidence in the schooling system**



# Detoxifying India's entrance examination system

Every year, nearly 70 lakh students in India compete for undergraduate seats appearing for entrance examinations such as the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Common University Entrance Test (CUET), and Common Law Admission Test (CLAT). With a fixed number of seats, the competition is intense, fuelling a coaching industry and a culture of relentless pressure. Recent controversies such as branch closures and financial misconduct at a major JEE coaching centre, an Enforcement Directorate raid and student suicides highlight a broken system. It is time to rethink undergraduate admissions, prioritising fairness, equity and student well-being.

## The coaching crisis and its toll

The scale of aspirants – 15 lakh for the JEE alone – has created a coaching empire, with centres charging a fee of ₹6 lakh-₹7 lakh for two-year programmes. Students as young as 14 years sacrifice holistic development for a gruelling routine of solving complex problems from books such as Irodov and Krotov, which go far beyond B.Tech requirements. This rat race breeds stress, depression and alienation, robbing teens of peer bonding and a normal adolescence. With some students unable to handle the pressure, some governments have enacted laws to regulate coaching centres. Yet, the root issue lies in an entrance examination system that overqualifies students and distorts merit.

Entrance examinations aim to filter 15 lakh aspirants for 18,000-plus seats in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), but making a distinction between students scoring 91% or 97% in the Class 12 examination, or 99.9 percentile in JEE, is unreasonable. A decent Class 12 score, say, 70%-80% in physics, chemistry and mathematics, is sufficient for a B.Tech programme. The current system demands extraordinary performance due to the limited seats, vast applicant numbers, and disparities in college academic quality, creating a



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The choice lies between continuing a toxic race that scars students or adopting a system of fairness and equal opportunity

false hierarchy with an overemphasis on minor score differences. This sidelines capable students, favours those who can afford coaching, and exacerbates urban-rural, gender, and regional imbalances.

The consequences are severe. Psychologically, students face immense pressure. Socially, the system privileges wealthier families who can afford top-tier coaching, creating an illusory meritocracy. As Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel argues, this fuels a toxic obsession with perceived individual superiority, ignoring the role of luck and privilege. Sandel even suggests lotteries for admissions at elite institutions such as Stanford and Harvard to address these flaws.

## The Dutch lottery and beyond

India can draw inspiration from global models. The Netherlands uses a weighted lottery for medical school admissions, introduced in 1972 and reinstated in 2023. Applicants meeting a minimum academic threshold enter a lottery, with higher grades improving odds. This reduces bias, promotes diversity, and eases pressure, recognising that overly precise metrics are often irrelevant, unfair and costly. Outcomes show that lotteries are viable when capacity is limited, aligning with Sandel's critique of meritocratic excess.

In China, the 2021 "double reduction" policy banned for-profit tutoring for school subjects, nationalising coaching overnight to reduce financial burdens, address inequalities and protect student well-being. This tackled issues that India faces – unchecked, excessive and disorderly growth of coaching centres and their impact on youth.

The solution lies in simplifying admissions, trusting the school system and shielding students from an excessive number of examinations. The Class 12 board examinations, with their rigorous curriculum, are adequate to gauge B.Tech readiness. Instead of entrance examinations, a threshold, say, 80% in physics, chemistry and

mathematics, can be set for eligibility. Students meeting this could be grouped into categories (90% and above, 80%-90%) and allocated seats or a rank number through a weighted lottery, incorporating reservations for gender, region and rural backgrounds within existing reservation policy, similar to the Dutch model. Higher grades could improve odds, but all eligible students would have a fair chance, eliminating cut-throat competition.

To enhance equity, 50% of IIT seats could be reserved vertically for rural students educated in government schools, promoting social mobility and reducing structural inequality. If entrance examinations persist, coaching should be banned or nationalised, with free online study materials and lectures. To foster diversity, the IITs could introduce an annual student exchange programme, randomly selecting students to study across different IIT campuses over four years. This would promote national integration and exposure to diverse cultures. Incentivising the transfer of professors between IITs could also ensure uniform academic standards, dismantling artificial hierarchies and reinforcing the equal value of a B.Tech from any IIT.

## The path forward

Scrappping undergraduate entrance examinations for a lottery-based system would free students from the coaching treadmill, allowing them to attend school, take part in sports and grow holistically. It would reduce financial barriers, giving every qualified student, regardless of wealth or privilege, a shot at top institutions. Most importantly, it would let youth be youth, and not machines chasing percentiles and becoming too serious at too tender an age.

India's education system faces a choice: continue a toxic race that scars students and society or embrace fairness, sanity, egalitarianism and equal opportunity. The path is clear.



# History textbooks and their tryst with truth

Until recently, professional historians and history departments in universities broadly recognised Indian history as divided between the Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods. The more contentious colonial division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods was thus displaced. There have been some adaptations of the three terms, as in the use of Early India (rather than Ancient India), Early Modern (to refer to the 16th and 17th centuries as times when lively exchanges and experiments occurred). The Kerala government's social studies textbook discusses the medieval period as the "era of exchanges" between the East and the West.

