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When does the gender gap emerge with respect to mathematical abilities?

A study in France found that boys and girls began school with the same mathematical abilities, but a gender gap began emerging in the first year of school. This finding was consistent across private and public schools, in schools catering to high- and low-income families, and in every region

Radhika Santhanam

Martinot, P., Colnet, B., Breda, T. et al, 'Rapid emergence of a maths gender gap in first grade', *Nature* (2025). doi.org/10.1038/s41586-025-09126-4

Across the world, women are under-represented in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Their absence has consequences: it narrows perspectives in STEM, potentially hinders progress in research, and perpetuates gender differences at the workplace.

This inequality stands in stark contrast to the fact that boys and girls begin school with the same mathematical abilities. A gender gap begins to emerge only after boys and girls start learning the subject formally in school, that is, during the first year. These are the findings of a study published recently in *Nature* by researchers in France. Understanding this data and the underlying reasons are crucial as they can help policymakers intervene at the right time and in the right ways to narrow the gap.

Findings of the study

In the past, educationists, economists, sociologists, psychologists, and others have conducted several studies. One study in the U.S. showed that a maths gender gap favouring boys emerged within the first few years of schooling. Another study that followed 2,633 children in France found that a maths gender gap was absent in kindergarten but became favourable to boys by ages 7-8.

The latest study in *Nature* reinforces

what other studies have found in the past, but by using "an exceptionally large and exhaustive dataset," according to the researchers. The researchers studied 26.53 lakh children aged 5-7 years in France over four years. They analysed four consecutive cohorts from 2018 to 2022. All these children took the EvalAide, a nationwide battery of tests given to first and second grade students to assess their language and maths abilities.

When boys and girls entered school, their average maths performance was nearly identical in 2018. There were more boys clustered among the top and bottom performers. However, just after four months of schooling, the researchers found a small but highly significant gap emerging, which favoured boys. By the next year, there were twice as many boys as girls among the top-5% of performers.

Importantly, this gap was found in every cohort across the four consecutive years. This meant that it was not due to any specific societal, economic, or curricular changes in a particular year. The gap was found in each region of France, in schools serving communities at both high and low socio-economical levels, in private as well as public schools, and regardless of family composition.

Curiously, the gap between boys and girls was wider if the children were from high-income families – a phenomenon not found for language. It was also larger among high-income families where both parents held scientific occupations.

Analysing the gender gap

Since the children had similar abilities when they started formal education, we can conclude from the data that the gap is not related to any fundamental gender

differences in aptitudes. So what explains the gap?

First, a few caveats. Researchers write that since the data is descriptive in nature, it can't be used to pin down causes. Second, a study conducted at intervals prevents any evaluation of the potentially continuous effect of school exposure or the effect of vacations. Third, the tests were not strictly identical at all points of time during the study. Fourth, the data is limited to one country.

Nevertheless, they offer some explanations consistent with their findings.

Maths problems are solved in a particular time frame and in a competitive setting, and these are conditions that girls are taught to fear. Their consequent anxiety could be exacerbating the gap. The researchers say this explanation is congruent with their finding that greater test difficulty enhances the gender gap.

Stereotypes that boys are better at maths could also be widening the gap. The researchers write that "maths-related activities or exercises (for example, counting and subtracting) start to be more clearly identified as belonging to the maths domain" in primary school. They believe that this "sudden labelling of maths-related activities as 'maths' (whereas language activities start earlier in preschool) might give space for gender stereotypes surrounding maths to emerge, to be internalised by children and, eventually, to affect their self-concept and performance."

The attitudes of primary school teachers may be a factor as well. For example, teachers may encourage girls to read more and boys to do more division

and subtraction. That is, they may attribute intellect to boys and diligence to girls. Parents may also have such assumptions about aptitudes.

Suggested interventions

As the problem begins after children start schooling, the researchers believe improving teacher training will be a crucial intervention. If teachers are encouraged to question girls and boys equally often during maths and science classes, and also to focus equally on the talents and efforts of children of both genders, it could lead to improved outcomes.

Also, if teacher training in maths is increased to improve their confidence and interest in this topic, it could effectively reduce the gap. This, the researchers say, is especially true of a country such as France, where most primary school teachers are female.

Interventions could also be directed towards children. For boys and girls to become convinced that maths is worth the effort, they should be exposed to both male and female role models with whom they can identify.

The researchers also suggest that girls should be provided with ways to cope with anxiety related to competition. They suggest implementing self-affirmation tasks. They also express belief that accentuating an incremental view of intelligence – that is, emphasising that abilities and intelligence are malleable and can be developed through effort and learning – would help.

In short, it takes just a few months for a gender gap to emerge, so quick interventions could help close the gap effectively. **W/ U**

Editor's TAKE

Language imposition row

Maharashtra withdraws its resolution to implement 3-language policy after huge backlash in the state

The Maharashtra Government has withdrawn two Government resolutions (GRs) related to the implementation of the three-language policy in schools, following a fierce backlash from opposition parties and civil society over what was perceived as the imposition of Hindi. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced that a new committee headed by noted educationist Dr Narendra Jadhav would re-examine the language policy in detail and submit a report within three months. Until then, both resolutions issued on April 16 and June 17 have been scrapped.

The controversy first erupted when the Government issued a GR in April making Hindi a compulsory third language for students in Classes 1 to 5 in English and Marathi medium schools. Opposition parties, including the Shiv Sena (UBT), Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction), and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, termed the policy an attempt to erode regional identity and promote a cultural homogenisation under the guise of national integration. The resistance to Hindi is not unique to Maharashtra; southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh have historically pushed back against any perceived attempt to promote Hindi at the expense of their native languages. This opposition is rooted in a mix of cultural pride, historical memory, and concerns about linguistic equity. In states like Tamil Nadu, anti-Hindi agitations of the 1960s left a deep imprint, shaping the political and cultural outlook for generations. In Maharashtra, the assertion of Marathi identity has always played a central role in political discourse. Any attempt to dilute this through what is seen as a "national" agenda often provokes strong emotional and political responses. The core concern in these regions is that Hindi, already dominant in the central Government and national media, is being imposed through educational policies that ignore local linguistic contexts. Critics argue that while students in non-Hindi-speaking states are expected to learn Hindi, there is no reciprocal encouragement for Hindi-speaking students to learn regional languages like Marathi, Tamil, or Kannada. This one-sided policy direction fosters a sense of marginalisation and cultural erosion. At its heart, this controversy is a reflection of India's enduring challenge: how to balance national integration with linguistic diversity.

Language in India is more than a means of communication; it is an emblem of identity, history, and emotional belonging. The issue is not with learning Hindi per se, but with the manner in which it is introduced and the lack of choice it implies. Voluntary, interest-driven language learning is welcome. Coercive mandates, however, tend to backfire. Going forward, Maharashtra's decision to put the policy on hold and form an expert panel is a step in the right direction. It acknowledges the need for dialogue, consultation, and a broader consensus on something as sensitive as language education. India's strength lies in its linguistic diversity. Efforts to unify the country through language should celebrate that plurality rather than suppress it. As the panel led by Dr Jadhav begins its work, the hope is that it will recommend a policy that upholds the rights of every child to learn the language he wants.

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Curriculum Vital

For skill-based education to succeed, the implementation of a policy is as important as the course design, says **Neena Jha**

The National Education Policy or NEP, approved by the Union Cabinet in 2020, led to a strong discussion around competency-based education. There is a realisation that students should learn how to apply their knowledge in real life. In a world constantly marked by transition — climate change, rapid innovations in technology and an ever-evolving culture of work — this warrants a rethink of how education can prepare children for the future.

Recognising this need, the NEP envisioned a school education ecosystem wherein children don't just learn but learn how to learn. Thus the shift from content-focussed curriculum and assessments to competency-based curriculum. It mandates that skills and values be identified across all domains and stages of learning, and assessment tools aligned with learning outcomes, capabilities and dispositions.

The NCERT drafted national curricular frameworks for the foundational stage (NCF-FS) and school education (NCF-SE). At the core is this movement from knowledge to competency and skills. While there are ongoing efforts to implement this process through bodies such as the National Assessment Centre PARAKH at NCERT and by states, a critical piece in this shift is that of curriculum and how it is implemented in classrooms.

The idea that education should focus on competencies and prepare children for real-life situations is not new. In 1899, in the book *The School and Society*, John Dewey argued that education served a purpose beyond individualistic development of a child; it was socially significant and included a



process of learning how to live.

Over the next century, education reforms in various countries including India conceptualised learning within the wider local and global context. But what came to the fore was a disconnect between classroom and real life.

The effects of this disconnect have been stark — students getting through primary school without basic reading, writing, speaking, or arithmetic skills; lack of focus on the socio-emotional well-being of students leading to adverse impact on their mental health and early burnout; lack of interpersonal skills and so on.

Here is an attempt to unpack some crucial changes in curricu-

la that can enable the shift to competency-focussed classrooms and, consequently, skills at the centre of student learning.

First, the leveraging of local and regional contexts as learning resources. With the NCF providing guidance on mapping competencies and skills as learning outcomes, there is a need to further contextualise these. For instance, Nagaland, which has an abundance of natural resources, cultural diversity and challenging terrain, would have a different lesson plan and classroom pedagogy compared to Haryana, a landlocked state with a strong agrarian economy and vibrant sporting culture.

Second, acknowledging the role of the teacher in translating curricular goals to learning outcomes. Knowledge-based, content-focussed training modules are not adequate to prepare teachers for multidisciplinary, skill-based, competency-focussed teaching. For instance, it will not be sufficient for maths teachers to know about the latest pedagogical innovation or teaching resource; they would need to convey the use of mathematical concepts to analyse survey data and manage finances.