These re-periodisations of history have been enabled by historians going beyond political and diplomatic histories to include social and economic structures, the lives of ordinary people (including those long neglected by the textbooks), histories of technologies and objects, and the histories of stable geographical elements — rivers, oceans and seas.

But now, under the guidance of Michel Danino, the NCERT social science textbooks have announced a new phase of historical writing which transcends known periods and historical methods (which may earlier have been powered by nationalist, Marxist, or Annales frameworks). He has ushered in, he modestly says, a period of "honest history — based on the data available — where we aim to do justice to the past". Now, this approach immediately thrusts the sophisticated productions of three generations of post-Inde-

pendence historians in the dubious category of being dishonest — sanitised, or produced under political pressure. Danino has distanced himself from these stains: "No political leader came to us saying, 'You have to include this, or mention this particular figure or fact'".

Still, he does admit that his team wanted a (dis)proportionate amount of attention given to Shivaji and the Marathas, who have earned a chapter of their own. The book's focus on what Danino called the "darker chapters in history" — coterminous with the regions and times under Muslim rulers — comes with the equivalent of small print, a disclaimer that reads, "Some of the invaders and rulers mentioned above committed terrible deeds and atrocities... we must keep in mind that this is about people in the past, not people of today... we, today, bear no responsibility for actions of individuals hundreds of years ago."

In fact, the textbook writers take no responsibility for the likely outcomes of this so-called truth telling. Danino's proclaimed independence of the political establishment displayed naïve ignorance of the travails of textbook production in India. The 2005-06 textbooks underscored the importance of focusing on pedagogical, rather than ideological goals. Despite this, there were literally hundreds of petitioners, from those who felt that their region/pain/experience had to be included to those who believed that the textbook should not speak about certain inequalities and struggles, since the concerned community had left those times behind.

And there was everything in between.

Do the new NCERT books once more subordinate pedagogy to ideology? If there are any innovations in this new "truth-telling" exercise, they are pressed into the service of national pride. The same standard of truth-telling is not applied to Hindu kings, such as Shivaji, or Maharana Pratap, or Akbar and Aurangzeb. Better still, while Anglo-Maratha wars are described in some detail, Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan and the Anglo Mysore wars have "disappeared". Standard VII and VIII have returned us to a style of historical writing (divided between Brave Queens/Bad Kings, etc, trenchantly critiqued in all historical method classes) that had long been decentred in favour of social, economic

and cultural history.

But the team has learned the hard way that proclaiming truth and honesty does not prevent outrage from several quarters: One community strenuously objected to the inclusion of Jaisalmer in the map of a sprawling Maratha Empire (included in the Std VII textbook). Another questioned the absence of the Paika (Odisha) rebellion of 1817. There will be more objections to follow as sub-nationalisms and community historians raise their demands. And they will not be from the nationalist, Marxist, or other "despised" historiographical stables.

Nothing reveals the grave undermining of the historical method in the new textbooks than the module entitled "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day". It is not intended to inform but to inflame. It is not to teach about Partition, but to commemorate August 14 (Pakistan's Independence Day) as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day (though the lines of Partition (August 17), and the violence happened after that date). It does not acknowledge at least four decades of research that highlighted hitherto unknown distinctions between the experience of Partition in the east and the west. In more

sensitive accounts, there is acknowledgement that what makes the Indian partition unusual was that the violence was not between one set of victims and one set of perpetrators (as the module suggests throughout). Victims could become perpetrators and perpetrators could become victims. Even the armies were not above attacking the very people they were supposed to protect. The newspaper cuttings — as proof of "truth" — are of violence against Hindus alone. Excellent work done by feminist historians on the experience of women, especially following the Abducted Person (Recovery and Restoration Act of 1949) by both India and Pakistan, has been conveniently ignored.

The module targets the Congress, the leading voice of the freedom movement, by suggesting that "in 1947, for the first time, Indian leaders themselves willingly handed over a vast part of the country permanently outside the national fold — along with tens of crores of its citizens — without even their consent or a war". They (mistakenly) "limited their discourse to a binary of 'native vs. foreign', forgetting the (presumably more important) historical 'realities' of Hindu-Muslim relations. A discussion of the Hindu Mahasabha's place in this historic moment would have added nuance. Instead, included is the most pernicious suggestion that "even though a separate country was created for Muslims, about 35 million Muslims did not shift and continued to stay in India. Pakistan was demanded and created as a homeland for all Indian Muslims. The entire calculation, political or territorial, was based on that assumption." Students are asked to remember that "the actual forces that drive human behaviour [are] self-interest, greed, fear, hatred, anger, vengeance, etc." If this is not a call for revenge in the present day, what is?



Janaki Nair

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The views expressed are personal



# All prose, no cons

Are your reading goals still a piece of fiction? Find your tribe online and offline, to make them real

Anjali Kochhar

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**O**f course, you want to read more. Everybody does. It's the most virtuous habit of our time. Online, Bookstagrammers are doing 30-second reviews of exciting titles that just dropped. On YouTube, there are endless streams of people acting out a novel's intro, leaving off at the cliffhanger, urging viewers to "go read the rest". There are online and offline book clubs, travelling libraries, silent-reading communities, swaps, challenges and all kinds of shortcuts.

Reading culture isn't dying, says Manik Jaiswal, who runs one of India's most active reading initiatives. It's just taken a new shape, one that keeps up with screentime, scrolling, wishlists and travel goals. When people say they're trying every trick in the book to get others to read, they're not kidding. Take a look.

## The book buffet

Some people believe reading is about quality, not quantity. Others head to Bookcher's Lock The Box sales with glee. This is where customers pay a set price for an empty box, and then carry away as many pre-owned books as the box fits. For those who haven't figured out their tastes yet, and can't afford new books in every genre, this is a bazaar. For those who know what they like and want more of it, cheaply, it's a bazaar too. "Our Lock The Box events turned books into a treasure hunt," says founder Meenal Sharma.

The event travels nationwide. They've just wrapped up Indore and are on their way to Shimla. At every stop, readers find a surprise – a pre-owned title that's been out of stock in their city, or a promising one they'd never heard about. And of course, Lock The Box also buys old books in each city, so the pickings are never the same.

## On Insta

Nashik resident Neelanjali uses only her first name and operates @BooksMakeMeWhole, a six-year-old account devoted to books she hopes more people would read. She knows she can't force anyone into it, so her grid is laid out as a series of mini listicles: Books that live in my head rent free, Indian authors that are



too good to miss, and so on. "Not everyone reads long reviews, but those who do are more likely to pick up the book that resonates with them." And, like any other influencer, she drops tips on her reading routine and for getting out of a slump.

The account has 61K followers and, from the comments, they all seem to know each other and welcome new voices. "The best way to convince someone to pick up a book is by being honest and open about how it made me feel, how I connected with the story, or how it impacted me personally," she says. She'll also share a favourite quote or excerpt to get her followers hooked on to a story.

More like this: @SpoonfulOfPages, @Reader\_Viddh, @BagFullOfBooks.

## On the web

Online book clubs are starting to connect book lovers who don't really want to leave their comfy couch. Divya Jain and Snigdha Gautam set up The Indian Book Club in the pandemic, and have continued with it long after the lockdowns were lifted. There are separate sections for young and grown up readers on their website, and more than 13K followers on Insta (@IndiaReadWithUs).

The club takes it slow – one book a month, and they set up read-alongs, virtual discussions and author Q&As. It's not unusual to see GenZ and grandparents all bonding (or calmly disagreeing) over the same book. "A 19-year-old and a 60-year-old discussing Pachinko or Dhalia in the same meeting? That's the magic," Jain says. "It still blows our minds, sometimes."

## In the mountains

Manik Jaiswal and Narendra Singh started The Bookholics on Facebook in 2011. They were barely 19 and 20 years old at the time. Now, almost a decade and a half in, it might just be India's busiest reading community. Their Insta alone (@TheBookholics) has close to one million followers.

Jaiswal recalls how they started out, with "quotes from Khaled Hosseini, Haruki Murakami, messy book summaries, candid reviews, unfiltered bookish rants". It was more heartfelt than curated. "Slowly, people started engaging with us."

They do more than reviews, meetups and donation drives. The Bookholics runs a Book Exchange. In



which swappers include personal notes for recipients, often sparking friendships and new connections between strangers. From 100 books in Season 1 to more than 2,000 in Season 4, the exchange remains free.

Since 2017, they've also hosted four-day reading trips in the mountains for members. This is where participants get through a tome in a silent-reading session, join a book circle and discuss novels under the stars. Sign up early – they sell out fast.

## In the park

Group reading clubs have been a hit almost everywhere they've been initiated in India. Mohammed Nusrath and Biswarupa Barik set up Hyderabad Reads as a way to get citizens to use public spaces as peaceful reading zones. "We began in Jubilee Hills and Banjara Hills because these hubs attract people from different states," says Nusrath.

They've spread to other locations in the city, and each spot brings a mix of homegrown readers and those who've moved to Hyderabad to work but were seeking bookish company. "We don't do anything extraordinary to push people to read; we simply show up," Nusrath says. "When someone sees a group coming together every weekend to read, it acts as a reminder of that 'one thing' they've been meaning to do but keep postponing. People see it and think, 'Why not join them?' There's probably one in your city already."

## The book café

Where many cafes now have a shelf of books, Fictionary in Mumbai has walls and walls of them. The part-library, part-coffee-shop, part-cosy-hangout, part-bookstore-venue is dedicated to fiction. Founder Anup Nair chose it because he discovered its restorative power after years of picking up only non-fiction titles as a corporate worker. "Fiction became an escape from the routine, the stresses of life, and from the constant need to self-improve while reading," he says.