Third, finding ways for curriculum and assessments to actively inform one another. Despite multiple efforts, the use of assessment data to inform class-

room pedagogy and practices is limited. There is a tendency to represent assessment data in highly complex formats that often do not speak to teachers and other stakeholders. Going back to the purpose of assessments is critical. Teachers often gauge whether students are able to comprehend a lesson with simple, intuitive techniques — a quiz in the middle of a lesson, peer teaching or even the look on students' faces. For competency-based education, re-linking assessments to continuous classroom processes is imperative.

Fourth, conceptualising monitoring as a part of the implementation process. We must balance administrative and academic monitoring without neglecting either one. A comprehensive strategy would include self-reflection along with peer and supervisory support.

Fifth, while designing curricula and planning for implementation, it may be helpful to reflect on whether it offers children a blend of what they know, see, experience and what they do not. Does it view parents and families as silent spectators or active contributors to learning? What kind of scope does it create for children to learn from the community and bring back those learnings into the classroom?

American theorist Russel Ackoff once said, "A system is never the sum of its parts, it is the product of their interaction". How we design and manoeuvre the interaction between policy, processes, practice and people shall craft the story of how children experience the curriculum.

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Language Lessons: There's No Replacing English

To truly realise NEP's vision, a two language policy of English + Mother Tongue is better than GOI's hasty mother-tongue directive. Without English, children will be at a disadvantage in higher education & jobs

Ra Shhiva



The strongest roots of culture grow in the soil of a world-class education. In its pursuit to implement New Education Policy 2020, GOI in May issued a circular reaffirming that primary education ought to be delivered in pupils' mother tongues. The argument is that learning in a native language improves comprehension and fosters critical thinking. Yet the directive had an unrealistically tight deadline for implementation - to commence by July. It has plunged schools into disarray, raising a critical question: is this a progressive step or a political tool that betrays India's future?

Crisis in the classroom | The policy's immediate effect is to spark chaos. Consider a Delhi classroom with children speaking Tamil, Telugu and Bhojpuri. Teachers are suddenly expected to deliver mathematics or science lessons in three languages simultaneously - a wholly impractical task that inevitably entrenches inequality. This is compounded by a nationwide shortage of qualified teachers. As a result, teachers often default to the dominant regional language, typically Hindi in north India, effectively excluding those whose mother tongues are not accommodated. This is not just a logistical failure; it is a pedagogical one. With an ambiguous policy on assessment, children are likely to be taught in one language but tested in another, creating a 'trapdoor' foundation built on confusion rather than comprehension.

Betrayal of parental aspiration | This chaos is a blow to the aspirations of millions of Indian families who make considerable financial sacrifices for private CBSE schools. A robust English-medium education to them is not a luxury but an essential tool for their children to get ahead, excel in national exams and compete in a globalised world. Priority ought to be to address the stark inequality between the child who accesses ChatGPT and the one still struggling over a Google search. Instead, GOI's rushed mandate disrupts functional schools and overlooks the real crisis of educational disparity.

Own goal for India's global dreams | This policy is an act of generational economic sabotage, implemented when India's demographic dividend presents a once-in-a-



generation opportunity. With a vast youth population requiring skills for an AI-driven global landscape, every resource ought to be directed towards future readiness. Today, many nations have begun imparting AI education at the primary level; India, too, can prioritise this. Yet, the latest directive squanders energy and funding on building a Tower of Babel in classrooms, putting children at a disadvantage in the global race for talent.

Insult to federal fabric | The top-down approach undermines the very idea of India. For the Centre to impose a sweeping language policy without consultation dismisses states' authority, entitled to an equal voice on education. This is troubling given mounting criticism that Hindi has subsumed distinct languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili, Rajasthani, and Chhattisgarhi - languages classified as its dialects in the census. The policy accelerates this erosion. Languages that states cherish

are rendered to the margins in their own schools - a slow, policy-driven extinction. For parents whose mother tongue is Tulu or Gondi, the 'illusion of choice' is cruel. By coercing adoption of a dominant state language, the policy paves the way for long-term demographic re-engineering: a Kannadiga child in MP, taught in Hindi for convenience, may eventually identify as a Hindi speaker, distorting future linguistic census data.

Misunderstanding Indian identity | The Indian mind is not a monolingual box but a sprawling Banyan tree. Roots of the mother tongue provide cultural sustenance, branches of regional languages reach out to neighbours, and the canopy of a global language engages with the world. Our genius is our ability to navigate this complexity. The new policy seeks to replace this vibrant, living organism with a collection of isolated, sterile, potted plants, impoverishing the very soul of our pluralistic identity.

Bilingual model's better | The solution to this manufactured crisis is not to discard mother tongues but to adopt a proven, equitable alternative: A bilingual model successful in many multilingual nations. This is how NEP 2020's vision can be truly realised. The first step is for schools to produce bilingual textbooks. For pupils in UP, lessons could appear in English on one page and Hindi on the opposite. For Tamil pupils, English and Tamil, and so on. Imagine a textbook with two columns - English on one side, and the pupil's native language (whether Tamil, Bhojpuri, or any of India's myriad tongues spoken by over 10,000 people) on the other. Such an approach would both preserve India's cultural heritage and equip children for the world.

This model would ensure pupils learn core subjects through their mother tongue, fostering classroom equality and gain competency in English essential for higher education and employment. It affirms linguistic identity and unlocks opportunity - what NEP claims to champion. Without such an approach, the policy will favour Hindi, marginalise other language speakers. Prioritising linguistic purity won't create jobs. It's essential to press pause on a governing philosophy that places ideological haste over national competence. Children's future should not be sacrificed at the altar of ideology.

The writer is an advocate at Madras HC and founder of Citizens for Law and Democracy

7/14

Dummy schools or a meaningful college library



ANUJ PATKAR
SOCIOLOGIST

EVERY year around this time, our colleges become vibrant, alive and festive, as young and fresh students take admission, radiate their life energy, enter the realm of higher education and undertake a new journey. Yet, this is also the time when every sensible and sincere teacher becomes introspective and begins to reflect on the challenges ahead. After all, it is not easy to orient these young students, decondition their minds and invite them to the realm of higher learning. Let us understand these challenges.

First, it is important to realise that a college cannot be seen in isolation because the fate of higher education depends on the quality of school education. We see the growing devaluation of schools. How ironic is it that we have accepted the reality of 'dummy schools'. In fact, we seem to be quite comfortable with the death of meaningful schooling, and simultaneously the mushrooming of coaching centres in every

locality. In a way, it is difficult to dispute the harsh truth: coaching centre strategists have replaced good teachers; strategic/instrumental learning attracts more than what good schools used to provide — a creative mix of science and arts, or sports and theatre; 'success manuals' have displaced good books; and above all, a sustained and non-utilitarian relationship with good pedagogues is becoming increasingly rare.

Accept it: the students who are joining our colleges, bearing exceptions, have already been conditioned by the ethos of this sort of strategic/instrumental learning. No wonder it becomes exceedingly difficult for them to accept and internalise what the ethos of higher education demands — the habit of visiting the library frequently and reading original texts and classics; the creative skill of writing educative and interpretative essays; and above all, the art of concentrated listening, particularly when the professor, free from dictating notes for exams, delivers a rigorous lecture.

Second, these youngsters are growing up in an environment that is not particularly conducive to the celebration of critical thinking. In fact, as the rationale of market fundamentalism has begun to colonise the everyday life-world, the meaning of education has altered drastically. Quite often, it is



FLAME: youngsters are growing up in an environment that is not conducive to critical thinking, says...

reduced into a 'skill' the neoliberal market demands to create and train the workforce. And one's 'success' is measured in terms of one's job profile in this techno-economic empire.

No wonder it is becoming increasingly difficult to convince this generation of young students that not everything is for sale, and the higher objective of education is to become an alert and sensitive citizen who can think critically, raise new questions, see the world beyond the glare of technocratic reasoning and monetary transaction and imagine a just humane world.

**If our education
refuses to sensitise
students, it
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graduates.**

At a time when there is an obsessive chase for sophisticated/technocratic knowledge systems like artificial intelligence, robotics, data science and machine learning, it is not easy to convince a young student to visit the library, borrow the books of, say, Marx, Gandhi and Ambedkar, study these texts mindfully and write a paper with critical insights that might even unsettle the status quo. But then, this is precisely the challenge good teachers at any social sciences and humanities need to undertake in order to make it clear that education is not merely a training for future jobs.

And third, the cultivation of critical thinking is deeply related to the moral/ethical question confronting us, particularly at this moment when the cult of violence implicit in the all-pervading war, militarism, rising authoritarianism and climate emergency has begun to pose a threat to the dream of a peaceful, egalitarian and ecologically sustainable world.

Can the youngsters be altogether indifferent to this perennial moral question — the kind of life they should live, the kind of politics they should prefer or the kind of relationship between technology and environment they should cultivate? And can the teachers keep pretending that their teaching is 'value neutral', and hence, they are not supposed to discuss anything beyond the 'official syllabus'? In fact, if our education refuses to address these ethical issues and sensitize young students, it creates subtle and profound only a bunch of soulless graduates.

However, I have no hesitation in saying that it is not as easy to create and nurture a meaningful learning environment in our colleges. Think of an average undergraduate college in the country. Empty classrooms, demotivated teachers, poor infrastructure, petty politics, the ritualisation of examinations and the mass production of intellectually impoverished graduates:

yes, we see the trivialisation of higher education.

"I visit my college only to mark my attendance as students hardly come," a college teacher from West Bengal once told me. But then, if we think of elite colleges in big cities, we see yet another kind of obstacle. In the age of 'ranking' and 'branding', as a bright young teacher from a prestigious college in Delhi once told me, the pedagogical art of intense and meaningful teaching has been severely devalued because it doesn't help the institution improve its ranking as it cannot be measured and quantified.