Fictionary is a year old and has a mix of buzzing and quiet nooks. It hosts reading mixers and book-club events. There's a WhatsApp group, where members exchange recommendations. And their Insta (@FictionaryBooks) keeps their 76K followers updated about what's happening at the store and which collabs are in the works. "Being surrounded by other readers has motivated a lot of people to go back to reading," Nair says.

Biswarupa Barik and Mohammed Nusrath (left), who started the group Hyderabad Reads, see it as a way to make the city's public spaces peaceful reading zones.



Narendra Singh and Manik Jaiswal (top) host reading trips for Bookholics members. Meenal Sharma of Bookcher (centre) organises Lock The Box events that turn books into a treasure hunt. Anup Nair, founder of Fictionary (above) has a WhatsApp group where people share their picks.

Reading culture has evolved in India, with online and offline book clubs, travelling libraries, and Bookstagram. PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK









# HEIs: A moment of reckoning

Since we are approaching Teachers' Day, this writer would like to make a small appeal to our Central government and state governments (since education is a State subject). Mr Mayhem, US President Donald Trump, is hating on his pet peeves, the US liberal intellectual class and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), almost each fortnight. He's wrecking the intake of talent (and monies) that US HEIs are globally known for. Large sections of students at these institutions are international.

The era which India and other countries identified with 'brain drain' looks somewhat set to end. Spiralling admission costs, plummeting financial aid, cratering returns on investments in terms of employability, restrictive visa regimes and post-education work opportunities are some of the factors militating against students going abroad in the current international climate. Atop this sits Trump. America may account for an extreme current instance, but more or less the same climate prevails in other HEI destinations like Canada, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Germany. So, what can countries like India do about this?

If only India had China-like dogged vision and intent, this situation would be a windfall to turbocharge Indian HEIs, both private and public. Yes, to some degree, the National Education Policy of 2020 tilts our imperatives in that direction, but Trump has created a situation that calls for immediate, yet considered actions from the Centre and states. At the moment, India is sitting on a not insignificant pool of talent across higher education fields that would typically aim to fly away. India also has not insignificant numbers of internationally trained returnees, mostly scholars, researchers, teachers, idea generators, and academics with undergraduate educational bearings in India. So, there's a burgeoning set of young people who want to learn more and another slightly older set that could possibly benefit higher education, either in terms of research, or teaching, or both.



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It is displeasing to either wait to burnish your talent or return to a home environment having honed talent elsewhere and not find the apposite nest for its expression and enhancement. Our respective governments must act soon to tap into a restive student/young scholar demographic that increases by the day, and present a workable roadmap. India is well behind the higher educational curve vis-a-vis its much more strategically thoughtful neighbours. Fleet-footed China is earning international accolades as high-profile international scholars partially live and work there. Southeast Asian nations such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam have made strong strides to attract and retain international talent, and usher in pools of its youth into higher and/or primary education careers. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries established swathes of urban areas for western university campuses to get set in locations like Doha and Dubai.

Lest you mistake me, I don't want to preach the mantra of internationalisation for its own sake. What they signal is concerted intent to make education more attractive, and help strengthen and nurture strong, good, practices and temperaments for the long-term future of these countries. Well before their attempts to internationalise education, even a rudimentary scrutiny over budgetary spends on education in these countries over the last 30 years displays a marked intent to bolster it and lay a solid foundation for the future of its respective youth. Chinese companies such as DeepSeek have jolted information technology and Artificial Intelligence spheres. When they shook early this year, Indian captains of industry again rued why Indian companies and institutions were unable to generate such ideas. In my view, that moment was also a triumph for Chinese HEI investment. Now, Trump is closing the door. While solidifying its foundations, India must open its own for others, but carefully, thoughtfully, and quickly. *DNB*



# How did Kerala pull off digital literacy feat?

Who were the volunteers? Who were trained? What do the numbers tell? Which panchayat was declared the State's first fully digitally literate panchayat? What is the plan going forward? Why is the State focusing on smartphones instead of computer literacy?

S.R. Praveen

## The story so far:

**I**n August 21, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan declared Kerala as the first fully digitally literate State in India, marking the completion of the first phase of the 'Digi Kerala' digital literacy programme, a grass-root level intervention across all local self-government bodies with an aim to bridge the digital divide. According to the Local Self Government Department, a total of 21.87 lakh people who were identified as "digitally illiterate" in a ground-level survey had successfully completed the training programme as well as cleared the evaluation.

## What did they learn to do?

The trainees, who were not previously acquainted with digital devices, were taught to make voice calls as well as video calls using smartphones, to use WhatsApp and other social media platforms. Those who were not too old were also taught to access government services and to carry out digital transactions.

## What led Kerala to take up the programme?

This is a classic case of bottom up, rather than

In the next phase, there will be awareness classes on cyberfraud and lessons to identify and reject fake news

top down, flow of government programme ideas. The idea originated from the Pullampara panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram in 2021, when some government officials native to Pullampara noticed long queues regularly in front of one of the few banks in the panchayat. Quite a few of those in the queue were daily-wage or MGNREGS labourers who had travelled from the interiors just to check their account balance. The travails of those who had to sacrifice their daily wages for even checking their account balance made the government and panchayat officials think about teaching them to use the basic digital technology required in daily life.

The panchayat launched the 'Digi Pullampara' project, under which a survey was carried out across all wards to identify those who are digitally illiterate. Out of 3,917 people thus identified, training was provided to 3,300 as the rest were bedridden. The core team designed 15 activities in three modules for training.

Students from the National Service Scheme (NSS) units of engineering colleges and schools in the region signed up as volunteers to teach, along with Kudumbashree volunteers, SC/ST promoters, and library council members. MGNREGS worksites and Kudumbashree neighbourhood groups where people come together in considerable numbers became classrooms. Training was also done by volunteers visiting households. After the training, a different set of volunteers conducted an evaluation of each trainee, with the requirement that they had to complete at least six of the 15 tasks to pass. In Pullampara, 96.38% of the trainees cleared the evaluation. Retraining was provided for those who failed. At an event in September 2022, in which the Chief Minister declared Pullampara as Kerala's first fully digitally literate panchayat, it was also announced that the programme will be expanded State-wide.

## How did the government scale up the Pullampara model across the State?

The government brought the core team from Pullampara to the Kerala Institute of Local Administration to train a group of master

trainers, who later trained 2.57 lakh volunteers from across the State. The surveying and training process was thus scaled up without major tweaks and was implemented in a manner similar to the Total Literacy campaign of the late 1980s. In the survey, 1.51 crore people from 83.45 lakh households participated, out of which 21.88 lakh were identified as digitally illiterate. At the State level, the third-party evaluation was carried out by the Economics and Statistics Department, in which 21.87 lakh people passed. In panchayats where over 10% trainees failed the evaluation, re-training was conducted. To questions on whether the State-wide survey has truly covered everyone, the officials argue that local level Kudumbashree workers who accompany the volunteers for the survey helped them avoid the houses in which the residents are already digitally savvy.

As per the National Digital Literacy Mission guidelines for digital literacy, training needs to be provided only for those up to 60 years of age. But the Digi Kerala programme includes people of all ages, even those above the age of 100. As many as 15,221 of the trainees were above the age of 90, while 7.77 lakh people were between the ages of 60 and 75 and 1.35 lakh between the ages of 76 and 90. Over 13 lakh women, eight lakh men and 1,644 transgender persons completed the programme successfully, as per the data.

## What is the road ahead for the Digi Kerala project?

At the Digi Kerala declaration, the Chief Minister also announced the Digi Kerala 2.0 project, under which awareness classes on cyber fraud, lessons to identify and reject fake news and intensive training to access government services will be held. At the national level, digital literacy is focused on computer literacy, but the Pullampara panchayat as well as the State government shifted the focus to the use of smartphones to navigate daily life. The State government sees it as part of a larger project, which also involves its Kerala Fibre Optic Network (KFON) project aimed at ensuring universal Internet access and narrowing the digital divide by providing Internet free of cost to below the poverty line (BPL) families (14,000 BPL families have been connected till now, in addition to 74,203 commercial home connections) and the K-SMART project to make available all services of local self-government bodies digitally over a uniform platform.



**Hands-on lessons:** Training programme at a MGNREGS worksite as part of the Digi Kerala project. R.K. NITHYAN



# Mathematician who tracked down India's maths heritage

Physicist and the country's pre-eminent math historian, PP Divakaran, who died recently in Kochi, was a cherished friend of mine for over six decades. We first met at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and immediately fell into a discussion about the ground breaking work on parity violation by TD Lee and CN Yang, a topic that had captivated physicists worldwide, and for which they won the Nobel Prize in 1957. What immediately struck me was the remarkable clarity with which Divakaran, or PPD, as his friends called him, explained the intricate details of their research. His ability to distil complex ideas into understandable points was extraordinary, and would be the hallmark of his eventual work. The second thing about PPD that would soon become evident was the breadth of his interests and his polymathic ability to synthesise them. Sometime in the 1960s, when I was teaching at IIT Kanpur, he came to visit us and expressed a desire to see a temple nearby which was famous for its Gupta-period architecture. As we explored the temple with him, his profound knowledge of its architectural nuances left us all in awe.

Over the years, he and I would meet across the country at various institutes of learning — the Institute of Mathematical Sciences (IMSC), Chennai, and then for a substantial period at the Harish-Chandra Research Institute, Prayagraj, formerly Allahabad, where he gave a series of lectures on neutrino physics. A set of three lectures he delivered there set the tone for my research interest for the next ten years. I bring up these meetings because through them I realised PPD's unstinting generosity towards other scholars, whether it was editing their papers or guiding them with their research projects.

His interest shifted to studying mathematicians from Kerala, and as was his wont, he dived into it deeply. His text, *The Mathematic of India: Concepts, Methods, Connection* is a testament to his tremendous intellect, and put ancient Indian mathematicians and their contributions on the international map. He shone a light on the radicalism and the rationality of ancient Indian mathematicians. Aryabhata, he noted, may have been a "god-less secularist" because his writings do not

invoke any identifiable Hindu god.