Indeed, as yet another teacher from a reputed private college in Bengaluru informed me, she has been asked to polish her papers, organise a couple of conferences in one semester and bring more students in the department so that these measurable 'achievements' can improve the ranking agencies. Yet, these days, except qualitatively enriched meaningful teaching and engaged pedagogy, everything that is quantifiable matters from the citation index to the mass production of 'research papers'. Furthermore, in these tough times, when academic freedom is in danger, not many teachers are willing to take any risk. As obedient soldiers, they just follow the official curriculum.

Indeed, it's tough to send these young college students

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Hindi not a must

Maharashtra rollback a message for restraint

THE Maharashtra government's decision to scrap teaching of Hindi as the third language in primary classes comes amid the estranged Thackeray cousins joining forces against the move, and opposition within the ruling Mahayuti ranks. A panel would now determine from which class the three-language policy should be implemented and outline the options for students. "Our policy," Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said, "remains Marathi-centric and Marathi student-centric." The Maha Vikas Aghadi regime led by Uddhav Thackeray, he claimed, had accepted the three-language formula report of the Mashelkar committee without questioning it. Denying it, Uddhav termed the rollback a victory for the Marathi *manos*. The objection, he said, was to the forced imposition of Hindi, not the language itself.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandates learning three languages in school. States can choose any two Indian languages — Hindi is just one of the many options — and one foreign language. Though NEP 2020 appears to provide more flexibility than the previous policies, the dynamics of its implementation have triggered protests. There are concerns over Hindi being prioritised as the default option for the second Indian language, like in Maharashtra, apart from the native language. The rollback by the BJP-led government could lead to a pushback in other states too. Tamil Nadu has vociferously opposed any attempt to sneak in Hindi through the backdoor.

If a three-language formula aims to bring people from different linguistic regions closer, it can't be empty rhetoric. Parliament was recently informed that several North Indian states have refrained from teaching any South Indian language as the third language. Hindi, like English, is already a link language for so many Indians — by choice. That choice remains open for all. A forceful imposition is not the language India understands or desires. ✍️/✍️

Reserved faculty posts are still vacant and out of reach

India's commitment to social justice, enshrined in the Constitution, mandates equitable representation to marginalised communities in public institutions. Reservation policies for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) aim to address historical inequalities with a quota of 15%, 7.5%, 27%, and 10% of posts, respectively. Yet, central universities and premier institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, the Indian Institutes of Management and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences consistently fail to fill reserved faculty positions, shifting the focus to this constitutional mandate. Importantly, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led political dispensation has often promised to abide by the agenda of social justice to make India's institutions more inclusive and democratic. In this case, what are the systemic barriers that prevent these institutions from enabling inclusive representation?

A persistent gap

In data presented by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in the Lok Sabha in April 2021, there were significant vacancies in reserved faculty posts across 45 central universities: 2,389 for SCs, 1,199 for STs, and 4,251 for OBCs. More recent reports suggest that while some progress has been made with a special drive for recruitment in certain universities (Jawahar Lal Nehru University and University of Delhi), the gap persists. A University Grants Commission (UGC) report (2023) indicated that nearly 30% of reserved teaching posts in central universities remain unfilled, particularly at senior levels such as associate professor and professor.

This shortfall is in contrast to other public sectors (railways and banks), where reserved posts at the lower levels (Group C and D) are often filled. However, senior positions of power and privileges are still out of reach for marginalised social groups. In academia too, the senior positions (vice chancellors, directors, principals and professors) have been dominated



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Central universities and premier institutions must align their recruitment practices with the goal of social justice

by unreserved categories, highlighting a structural disparity in higher education.

Systemic barriers

Several factors contribute to the non-fulfilment of reserved faculty posts. First, central universities and institutes of national importance operate with significant autonomy, sometimes insulating them from governmental oversight. While the UGC mandates adherence to reservation policies, enforcement varies. Vice-Chancellors and selection committees, often drawn from dominant social groups, show a lack of urgency or accountability to prioritise the social justice agenda.

Second, the UGC's shift in 2018 to the "13-point roster system" for faculty recruitment has been contentious. Unlike the earlier 200-point system, which treated the entire institution as a unit for calculating reservations, the new system considers individual departments as units. In smaller departments with limited posts (for example, six faculty positions), only one post may be reserved for OBCs, and none for STs until 14 posts are created. This has significantly reduced the number of reserved positions, particularly for STs, prompting legal challenges and protests.

Third, allegations of bias in the selection process persist. Qualified candidates from marginalised communities often face rejection under vague criteria such as "candidate not found suitable". Such practices can discourage talented academics from SC, ST, and OBC backgrounds from pursuing university careers, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion. A study by the Ambedkar University Faculty Association in 2022 highlighted that over 60% of reserved post vacancies in central universities were attributed to such discretionary rejections.

Finally, institutional practices sometimes undermine fairness. Reports of biased appointments influenced by political affiliations or ideological alignment raise concerns about transparency. Though successive governments, both Congress and BJP, have championed social

justice, the gap between policy rhetoric and implementation remains wide.

Addressing the challenge

Filling reserved faculty posts requires a multi-pronged approach. First, stricter enforcement of UGC guidelines is essential, supplementing the values of social justice. Regular audits and public reporting of reservation compliance could hold institutions accountable. Second, revisiting the 13-point roster system to ensure that it aligns with constitutional mandates is critical. Hearings by the Supreme Court of India, that are ongoing on this issue, may provide clarity.

Third, universities must address biases in recruitment by enabling diversity in selection committees and standardising evaluation criteria. Training programmes to sensitise academic leaders to social justice principles could foster inclusivity. Finally, it requires proactive outreach and political enforcement. Social justice should not remain a mere political slogan. The ruling class must ensure its effective implementation in every institution.

The persistent vacancy of reserved faculty posts undermines India's vision of an inclusive education system. Universities are not merely centres of learning but also spaces for social transformation. Ensuring equitable representation in faculty positions is not just a legal obligation but also a moral imperative to reflect India's diverse society.

As the National Education Policy 2020 emphasises multidisciplinary and inclusive education, central universities must align their recruitment practices with the goals of ensuring more faculty members from the marginalised social groups. Only concerted action that combines substantive policy reform, greater institutional accountability towards social justice and political vision of the ruling class to make public institutions more inclusive can bridge the gap between the social justice mandate and the current hesitation of the academic institutions towards it.

The new paradigm of holistic education

SECOND Opinion

Indian students were known for their rote learning prowess and their genius capabilities to manoeuvre through theory lessons. The education system pushed such students by awarding them with good marks.

However, with changing times, it dawned upon educators the fact that just theoretical education will not be enough for the students who are stepping into the 21st century, which is more advanced than at any time ever.

The next generation needs to be empowered by holistic education where they not only learn about core subjects but also learn soft skills and empathy, and develop a skillset that will be required in the future. Thus, multiple courses were introduced by schools to prepare the students for a future that will be considerably different when they step into the professional world. Interestingly, International Baccalaureate or IB programmes offer a curriculum that is rooted in curiosity.

It is a course designed for the future and does not even require any specific programmes to cater to futuristic needs. Here, teachers don't just share theoretical information but share knowledge; students too do their research for better clarity of the topic. It leads to a meaningful connection where both draw from real-world contexts to learn and teach complex top-

ics. This deep involvement is only possible through experiential learning, where students learn through hands-on activities, field visits, and role plays and thus understand the concepts in such a manner that they create lasting memories. It is difficult to create a rigid curriculum for such classes since the teacher will have to create a flow in tandem with the knowledge the students possess.

While the students' age, developmental level, exposure, IQ, and EQ will play a crucial role here, with every class they skilfully navigate the curriculum and apply the knowledge in ways that have never been thought of before. The inquiry-based learning pedagogy of the IB empowers the learners to evolve in the right direction in a world that is dynamic and changing every day.

Teachers can become their anchor and help the students to think in smart ways. This can be done by challenging the students with problems and helping them in analysing and solving the problems. Instead of showing the students how to solve a problem, the focus here is on the students themselves working towards finding the solution to this problem.

Real-world scenarios can be the best examples to understand many concepts. Teachers are the right people to build a mindset that is more entrepreneurial. These creative students, who have been regularly solving problems since their school days, will think like entrepreneurs and create more employment rather than looking for one. As the students

learn skills that will help them in the real world, they will be able to compete with the best. This is the right way to prepare students to succeed in the global workforce. Introducing advanced technology at an early age will make the students comfortable with it and also sow the seeds for innovation early on.

A focus on science and technology will build a strong foundation for engineering and maths, apart from creating a scientific approach to technology. Paralleled with a conducive learning environment where students share their ideas, this will not just boost their creativity but also their confidence and make them self-assured individuals. The culture of innovation will motivate all students and the values of inclusivity will create a learning environment that is accessible to everyone.

Ultimately, creating such an ecosystem is only possible when all stakeholders work together. As teachers inculcate teamwork and communication skills, parents too will need to step up and support their child's education. The parents must change their viewpoint and understand the benefits of this futuristic style of education.

To take innovation-based learning to the next level, Government support too is necessary. They must create policies that promote invention and creativity. Such an approach will help us prepare the students for careers in modern industries and prepare them for any surprises that the future may hold.



SANAMDEEP
CHADHA

(The writer is an educator and education reformist.
Views are personal)

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NEP 2020: Unfolding of three quiet revolutions



ANURAG BEHAR

Five years have passed since the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was unveiled, a document that intends to reshape India's education system over a 15-20 year horizon. Two of these first five years were consumed by the pandemic, forcing schools to shut down and governments to scramble for solutions to keep learning alive, and then later to recover lost learning. Despite this disruption, this last half-decade has seen significant developments - some promising, some contested, and some quietly transformative. As a member of the NEP drafting committee, I have watched these unfold with both hope and impatience.

The policy's vision is bold: a fundamental reimagining of school education in India. That is equally true for higher education, but this piece is focused on schools. Like any long-term roadmap, it has set milestones. The unfulfilled potential of the NEP is reflected in those cases where these milestones have not yet been met.

Take, for instance, the idea of clustering public schools - an administrative

structural improvement meant to enable 10-15 schools to share resources like labs, playgrounds, and specialist teachers in arts or physical education. This would not only have optimised scarce resources but would also have improved equity. Simply because given the small sizes of many of our primary schools, it is not possible at all to have all these resources in each school. Yet, only a handful of states have made progress here.

Similarly, board examinations continue to remain high-stakes, memory-driven affairs - across too much of the country, with few boards changing and improving assessment to measure genuine learning. The transition from school to college is still a maze of entrance exams, a stress-inducing ordeal for students. NEP 2020 has addressed all these issues, with a clear and practical approach and architecture, yet implementation has been at variable pace across states and different institutions involved. But since this is about implementation, and in a practical sense we are only three years into the implementation phase, we can be hopeful that the laggards will catch up.

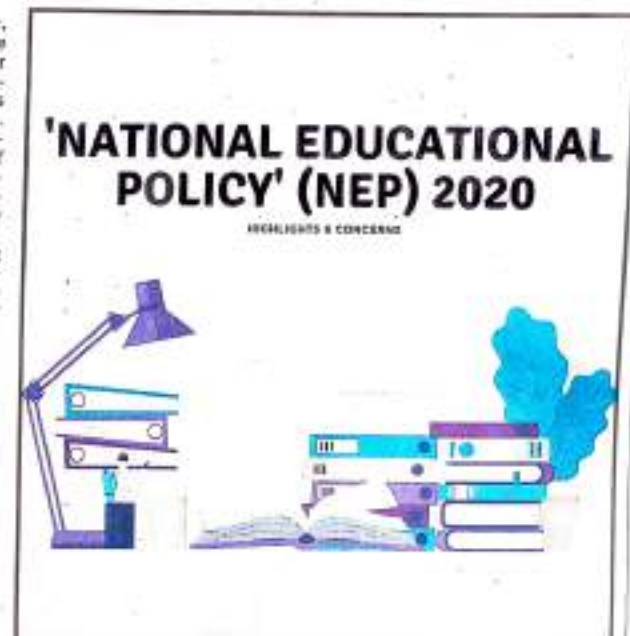
Then there have been the controversies - most of them unnecessary, often stemming from misreadings or deliberate distortions of the policy. The three-language formula, for example, has been a feature of Indian education since 1968. If anything, NEP 2020 made it more flexible, and responsive to local and regional preferences. Yet, it became a political flashpoint, with critics either unaware of the policy's actual provisions or projecting their own anxieties onto it. Similarly, claims that NEP promotes privatisation are baffling to anyone who has read the document, which explicitly emphasises strengthening public education. Such debates distract from the real work at hand.

Beneath the noise, however, three under-recognised shifts are unfolding - changes that will, over time, redefine Indian school education. The first is the system wide focus on early childhood education (ECE). Research has long shown that ages 3-8 are critical for every dimension of the development of the child - physical, cognitive, social, ethical and emotional. Yet India's system historically neglected this phase.

NEP 2020 changed that, spurring curricular transformation, infrastructure upgrades, and appropriate teacher development and support for ECE. Everywhere in the country you can hear the buzz of early childhood education, including in the vast public 'anganwadi' system. This shift, while in its early stages, is laying the real foundation for a truly equitable and effective system. Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and homes will benefit most from these changes - if we don't let the momentum slip, and so we must not.

The second - and perhaps equally foundational - change is the push for mother tongue-based education in gaining early literacy. Decades of evidence show children learn best in a familiar language, yet India has not implemented this approach, exacerbating the crisis that we have in basic education. NEP 2020's clear use of familiar languages to gain literacy is potentially a game-changer. Its overall approach effectively tackles the multilingual reality of our classrooms. As states implement this approach, along with other key measures of the policy in foundational literacy and numeracy and teacher support, we are likely to see improvement in basic educational outcomes.

The third, and potentially even more far-reaching, reform is in teacher education. Our teacher education system has been marred by



poor quality and corruption for decades. Almost all efforts to improve have come to a naught. In a very real sense this state of teacher education has been at the bottom of our troubles in school education. The NEP has confronted all of the issues in teacher education frontally. By introducing four-year integrated programmes in top universities and making them the benchmark qualification, and moving the entire teacher education system to that circular approach, combined with decisive regulatory reforms, we are truly at the cusp of a new era. The job is not yet done, but the right start

has been made. This will change our education at the core.

No policy as vast as NEP 2020 can be flawless, nor can progress be linear. But amid the as yet unmet promises and needless controversies, these three quiet revolutions - early childhood focus, mother tongue-based learning, and teacher education reform - hold the seeds of a more equitable and effective system. The next five years must see faster execution, but we are on the way.

(The writer is CEO, Azim Premji Foundation. He was a member of the NEP 2020 drafting committee.)

The Northeast is falling behind in education

Empty classrooms

NORTH BY NORTHEAST

SANJOY HAZARIKA

I recently went for a hike in the countryside near Mairang, a town of around 35,000 persons with small streets and a bustling market about 45 kilometres from Shillong, Meghalaya's capital. The glittering countryside seemed to shine a brighter hue of green as a gentle drizzle sprayed hills and narrow valleys. Farmers had started to plant rice in slushy fields.

My destination was Kylian Rock, a breathtaking, massive, round, smooth granite formation in the middle of a tree-packed landscape. The combination of mist, drizzle and foliage made one expect a hobbit or two to pop up in this Shire. But this column is not about the place, it is about a haunting image en route that has stayed with me.

On that trip, I saw two young boys, who appeared to be in their early teens, herding cattle in the rain along the roadside. It reminded me of a similar sight on a journey a few years ago while heading to the site of a clash on the Assam-Meghalaya border. On our way, my fellow traveller, Patricia Mukhim, the redoubtable editor of *The Shillong Times*, and I saw a number of young boys tending to cattle in the fields. This was a pretty common sight across the state, I remember Patricia saying, and an indicator of poor education indices — of children out of school.

The recent journey provoked me to look at a recent review of the status of school education facilitated by Pratham, a highly-reputed non-governmental organisation. The 2024 *Annual Survey of Education Report*, a survey done every two years, carries a multi-coloured, state-wise map which paints a compelling picture of the existing quality of education. On a map that shows the percentage of government school children enrolled in Class II who can at least read words, there were three states which scored 90% and below. These were Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.

We will review some disturbing trends in the northeastern region that the ASER study turned up. Only two states, Sikkim and Mizoram, score between 61% to 70% among children who were interviewed to see if they could read words. In four years, Assam's percentage on this single data strip fell from 48% in 2018 to 36% in 2022 but showed an uptick to 39.6% last year. Meghalaya, on the other hand, did not fare that badly, and its figures went from 46% in 2018 to 47.3% in 2022 and up to 59.5% in the latest survey.

ASER statistics also underline the devastating effect that Covid-19 had on educational institutions, especially on students, pointing to a drop in many states during those horror years of 2020 and 2021 when schools and universities



Sorry state

were shut and work from home became the norm.

Pratham's analysis showed that while school enrolment for children aged 7 to 16 years remained robust in Meghalaya with a continued preference for government schools, the situation was challenging among older age groups. Enrolment figures for children aged 15 to 16 years declined slightly, particularly among girls. Encouragingly, the dropout rate among girls aged 11 to 14 years decreased compared to previous years.

Despite these gains, infrastructure in Meghalaya remains poor. Recent conversations with district officials indicate that poverty is still a critical hurdle to sending children to school beyond the primary level. One official said that another problem was infrastructure, with some remote villages lacking connections to linking roads. There were no bus services to take children to the middle and secondary schools, which can be from five to ten kilometres away from their villages.

"The children visit the primary schools even when they've passed out because they want to be in that kind of atmosphere, they don't want to stay at home," one officer told me, noting that some of these schools were in cramped single-roof structures. Meghalaya's education minister, Rakkham Sangma, suffered acute embarrassment when it was reported that some schools in the Garo Hills (which is his home turf as well as that of the chief minister, Conrad Sangma) were being run in rooms no bigger than garages, "dilapidated and susceptible to floods".

While ASER noted some positives, the sharpest indictment of the state's schooling system came in the form of the Central government's Performance Grading Index, which puts Meghalaya at the very bottom of the national table. The PGI is a nationwide rigorous grading system that reviews no less than 73 indicators across categories and domains, including access, infrastructure, teacher training,

equity and learning outcomes.

The Northeast has not done well overall. Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, which were at Meghalaya's level earlier, have improved a notch and reached the second-lowest tier. Sikkim was a cut above that, while the top position was secured by Chandigarh. Even a state like Mizoram, which is constantly placed at the top of the literacy rates in the country, stumbles when it comes to the PGI report. It may have recently flaunted its status of being a "fully literate state" but the PGI report underlines the reality that literacy does not mean the same thing as education.

Conrad Sangma is an affable, popular politician with a remarkable connection with people and an influential social media following. He needs to move with clarity and firmness in this sector. Meghalaya's biggest budgetary allocation is for education, youth and sports; he is rolling out a chief minister's scholarship programme that is aimed at reaching 80,000 youth. But something is clearly amiss. Rural schools, not the urban centres, need maximum attention with regard to access and infrastructure so that they can draw and retain students.

In the midst of all this, Meghalaya is bidding to make itself an attractive tourist destination. There is a package for everything — for those who want to beat the heat of the Indian plains; a haven for adventure lovers with river rafting, nature trails, waterfalls; there are quaint homestays and cute cafes; for music aficionados, the likes of Ed Sheeran have come to perform. However, the state cannot entrust its future to the basket of tourism which meets a fraction of its revenue needs.