PPD noted in his writings that Aryabhata's unwavering rationality was in direct contrast to what some of his supporters referred to as "pauranika" (traditional) or "sruti" (scriptural) knowledge. This is further supported by the criticism Aryabhata received from his most notable opponent, Brahmagupta. PPD pointed out that Brahmagupta's attacks were directed less at Aryabhata's astronomy and mathematics and more at his divergence from accepted wisdom and traditions.



HS Mani

PPD, who retired from TIFR in 1996, studied Aryabhata's work, *Aryabhataiya*, and pointed to verses 3 and 4 of the text's *Gitika* section as the first indication of his ground breaking theories. These verses list the number of "revolutions" (or periods of motion) for all the *grahas* (celestial bodies) within a *yuga* (a specific period of time in Hindu cosmology). The author considers this list of revolutions to be the initial hint of Aryabhata's theory of a spinning Earth. This idea would have been a radical departure from the prevailing geocentric models of the time.

The two other key points that PPD raised in his study of the ancient mathematicians were the advanced state of Indian trigonometry and the decline of Indian mathematics after the 16th century. He argued that the expansion of trigonometric functions like sine and cosine and their inverses were studied by the Nila school of mathematics in Kerala before they were developed by Western mathematicians. He supported this claim with rigorous evidence. PPD's work was appreciated by David Mumford, the Fields Medallist renowned for his work on algebraic geometry. PPD also noted that this period of mathematical innovation and creativity was not followed by steady progress. Instead, the Nila school marked the end of an "essentially autonomous progression of mathematical thought in India," he wrote. While he acknowledged various reasons for this, the "immediate trigger was the arrival of Portuguese colonialists on the shores of Kerala".

HS Mani taught at IIT Kanpur and HRI Prayagraj and presently, teaches at the Chennai Mathematical Institute. The views expressed are personal



# Sci-Hub case: What's really at stake is future of research in India

## BY INVITATION



ARUL GEORGE SCARIA

On August 18, researchers across India woke up to unsettling news: access to Sci-Hub — the shadow library that has long been their lifeline — had been blocked by order of the Delhi High Court. If appropriate long-term measures are not taken, this could have enormous implications for the future of research in the country.

## THE LEGAL BACKSTORY

The ban did not come out of nowhere. It was the outcome of a long-running copyright battle playing out in Indian courts since 2003. On one side was Sci-Hub, founded by Kazakhstani computer programmer Alexandra Elbakyan, which has long provided free access to millions of published research articles. On the other were three major international publishers (Elsevier, Wiley and American Chemical Society) who filed a copyright infringement suit against it. During the proceedings, Ms Elbakyan gave an undertaking that no new articles covered by the plaintiffs' copyright would be uploaded till the proceedings conclude. But while this undertaking remained in force, she released new articles through another website named Sci-Net. Arguing that this violated her undertaking, the publishers went back to court, leading to the blocking order on Sci-Hub, Sci-Net and all mirror websites.

## WHAT THE COURT IGNORED

While this appears like a simple blocking order, one should not overlook some of the public interest dimensions.

First, it is an undeniable fact that even the most resource-rich institutions in India like IITs

and IIMs fail to provide access to all the publications necessary for facilitating good quality research. One can only imagine the plight of researchers in other institutes.

Second, the blocking order relies heavily on jurisprudence laid down in the context of issues like online movie piracy. But are these comparable infringements? The business models in academic publishing are very different — not just from movies but even fiction and newspaper publishing. Journal authors are almost never paid royalties or remuneration for their contributions. Even open access journals that allow the authors to retain copyright often charge them 'processing' fees, clearly illustrating the continued exploitation by journals. In such a context, the traditional incentive-based justifications for grant of copyright protection hardly exist. Most researchers contribute to journals for reasons such as advancing knowledge, signalling expertise, and meeting requirements for appointments/promotion in academic and research institutions. This fundamental difference is why scholars like Steven Shrawel argue for abolition of copyright in academic works and placing them in the public domain for broader social benefits.

Third, it is debatable whether the publishers own valid copyright in all the articles available through Sci-Hub, as this also requires valid copyright assignments from the authors to journals. A substantial number of articles could already be available in the public domain for multiple

**Even the most resource-rich institutions in India like IITs and IIMs fail to provide access to all the publications necessary for facilitating good quality research. One can only imagine the plight of researchers in other institutes**



Illustration by Gauri Chawla (P22)

**UEL WAR:** Such cases are not mere private disputes. It is important to look at the public interest dimensions before issuing sweeping orders

reasons such as expiry of copyright term, relinquishment of copyright by authors or application of open-access mandates by those who funded the research. These are complex issues that can only be determined through a full trial, and in such circumstances, the courts should avoid sweeping blocking orders applicable to the entire website. It is also worth adding here that cases like this should not be seen as mere private disputes between two parties. It is important to look at the broader public interest dimensions before issuing any injunction.