Meghalaya is now in middle age, having passed 60 years of its creation. Its government must prioritise the delivery of access to education, better health and livelihoods. These three, the trinity, go together. Only then will the ASER and PGI rankings improve as the vulnerable, including young herders, join classrooms.

Sanjoy Hazarika is a writer who specialises on the Northeast and travels extensively in the region

7/2/25

Agricultural education in India

PROF BINOY
K & MEDHI

A dynamic convergence of policy, innovation and global collaboration is redefining agricultural education to empower India's future-ready agri-leaders.

Agricultural education in India is undergoing a pivotal transformation, primarily driven by the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Spearheaded by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the University Grants Commission (UGC), this reform is focused on addressing long-standing challenges while seizing new opportunities. With oversight of 74 agricultural universities, ICAR plays a central role in aligning these institutions with the NEP's objectives, introducing key reforms aimed at improving education quality and aligning it with global standards.

A key element of NEP 2020 is the overhaul of curricula in agricultural universities to promote interdisciplinary learning, integrate technology, and offer flexible degree programmes with multiple entry and exit options. This approach aims to equip students with the diverse skills needed in a rapidly evolving agricultural sector. However, several challenges persist. Many institutions continue to rely on outdated curricula focused on traditional farming, with limited inclusion of emerging technologies and sustainable practices. A 2019 survey by the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) found that over 60% of agricultural universities had not updated their curricula to reflect current scientific and technological advancements.

Infrastructure gaps and faculty shortages further hinder progress. As of September 2023, the Orissa University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) had six of its 19 dean positions vacant for over two years, and its College of Agriculture in Bhubaneswar operated with only 67 faculty members out of a sanctioned 105. Mangalore University faced similar issues, with

more than half of its 273 teaching posts unfilled. States like Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Telangana report comparable faculty shortages. Nationally, 27% of the 18,940 sanctioned teaching positions in 46 central universities remained vacant as of July 2024. A March 2025 parliamentary report further revealed that 56.18% of professor-level posts were unfilled in top institutions including the IITs, IIMs, NITs, and IISERs. A 2024 ICAR report highlighted efforts to integrate digital tools and advanced technologies into agricultural education. However, many institutions still face considerable obstacles, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to high-tech laboratories, and a shortage of trained personnel to operate advanced equipment. These limitations have restricted the adoption of modern technologies like drones and artificial intelligence in the academic setting. The UGC has introduced several initiatives, including the revised Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP) and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), to promote NEP reforms. However, a 2025 *India Today* report revealed that many institutions have been slow to implement these reforms due to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, resistance to change, and poor coordination between central and state authorities. While ICAR and UGC have made strides in aligning agricultural education with NEP 2020, the uneven implementation across institutions remains a significant concern. Addressing issues like faculty shortages, regulatory flexibility, and institutional autonomy is crucial to achieving uniform standards across agricultural education institutions.

The curriculum now emphasises the inclusion of digital tools like precision farm-

ing, satellite-based monitoring, and artificial intelligence in agricultural education. ICAR's initiatives in emerging technologies like AI, big data, and remote sensing are also enhancing students' ability to address complex challenges, including water management, pest control, and crop modelling. Sustainability has become a central theme for both UGC and ICAR, with natural farming, organic farming, the Indian Knowledge System, and climate-smart agriculture gaining importance in the curricula. The Sixth Deans' Committee Report of ICAR (2024) recommended integrating emerging technologies such as AI, machine learning, and robotics into agriculture courses. It also advocated for flexible degree programmes with multiple entry and exit points, aligning with the goals of NEP 2020. Moreover, ICAR's partnership with the World Bank under the National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP), investing USD 82.5 million, is upgrading curricula and infrastructure across 74 agricultural universities. This initiative has improved student training in cutting-edge technologies like GPS, drones, data analytics, and robotics, and has increased female enrolment to 45%.

Institutions like the Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology (DA-IICT) have begun implementing multidisciplinary programmes aligned with NEP 2020. For example, DA-IICT offers an MSc in Agriculture-Analytics, combining agricultural science with data analytics, and B.Tech programmes that integrate technology across disciplines. This approach equips students with diverse skills to tackle modern agricultural challenges. NEP 2020 also emphasises experiential learning through initiatives like the Rural Entrepreneurship Awareness Development

Yojana (READY), which connects students with practical experiences via internships, farm visits, and industry collaborations - bridging the gap between academia and the agricultural industry.

In recent years, the UGC has led efforts to align India's agricultural education with global academic and research standards, aiming to make Indian universities internationally competitive. These reforms have expanded access to international collaborations, exchange programmes, and internships, enabling partnerships with leading global agricultural institutions. As a result, students gain exposure to advanced technologies, global best practices, and diverse agricultural policies. This international experience equips them to address complex challenges and contribute to innovation in the sector. The internationalisation of agricultural education not only improves academic outcomes but also positions India as an emerging global leader in agricultural innovation.

Alignment between ICAR and UGC is critical to shaping the future of agricultural education in India. By prioritising research, skill development, technology integration, and global collaboration, these reforms aim to prepare a workforce capable of driving innovation and sustainability in the sector. Updating curricula to include emerging topics such as digital farming, climate-smart agriculture, vertical farming, AI, machine learning, and the circular economy is essential. Strengthening faculty capacity, infrastructure, and industry linkages will further enhance educational quality. A unified policy approach will ensure consistent, future-ready reforms across institutions, positioning India as a global leader in agricultural innovation.

(The author is Professor, Soil Science and Director-SW, AAU)

How did Indian universities fare on the QS ranking list?

What are the parameters on which universities are judged? How can Indian universities improve?

Somak Raychaudhury

The story so far:

For the first time, in the international ranking of universities published by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a company specialising in higher education analysis based in the U.K., Indian universities have more than 50 spots in the top 1,500. The highest rank among Indian universities goes to IIT Delhi (Rank 123), closely followed by IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur and IISc Bengaluru. This number has increased from 11 in 2015 to 54 in 2025, with eight universities, including Ashoka University in Haryana and Shiv Nadar Institute of Eminence in Greater Noida, getting featured for the first time.

What are the parameters?

The 2025 ranking is based on a whole range of parameters which include the

learning environment on campus, academic reputation (30%), impactful research (citations for research papers count for 20%), and international research network 5%, diversity (student diversity, international faculty and students count for 10%), student outcomes (employer reputation counts for 15%, while student placements 5%) and campus sustainability (5%).

Has higher education improved?

These rankings reflect how Indian universities are increasingly adapting to the norms followed by universities worldwide, and are thus becoming comparable to international universities.

For instance, the average undergraduate student to faculty ratio in Indian universities is 19. In order to be internationally competitive, this number needs to be between 10-15. At Ashoka University, for instance, over the last year for about 3,000 undergraduates, the ratio

was 11.5. These undergraduates come from 20 countries, which enhances the score for international diversity. Most universities in India have few international students, and most public universities cannot employ international faculty, which results in low scores in these categories.

Moreover, over the last few decades, Indian universities have not put much emphasis on original research carried out by faculty and students. For STEM subjects especially, the research is traditionally done in research institutes. This is in sharp contrast to global practices, as universities are the primary institutions where creation of knowledge takes place, in addition to its transmission to students, worldwide.

However, this is now changing. More and more universities, particularly IITs/IISc and new private sector universities, are paying particular attention to research. With the advent of

the National Education Plan, 2020 (NEP), which emphasises on research in universities, more and more Indian institutions will take their place on international ranking lists.

Public universities used to pay very little attention to the employment opportunities of students, but professional institutes such as the IITs and IIMs have always had placement cells and employers' fairs. Now, even for large central universities, this is an important consideration. All this is crucial to international ranking lists such as the QS.

How can universities fare better?

As more and more universities begin to build research networks across the world, and hire quality faculty who can do research along with the necessary teaching of students, we will see the rise of Indian universities in these ranking lists. India needs to encourage international students and faculty to become part of its educational institutions and to closely work with industry in identifying potential employment destinations for students. Particular attention to environmental aspects and sustainability in campuses will also earn points for universities aspiring to be among the top educational institutions.

Somak Raychaudhury is Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Physics, Ashoka University, Delhi-NCR. All opinions are personal.

THE GIST

The highest rank among Indian universities goes to IIT Delhi (Rank 123), closely followed by IIT Bombay, IIT Madras, IIT Kharagpur and IISc Bengaluru.

These rankings reflect how Indian universities are increasingly adapting to the norms followed by universities worldwide, and are thus becoming comparable to international universities.

India needs to encourage international students and faculty to become part of its educational institutions and to closely work with industry in identifying potential employment destinations for students.

Higher education: Growth, challenges and road ahead

India's higher education sector is undergoing a dynamic transformation marked by significant growth, diversification of academic programmes, and the rise of hybrid learning models. With a reported 14 per cent growth in sectoral revenue, the momentum is being driven by changing learner expectations, technological advancements, and policy shifts aimed at increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which currently stands at 28 per cent. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions raising this to 50 per cent in the next decade, an ambitious target that demands both structural reform and innovative delivery mechanisms.

A key trend shaping the higher education landscape is the shift from traditional, siloed disciplines to industry-aligned, multidisciplinary programs. Institutions across the country are increasingly introducing courses in emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, fintech, sustainable development, and digital marketing. The rise of hybrid learning models — combining online and offline components — has played a critical role in democratising access. The post-2020 acceleration of digital platforms has brought education to remote and underserved areas, while simultaneously catering to urban learners who value flexibility and autonomy. Hybrid models are especially attractive to the current generation of learners, who seek personalised and modular learning journeys rather than rigid, one-size-fits-all programme.

International enrolment is also contributing to the sector's vibrancy. Students from Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Middle East are increasingly looking to India for higher education due to its relative affordability, quality assurance, and English-language instruction. With clearly defined academic roadmaps and regulated institutional frameworks, India is emerging as a credible global education hub.

However, the rapid transformation has brought with it new challenges. Chief among them is the need for constant curriculum renewal to keep pace with industry disruptions, especially those led by technology. As the pace of change accelerates, the traditional model of revising curricula every few years has become inadequate. Institutions that offer autonomous programs are now introducing mechanisms such as biannual curriculum reviews in collaboration with industry experts.

This allows for agile course updates and incorporation of real-world applications. In the realm of business education in particular, job readiness has become a central concern. The success of any academic program is increasingly being measured by how well it prepares students for the workforce. This includes not just academic knowledge, but also a portfolio of practical skills, exposure to current tools, and adaptability to new technologies. Institutions are

addressing this by embedding certification modules from industry leaders, offering hands-on training, and introducing placement preparation from the first semester.

The implementation of NEP 2020 marks a significant departure from previous policies by encouraging multidisciplinary learning, vocational integration, and skill-based education. While the policy is well-framed in its vision, its execution remains uneven across states. Variations in adoption timelines and curricular frameworks have led to fragmented outcomes. For instance, students within the same institution may follow entirely different academic models depending on state-level directives. This lack of cohesion hinders scalability and national benchmarking. Policy clarity is especially critical in defining institutional roles. The NEP envisages categorising institutions into research universities, teaching universities, and autonomous colleges. Such classification allows for targeted development and funding, but ambiguity in criteria and overlapping mandates have caused operational uncertainties. A unified and phased approach to implementation, led by both central and state Governments, is essential to streamline the transition.



**AJITESH
BASANI**

Another area of concern is teacher training. As student expectations evolve, the role of educators is shifting from knowledge dispensers to facilitators and mentors. This transition requires a new set of competencies ranging from digital literacy and interdisciplinary thinking to the ability to guide students through personalised learning paths. The forthcoming national teacher education framework, set to launch in 2026, may address some of these gaps, but continuous professional development and pedagogical innovation must remain a priority. The changing perception of degrees and certifications also warrants attention. In today's job market, demonstrable skills often outweigh formal qualifications. Employers are increasingly emphasising problem-solving ability, communication skills, and digital proficiency over academic transcripts. This shift is especially evident in sectors like media, design, IT, and entrepreneurship. As a result, institutions must realign their assessment systems and course outcomes to reflect competence, not just compliance.

Going forward, the future of higher education in India lies in meaningful collaboration. Academic institutions must build deeper partnerships with industries to ensure relevance, internships, mentorships, and placements. Specialisation, adaptability, and a commitment to lifelong learning will be key differentiators. Institutions that invest in these areas will be best positioned to prepare students for a rapidly changing world.

(The writer is the Executive Director — Administration at Acharya Bangalore B-School (ABBS). Views are personal)

शोध एवं विकास की बाधाएं दूर होने की आस



अरवि सिन्हा

हाल तो तकनीकी महारक्ति एवं अव्यक्त बचने में अरुणोद्भूत योजना का पलटने वाली छवि अर्थिक को भी तेज की छे वाली कविता से सज्जी है

कि सो देश को यदि वैश्वकालिक एवं समाज प्रगति का लक्ष्य हासिल करना है तो उसके लिए शोध एवं विकास (आरएंडडी) में निवेश आवश्यक ही नहीं अपितु अनिवार्य होता है। इतिहास ऐसी मिसालों से भरा हुआ है। ब्रिटेन की औद्योगिक क्रांति मुख्यतः वैज्ञानिक अन्वेषण और पेटेंट अधिकारों की संहिताबद्ध करने की कठिनायत से प्रेरित थी, जिसने विभिन्न उद्योगों में नए आविष्कारों को प्रोत्साहित किया। बीसवीं सदी में महाशक्ति के रूप में अमेरिका के उभरने के पीछे विश्व की सरकारी नीतियों के केंद्र में रखने की अहम भूमिका थी। अमेरिका ने इस दौरान नेशनल साइंस फाउंडेशन और डिफेंस एडवांस्ड रिसर्च प्रोजेक्ट एजेंसी-द्वारा जैसे संस्थानों की स्थापना के साथ रक्षा, अंतरिक्ष और मेडिकल शोध में बड़े पैमाने पर निवेश किया। इसने एयरोस्पेस से लेकर इंटरनेट तक जैसे तमाम क्षेत्रों को नए आयाम दिए।

हाल में चीन के उभार और विशेषकर एक प्रौद्योगिकी महाशक्ति के रूप में बने उसकी पहचान में शोध एवं विकास की नीतियों के केंद्र में रखने की अहम भूमिका रही है। संघजनशील अत्याधुनिक तकनीकों में चीनी सरकार और औद्योगिक क्षेत्र के निवेश ने सीमित को बढ़त दिलाई है। स्पष्ट है कि जिस देश ने विश्व की अपनी नीतियों के मूल में रखा, वो न केवल उसने समृद्धि के नए प्रतिमान गढ़े, बल्कि अपनी संभ्रमण का भी विस्तार किया।

भारत के आरएंडडी परिदृश्य पर निवेश के सुखे की समस्या करने के लिए सरकार ने हाल के वर्षों में भारी प्रयास किए हैं। अनुसंधान नेशनल रिसर्च फाउंडेशन (एनआरएफ), हाई-टेक क्षेत्रों के लिए विस्तारित उत्पादन आधारित प्रोत्साहन-पैकअप योजना से लेकर सेमीकंडक्टर, अंतरिक्ष और क्वांटम टेक्नोलॉजी में निवेश विज्ञानोन्मुखी विकास की दिशा में गंभीर नीतिगत प्रतिबद्धता के प्रतीक हैं। हालांकि निजी क्षेत्र ने इसमें सही तालमेल नहीं दिखाया, जो वैश्विक लेने का चकक नहीं दिखाया। अमेरिका, जापान और चीन जैसे देशों को शोध एवं विकास प्रतिविधियों में जहाँ निजी क्षेत्र की हिस्सेदारी 70 प्रतिशत तक है, वहीं भारत में वह महज एक शिष्टाई के दायरे में सिमटा हुआ है। विकास की गति जिन कारणों से अपेक्षित रूप से तेजी नहीं एकद या रही, उनमें से एक यह भी है। निजी क्षेत्र के इस सकलित धरे रवैये के पीछे के कारणों को पड़ताल करें तो पता चला ही दिखाता है कि तमाम कंपनियों उन प्रतिस्पर्धी क्षेत्रों में सक्रिय हैं जहाँ लागत का पड़ना बहुत



अरवि सिन्हा

मानने लगता है और उनमें मुकाबल को बहुत ज़्यादा नहीं होता। ऐसे में किसी वैश्वकालिक नवाचार से मिलने वाले लाभ को लेकर अविश्वसनीय बनी रहती है। उद्योग और अकादमिक जगत के बीच की कमजोर कड़ी से भी कंपनियों को अक्सर कुशल शोधों नहीं मिल पाते और अत्याधुनिक शोध से वे दूर रह जाते हैं। तमाम भारतीय कंपनियों में कारपोरेट जर्नल का स्तर भी एक बड़ा अवरोध है, जिसमें वैश्वकालिक क्षमता निर्माण पर तात्कालिक लाभ को तज़ाज़ी दी जाती है। चुंकि भारत में विज्ञान-केन्द्रित स्टार्टअप के लिए गहन वेंचर कैपिटल (उद्योगों के लिए वैश्विक पूंजी) इकोसिस्टम का अभाव है तो शुरुआती उद्यम भरने के लिए भी उन्हें वित्तीय धैर्य नहीं मिल पाता। निष्कर्षतः अविश्वसनीय और सीमित वित्तीय संपदा समर्थन भी कंपनियों को शोध एवं निवेश में प्रयास बढ़ाने के प्रति उत्तेजित करता है। परिणामस्वरूप भारत में शोध एवं विकास की संस्था से अधिक बोझ समझा जाता है।

इस मोर्चे पर कथम विमर्शनीय

को दूर करने के लिए केंद्र सरकार ने एक जुलाई को रिसर्च डेवलपमेंट एंड इन्वेस्टेशन (आरडीआई) योजना का प्रारंभ किया है। एक लाख करोड़ रुपये की यह योजना भारत को वैश्विक नवोद्यम एवं इन्वेस्टेशन केंद्र के रूप में स्थापित करने के लक्ष्य से काज़ी चलाने वाली साबित हो सकती है। इससे आरएंडडी निवेश की धारा में वित्तीय प्रवाह बढ़ेगा। इसमें कई उपयोगी प्रविधान किए गए हैं। जैसे नवाचार-केन्द्रित परियोजनाओं के लिए निजी क्षेत्र को रूचन या बहुत कम ब्याज पर वित्तीय सहायता या इम्पिडी फंडिंग उपलब्ध कराई जाएगी। इससे वर्तमान क्षेत्रों से लेकर रणनीतिक रूप से महत्वपूर्ण क्षेत्रों के लिए आवश्यक निवेश उपलब्ध हो सकेगा, जिससे क्वांटम टेक्नोलॉजी, स्वच्छ ऊर्जा, सेमीकंडक्टर और एयरोस्पेस जैसे तमाम क्षेत्रों में नई संभावनाएं साकार होंगी।

आरडीआई योजना के अंतर्गत वित्तीय संसाधन एक विशेष उद्देश्य क्षेत्र के माध्यम से द्वितीयक स्तर पर सक्रिय क्षेत्र प्रबंधकों को प्राप्य होंगे। ये प्रबंधक पूंजी को श्रृंखला, इन्विटो या किसी अन्य रूप