## THE PATH FORWARD

The case and the resulting blocking order should act as a wake-up call for our policymakers. If India has to achieve economic and scientific progress, access to scientific information is a must for researchers and students. While the country

has initiated the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) policy to provide access to journals for institutions across the country, the economic prudence of the scheme is questionable. It is also important to notice that not all publishers are part of ONOS, thereby limiting coverage.

The only sustainable long-term solution to the crisis is open access to research publications. A starting point would be to mandate that all work funded by public money — and all research produced in publicly funded institutions — be made openly accessible. The draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2020 had recommended steps in this direction; it is time to implement it.

Another important step is enacting restrictions on assignment of copyright to journals. For instance, France has adopted a specific secondary publication right for authors, which empowers authors to share their final accepted author version of publications, irrespective of any exclusive contract they may have signed with publishers. While allowing authors to publish in any journal they prefer, such measures can help authors and institutions address the current imbalance in bargaining power. It is also important to note that author protective measures are not alien for Indian copyright law. For example, the Copyright (Amendment) Act 2012 introduced restrictions with regard to assignment of copyright and mandatory royalty sharing, with the primary objective of protecting lyricists and composers against economically powerful producers.

The long-term solution is, therefore, to take inspiration from our own history and achieve a fair balance between copyright protection and broader social interests. Only then can we create a research ecosystem that truly democratizes knowledge. ■

Scaria is a professor of law at the National Law School of India University, Bengaluru



## याकी हैं कुछ प्रश्न

अजयबाई की समझती की जगह एआइ ने ले ली है और ज्ञान के क्षेत्र के स्वयं से भी एआइ की ही कार्यक्षमता बहुत बढ़ गई है। लेकिन इस आयकपी ने कुछ जल्दी सवाल पूछे हैं:

• एआइ के जगह इन्फोर्मेशन इंजन की जगह कौन, वैश्विक, सामूहिकता और सच्चाई जैसे मूल्यों पर कितना ध्यान देगा?

• एआइ का जगह इन्फोर्मेशन इंगीनीयरीज और सोफ्टवेयर की जगह कौन के कौशल की जरूरत पड़ेगी?

• एआइ शिक्षा संस्थाओं में अपनी कार्यक्षमता और कार्यक्षमता को कितना नुकसान पहुंचाएगा?

सच कहें तो ये सवाल पूछे जाते हैं और ये सवाल को हर जगह जल्दी से फैलाने की कोशिश और यह ध्यान लेना कि टेक्नोलॉजी और समस्यात्मक समाधान हैं, ने इन जल्दी जल्दी की कार्यक्षमता को बढ़ावा देने के लिए है। (यह सवाल बड़ा और कई जगहों पर बसा हुआ है, जिसमें शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में बहुत विशिष्ट है, जो एआइ का जगह इन्फोर्मेशन इंजन के कौशल को बढ़ावा देने के लिए है।) एआइ और एआइ के बीच के अंतर को समझना और एआइ के जगह इन्फोर्मेशन इंजन के कौशल को बढ़ावा देने के लिए है।



भारत की शिक्षा प्रणाली में, यहाँ यह मुख्य रूप से प्राचीन परंपरा से या नई शिक्षा नीति 2020, एनोशा शिक्षक की केंद्र में रहा है।  
प्रो. संजीव कुमार शर्मा के अनुसार यह समस्त भारतीय शिक्षा की नई प्रेरणा का है, जहाँ आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस बन रहा है शिक्षकों का सहायक..

# एआइ से प्रशस्त शिक्षा की राह

भा. रा. की इनकी सारी एक दुनिया को खोल कर शिक्षा का रास्ता, उसने कई हमलों के बाद अपना ध्यान छो दिया। एक समय का विद्यार्थी प्रमुख हो गया। उसका एक हजार साल की परंपरा, बहुत सोचों और बर्बादों के बाद भारत फिर से एक जलजल देश के रूप में खड़ा हुआ। वहीं और गुरु से थके हुए देश में एक नई उमंग आई। लतामो मनना से अपने भारत फिर से पूरी दुनिया के लिए आकर्षण का केंद्र बन गया है। भारत की यह अवस्था होने के बावजूद, उसके अधिकांश तकनीकी पूर्ण दुनिया को रोक कर रही है। सेवा के मामले में भी भारत ने अपने जगह समर्थन को ही और अतीवशिक्षा में तो वह अनुभवी कर रहा है। दूसरी कई क्षेत्रों में भी भारत को उसके ही कालों का महसूस करने पड़ेगा है। आज शिक्षा और विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में भारत फिर से निर्यात करने का समय देख रहा है। ऐसे में, दुनिया में टेक्नोलॉजी में जो रोल बदलने की भारत दुनिया नहीं रह सकता। अन्य विज्ञान बहुत तेजी से चलेंगे की बढ़त रहा है। बॉलिवुड महापौर के बाद से जो इंटरनेट और नई टेक्नोलॉजी का हमारे निवेश बहुत बढ़ गई है। वहीं ये भी टेक्नोलॉजी का असर साफ देखना शुरू हो रहा है। स्कूल से लेकर कॉलेज और विद्यालय तक, एआइ-शिक्षा में टेक्नोलॉजी का इस्तेमाल सामान्य बन रहा है। आज