में डीप-टेक फंड को उपलब्ध कराएंगे। यह संस्थागत ढांचा रणनीतिक सुसंगति, जवाबदेही और दक्षता को सुनिश्चित करता है। ह्यपर टेक्नोलॉजी रेडीनेस लेक्स (टीआरएल) के लिए स्पष्ट रूप से वित्तीय संसाधनों का प्रबंध करते हुए यह योजना भारतीय आरएंडडी परिदृश्य में उद्योगों का उस खतरनाक पड़ाव से बड़ा कर लगाएगी, जहाँ अधिकांश उद्यम दम तोड़ देते हैं। इसमें उन उद्योगों पर विशेष ध्यान होगा, जिनकी तकनीक भारत की आर्थिक सुरक्षा एवं संभ्रमण की संस्था में सहायक होगी। विशेष रूप से वैश्विक आपूर्ति श्रृंखला व्यवधानों एवं किसी देश द्वारा निर्यात निर्वहन की दृष्टि से यह बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है। इस योजना में सरकार केवल संसाधन प्रदाता के रूप में ही एक उत्प्रेरक की भूमिका निभाने जा रही है। इससे उन क्षेत्रों में भी निवेश का संकेत होगा, जहाँ अभी तक निरसा का अंधेरा था। इसमें यह सुनिश्चित करने का भी प्रयास होगा कि वित्तीय संसाधन न केवल पर्याप्त रूप से उपलब्ध हो सकें, बल्कि वे परिणाम देने वाले हों, जहाँ प्रतिस्पर्धा एवं पारदर्शिता जैसे पहलुओं को अन्वेषण न किया जाए।

शोध एवं विकास के क्षेत्र में एक वैश्विक शक्ति और 2047 तक प्रौद्योगिकी निर्मातक बनने की भारत की आकांक्षाओं के लिए यह नीति बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है। यदि इसे सही से अमल में लाया जा सके तो यह भारत के लिए बड़ी भूमिका निभ सकती है, जैसी दृष्टि में अमेरिका और नेशनल आइसी फंड ने चीन के लिए निभाई।

(लेखक लेख-नीति विश्लेषक हैं।
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21/7

सुधार के नाम पर शिक्षा से खिलवाड़

शिक्षा में सुधार के कुछ सरकारी कदम विवादास्पद बनते जा रहे हैं। हाल में उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार ने करीब 5,000 स्कूलों को बंद करने का निर्णय लिया है। इससे पहले राजस्थान और अन्य राज्यों की सरकारें भी हजारों स्कूलों को क्लियर के नाम पर बंद कर चुकी हैं। तर्क दिया जा रहा है कि जहां 50 से कम बच्चे हैं, उन्हें नजदीकी स्कूल में स्थानांतरित किया जाएगा। जो लोग देश के छह लाख से अधिक गांवों से परिचित हैं, वे शिक्षा पर इसके भयानक दुष्परिणाम की कल्पना कर सकते हैं। लगातार प्रयासों के बाद हमारी साक्षरता दर 80 प्रतिशत तक पहुंची है, जिसमें लड़कियों की साक्षरता दर विशेष रूप से उत्तर भारत में बहुत कम है। बिहार और उत्तर प्रदेश की स्थिति तो समग्र साक्षरता में निराशाजनक है। यदि नजदीकी स्कूल बंद हुए, तो इसका सबसे बुरा असर लड़कियों की शिक्षा पर पड़ेगा, जो किसी भी समाज और देश के विकास के लिए एक बुनियादी शर्त है। देश की लड़कियां कम सुविधाओं के बावजूद हर क्षेत्र में उत्कृष्ट प्रदर्शन कर रही हैं, लेकिन कुछ नीतियां उल्टे उनके खिलाफ जाती दिख रही हैं। केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालयों में दाखिले के लिए लाई गई नई प्रवेश परीक्षा सीयूईटी ने भी उनके नामांकन पर असर डाला है। आंकड़े बताते हैं कि इसके लागू होने के बाद से इन विश्वविद्यालयों में लड़कियों के दाखिले में 30 प्रतिशत तक की कमी आई है। दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय में ही नामांकन अब केवल उत्तर भारत के तीन-चार राज्यों तक सीमित होकर रह गया है, जिसमें कभी पूरे देश के मेधावी युवा आते थे। इस बीच विदेश में पढ़ने वालों की संख्या पिछले पांच वर्षों में दोगुनी से भी अधिक हो गई है।

शिक्षा का अधिकार अधिनियम कहता है कि पहली से पांचवीं कक्षा तक हर बच्चे के लिए एक किलोमीटर पर स्कूल होना चाहिए और छठी से आठवीं कक्षा तक हर बच्चे के लिए तीन किलोमीटर के दायरे में ही स्कूल होने चाहिए। संभवतः उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार ने इस पक्ष पर गंभीरता से विचार नहीं किया है। इसके पीछे वे नीति निर्माता प्रतीत होते हैं जिनमें से अधिकतर नगरों, महानगरों और विदेश और अंग्रेजी माध्यम



प्रेमपाल शर्मा

नजदीकी स्कूल बंद होने का सबसे बुरा असर लड़कियों की शिक्षा पर पड़ेगा, जिनकी शिक्षा विकास के लिए आवश्यक है



सरकारी स्कूलों में घटते नामांकन की हो पड़ताल • फाइल में पड़े हैं। उत्तर प्रदेश की योगी सरकार ने अपने पहले कार्यकाल के दौरान शिक्षा में कुछ अच्छे काम किए थे, जिसमें 60 हजार शिक्षकों की भर्ती भी शामिल थी। इससे सभी स्कूलों में योग्य शिक्षक उपलब्ध हो गए हैं। इस बीच शौचालय और अन्य भवनों में भी बहुत सुधार हुआ है, लेकिन अकेले इस कदम से पिछले दशकों में साक्षरता, शिक्षा और स्कूलों को बेहतर करने के प्रयासों को बहुत बड़ा धक्का लगेगा। इस यू-टर्न से भारत के विकसित देश बनने का सपना बिखर सकता है।

इस बात की गहराई से पड़ताल होनी चाहिए कि सरकारी स्कूलों में बच्चे क्यों कम हो रहे हैं? शिक्षकों पर कुछ अन्य अतिरिक्त काम जैसे-जनसंख्या से जुड़े आंकड़े जुटाने, चुनाव कराने, बैंक खाता खुलवाने, मिड डे मील योजना को लागू करने जैसी जिम्मेदारियां कम क्यों नहीं की जा सकती हैं? क्यों जिला स्तर पर इन स्कूलों में निरीक्षण और उनकी समस्याएं सुनने का तंत्र विकसित नहीं हो पाया है? उनके मोटिवेशन के लिए जिला स्तर पर ठोस कदम क्यों नहीं उठाए जा रहे हैं? सर्वे बताते हैं कि जिला अधिकारी

मुखिकल से पांच प्रतिशत सरकारी स्कूलों में जाते हैं। सरकारी स्कूलों में सरकार छात्रों को यूनिफार्म देती है, बज्जीफा देती है, कोई फीस नहीं लेती और प्रतियोगी परीक्षाओं से चुने हुए योग्य शिक्षक नियुक्त होते हैं। इसके बावजूद वहां बच्चे नहीं आते। यह आजाद भारत के लिए सबसे बड़ी विडंबना है। यह सरकारी तंत्र की असफलता है। 2015 में इलाहाबाद हाई कोर्ट ने निर्णय भी दिया था कि हर सरकारी कर्मचारी, विधायक आदि के बच्चों का इन स्कूलों में पढ़ना अनिवार्य हो। विकसित भारत की संकल्पना को साकार करने के लिए सरकार को इसे लागू करना चाहिए। इसके साथ-साथ स्कूलों में पुस्तकालय, प्रयोगशाला और बेहतर पाठ्यक्रम अपनी भाषा में बनाया जाना चाहिए। इससे बच्चे अंग्रेजी के बोझ से मुक्त होंगे और आत्मनिर्भर भी बनेंगे। जिला स्तर पर इस बुनियादी परिवर्तन से ही सरकारी स्कूल चमकने लगेंगे।

नई शिक्षा नीति के नियम का भी इस पर असर पड़ा है। नियम कहता है कि पहली क्लास में छह वर्ष से कम उम्र के बच्चों का नामांकन नहीं होगा। इसके चलते बच्चे सरकारी स्कूलों में आने बंद हो गए हैं। इस बीच कुकुरमुते की तरह बिना ठीक-ठाक बिल्डिंग, शौचालय, खेल की सुविधाओं के निजी स्कूलों में दाखिले की बाढ़ आ गई है। एक बार बच्चा वहां दाखिल हो गया, तो उसे निकालना आसान नहीं होता। इसलिए दाखिले की उम्र तुरंत पांच वर्ष करने की जरूरत है। इन स्कूलों में शिक्षक भर्ती की योग्यता का भी कोई पैमाना नहीं है। रोजगार का पक्ष भी उतना ही महत्वपूर्ण है। बेरोजगार नौजवानों में बढ़ता असंतोष बहुत दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण होगा और राज्यों के आने वाले विधानसभा चुनावों पर भी इसका असर हो सकता है। हर वर्ष 25 जून को हम आपातकाल को याद करते हैं, जिसमें लोगों की आवाज को पूरी तरह से अनसुना कर दिया गया था या रोक दिया गया था। बेहतर शिक्षा, समान शिक्षा हर लोक का हक है। और यही लोकतंत्र है। सरकार को इन सब बातों पर गंभीरता से पुनर्विचार की जरूरत है।

(भारत सरकार में संयुक्त सचिव रहे लेखक शिक्षाविद हैं।)

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Time to focus on new jobs, skilling

The Union Cabinet's approval for the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) Scheme acknowledges the need for large-scale job creation in the country. Announced in the union budget this year, the scheme is being implemented now. It is aimed to boost employment generation in all sectors with a special focus on manufacturing, through direct benefit transfer. India has done well to sustain a GDP growth rate which is the highest among the major economies, but it is not accompanied by corresponding employment generation. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), the unemployment rate was 5.1% in April 2025, and it rose to 5.6% in May. Youth unemployment (for those aged 15-29) is around 16.03%. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) also shows similar figures. High rates of unemployment among the youth are a matter of serious concern; so is the female labour participation rate, which is lower than the world average. A large part of employment is in the informal sector.