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अजयबाई  
भारत का एआइ  
कौशल अनुमानित  
है 2030 तक और  
इसका सीधा असर होगा एआइ।

शिक्षक दिवस - 5 सितंबर



सर्वां पोटो कॉपी

शिक्षक ही हमारे केंद्र में

इसी 'मार्ग' में आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस (एआइ) का अर्थ एक बहुत ही बड़ी पहल है। एआइ के आने से हमारा और विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में ऐसे बदलाव हो रहे हैं, जिसकी हमने कल्पना भी नहीं की थी। शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में तो एआइ एक बड़ा बदलाव ला रहा है। जहाँ ब्लॉगर, विज्ञान और दूसरे क्षेत्रों में लोग एआइ को अपने काम के लिए फिर देख रहे हैं, वहीं शिक्षा में इसके आने पर कुछ लोग डरसक भी हैं और कुछ को हुर्र भी। कुछ शिक्षा संस्थाओं में तो शिक्षा को बढ़ावा देने के लिए अपना शिक्षा है, जबकि कुछ जगहों पर तो एआइ के जगह इन्फोर्मेशन को होने वाले भ्रम नवीनी को लेकर चिंतित हैं। हमारे भारत की शिक्षा प्रणाली में, यहाँ यह मुख्य रूप से प्राचीन परंपरा से या नई शिक्षा नीति 2020, एनोशा शिक्षक की केंद्र में रहा है। हमने जलजल और परंपराओं में गुरु

को बहुत सम्मान दिया गया है। एआइ के आने से सबसे बड़ी चिंता इसी बात की है कि कौन एआइ शिक्षकों की जगहों को ही छाना न कर दे।

इसका हल है पूरी सावधानी

अबत में, एआइ की तकनीक और क्षमता हमारे बीच से कहीं गुजर रही है। इसके इस्तेमाल के जगह हमारे पास खुल रहे हैं। वह शिक्षा के लिए अतीवशिक्षा संस्थाओं के दरवाजे खोल रहा है। एआइ इन्फोर्मेशन, डिजिटल और नए क्षेत्रों को बहुत बढ़ावा दे रहा है। इनके विचारों को साथ लाने के ऐसे तरीके दिए हैं कि पूरी मानव सम्पत्ता पर इसका असर पड़ रहा है। कविता, साहित्य, संगीत और कला भी एआइ से प्रभावित हो रही हैं। वह भी तो सचता है कि अपने पहले दिनों में एआइ अपने जगहों के साथ-साथ समाज के गुरु लोगों को भी जगहों पर लाने लगे। अगर एआइ का इस्तेमाल व्यवसाय, सेवा और पदार्थ-

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एआइ हमारे कामों में शिक्षा का कौशल बढ़ने में इसका सीधा असर होगा एआइ।



निष्कर्ष में हमें ध्यान रखना है और नवीनी तक पहुँच कर तो हमें होना-कम सोचना भी पड़ेगा है। एआइ के बढ़ते इस्तेमाल से शिक्षकों के लिए वह चुनौती भी है कि उन्हें रोज नई जानकारी के साथ खुद को अपडेट रखना होगा। शिक्षकों को एआइ से अपने काम करने अनुभव और ज्ञान को एआइ के साथ जोड़ना होगा।

आगे बेहतर बदलाव

यह सच है कि शिक्षा संस्थाएं सिर्फ ज्ञान देने या शिक्षा करने की जगह नहीं हो सकती। अतः हमें, वे संस्थाएं शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में अपने काम को बढ़ावा देने के लिए एक अच्छा, सर्वोत्तम और उसे बढ़ावा देने वाले हैं। इसीलिए हमारी परंपरा में शिक्षा से बहुत अच्छे

आपका और मूल्यों की हमारे को बढ़ावा है। एआइ के आने से शिक्षा का समय सिर्फ जानकारी देना नहीं रहा गया है। आज सचता खुदने के लिए, फैलोपीटी जैसे कई रोल मोडल हैं। इं-रॉनिंग और प्लेबल की शिक्षा को फैलाने में मदद कर रहे हैं। हम रोज नए देश के बारे में जान रहे हैं जो शिक्षा में जड़ित लगे हैं। एआइ के सामर्थ्य बहुत उम्मीद से देख रहे हैं कि इसी शिक्षा में बहुत अच्छे बदलाव आने। शिक्षा अभावग्रस्त को समझा कर भी एआइ में हुर्र करने की कोशिश को न कर रहे हैं। शिक्षा को हमारे जगहों पर जो सही नहीं है।

(लेखक महाराष्ट्र की केंद्रीय शिक्षा विभाग, महाराष्ट्र, विद्यार्थी के रूप में हैं।)



अजयबाई  
कोशिस  
और  
'स्वयं'  
जैसे तरीके  
शिक्षा का  
उपयोग कर  
ए।