The new scheme is designed to benefit both the employee and the employer. It proposes that first-time employees will get a month's wage (up to Rs 15,000) in two instalments. While one instalment will be paid after six months of service, the second will be paid after 12 months and completion of a financial literacy programme. The employer will get monetary benefits to the extent of 10% of the new employee's monthly EPF wage, with a maximum limit fixed at Rs 3,000 for two years. The scheme would be applicable for jobs created between August 1, 2025 and July 31, 2027. It has an outlay of Rs 99,446 crore.

The ELI scheme carries promise, but only industry expansion and skilled youth can provide real momentum

The scheme is expected to benefit around 19.2 million first-time employees. But it needs to be seen how it is implemented and how employers respond to it. For a job with a monthly wage of Rs 15,000, the employer will get a benefit of Rs 1,500. No employer can be expected to create jobs for government doles. While the scheme may provide an incentive, the real challenge will be in creating jobs and improving the skill levels of the youth. The industry, especially the manufacturing sector, should expand and be able to absorb workers on a much larger scale. The skilling programmes aimed at young, entry-level job aspirants should be implemented more effectively. The government should focus on formulating and implementing policies that enable the industry to create more jobs and ensure an environment for sustainable growth.

22/5/25

AT
VANTAGE

SHRUTAPA PAUL

THE WRITER IS AN
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Almost 40 per cent of the expertise needed by 2030 will be new, necessitating both a technical and personal upgrade for all workers

Job Crunch

To remain employable in a geo-economically unpredictable and AI-disrupted labour market, workers must compromise, adapt, and upskill/reskill

Doesn't it feel like a season of wars? Every other nation seems to be at it. In today's dystopian world, reality seems stranger and more cruel than fiction. Had we ever imagined that butchering babies and gang-raping prisoners wouldn't be considered war crimes? That while a genocide continues to decimate entire generations in one part of the world orchestrated by a tiny nation, life would be business as usual in others. While climate change and erratic weather cycles destroy lives and create shortage of resources, an elite group of people would continue to become modern-day oligarchs. There is nothing predictable about the world today and going forward, one thing we can be sure of — you can be sure of nothing.

You know that job that you hate, the boss that you don't like, the office that expects you to actually work — that "job" you took for granted may not even exist in the future. Even today, there are hundreds of experienced mid-and-senior level professionals rendered jobless due to business vagaries, Covid-19 repercussions, and technological disruptions. They too had thought their employment would last forever but the ongoing work shifts have been unforgiving. India's educated unemployed class is massive with almost 16 million belonging to middle income households, as per Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) in 2022. Latest CMIE data shows unemployment at 7 per cent as against 5.6 per cent as recorded by the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). As per a report by Unstopp, which surveyed 30,000 Gen Z professionals and 700 HR leaders, 83 per cent of engineering students



India's educated unemployed class is massive with almost 16 million belonging to middle income households

graduated without an offer of a job or internship. According to the report, almost 50 per cent of MBA graduates from India's B-schools faced the same plight. The job market is getting exceedingly challenging with even top graduates failing to land an offer.

Echoing this trend, billionaire Nikhil Kamath highlighted the futility of four-year college degrees earlier this week. Basing his observation on the World Economic Forum's (WEF) "The Future of Jobs report 2025" that was released in January this year, Kamath warned that 92 million jobs would be displaced in five years while 170 million new ones will be created. As per the WEF report, the 78 million new jobs don't necessarily bode

well for those who refuse or fail to upskill themselves. These new jobs will come by destroying many in their wake.

Strongest demand for jobs is expected in sectors such as care, education, technology, and renewable energy while several age-old professions will be rendered obsolete due to the incursion of automation and artificial intelligence (AI). WEF noted that "Technological change, geoeconomic fragmentation, economic uncertainty, demographic shifts, and the green transition — individually and in combination — are among the major drivers expected to shape and transform the global labour market by 2030".

One of the biggest threats to jobs is AI that while mak-

ing work easier is also reducing dependency on human resources. Almost 50 per cent of the companies aim to use AI to their business advantage while 41 per cent expect to reduce workforce strength due to it. Job growth will happen across tech, data, AI, and renewable energy sectors as also in essential jobs such as caregivers, agricultural workers, delivery workers, and educators. Any job that can be automated with minimal human intervention or supervision stands to vanish. Graphic design and administrative jobs may cease to exist.

So, how should workers navigate employment uncertainties? Adapt, compromise, upskill/reskill. Staying rigid and inflexible can be an Achilles' heel. Agility and ability to bridge the skills

gap will hold workers in good stead. Almost 40 per cent of the expertise needed by 2030 will be new, necessitating both a technical and personal upgrade for all workers. About 59 per cent of the global workforce will require vocational training to be future job-ready. Employers will seek better productivity, resilience, and efficiency, and will bring on technology to achieve that end. All roles that can be automated will remain vulnerable. Nations, businesses, and educational institutes will have to work consciously and conscientiously to ensure that the youth not only remain employable but also have access to jobs. Because who knows, that job that you take for granted today, may not even exist tomorrow.

Views expressed are personal

05/07/25

Why is Maharashtra debating over Hindi?

Why is there resistance to introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education in government schools? What has the State government decided on the three-language policy? What does the National Education Policy, 2020 lay down?

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

The linguistic debate in Maharashtra continues days after the Maharashtra government withdrew two orders introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education across Marathi and English medium State Board schools. The government has appointed a committee under renowned economist Dr. Narendra Jadhav to study the three-language policy.

The language committee of the government was not consulted on the move.

What is the language debate in Maharashtra?

On April 16, the Maharashtra government issued an order making Hindi mandatory as the third language in all English and Marathi medium schools of the State Board in Maharashtra. The government said that it was as per the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. "At present, two languages are being taught from Grade 1 to Grade 4 in all the English and Marathi medium schools in the State. As per the State Education Framework, 2024, Hindi will be mandatory as the third language in all the English and Marathi medium schools from Grade 1 to Grade 5," the order stated. Till now, third language was introduced only in Grade 5 in English and Marathi medium State Board

schools. The other medium schools already have a three-language policy in primary education.

What was the reaction?

There was widespread opposition to the government's decision on two grounds – first, that a third language should not be imposed in primary school from Grade 1 to Grade 5. The second ground was about the imposition of Hindi. Regional linguistic groups, academics, civil society members, and prominent literary figures raised their voice against the move which was dubbed as an effort to 'force Hindi', and a move towards 'cultural hegemony'. The Maharashtra government's own language committee wrote to the government seeking its immediate revocation.

Experts argued that the NEP, 2020 focussed on R1 and R2, which is the mother-tongue, and an additional second language for primary education. They said that children should not be burdened with learning three languages in primary school. "Why should there be an imposition of Hindi? This is a concerted effort for cultural hegemony. This is in line with the RSS' plan of 'Hindi, Hinda, Hindustan'. In Maharashtra, the Marathi mancos will stand for his linguistic, cultural identity. This is a historic moment since the movement for the reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. The entire State has stood against the government's imposition of Hindi," Deepak Pawar of Marathi Abhyas Kendra said.

How did the government respond?

After a severe backlash, Maharashtra education minister Dada Bhuse promised to revise the government resolution (GR). "Hindi will not be mandatory," he announced. On June 17, the government revised the GR, making Hindi a 'general' third language in schools. It stated that the students had the option to learn any other Indian language as the third language, but that it was mandatory for at least 20 students to come together to make the demand. "The government will make a teacher available or will make provision for online learning if at least 20 students come together to learn any other Indian language apart from Hindi," the revised

GR stated.

However, this drew further backlash as academics and regional linguistic political parties called it an effort to impose Hindi through the backdoor. "The whole exercise of the meeting of the steering committee was carried out in secrecy by the government. The language committee of the government itself was never consulted on the move. The decision is illogical. It has no scientific backing by educationists, child psychologists. It has been taken without any consultation with the stakeholders and experts. At a time when the Marathi culture and language is not being respected by its own government, this is an assault on the linguistic identity of the State," said Laxmikant Deshmukh, head of Maharashtra's language committee.

What about political realignments?

The issue provided a fillip to Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which counts 'Marathi asmita' or linguistic chauvinism as its core ideology. "We are Hindius, not Hindis," he said. It paved the path for the reunification of the Thackeray cousins after two decades. Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray joined hands against the government's move, even holding a joint rally. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar too openly expressed his displeasure with the government's decision and said that Hindi should not be imposed till Grade 4. This has led to an unease within the Mahayuti with Eknath Shinde not wanting to be seen as standing against the cause. In the face of upcoming local body elections, the language debate has led to changed political dynamics.

What is the way ahead?

The government has announced the scrapping of the two controversial GRs issued on April 16 and June 17. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis announced the formation of a committee under Dr. Narendra Jadhav to look into the three-language policy, and said the government will accept his report. Academics have raised questions on Dr. Jadhav's expertise in school education, and have demanded the scrapping of the committee as well as the decision to impose the three-language policy in primary education. Opposition parties have said the government should scrap the three-language policy altogether. "We will not accept the three-language policy," Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena UBT leader, said.



Linguistic unity: Uddhav Thackeray, along with Raj Thackeray, Supriya Sule, and others, during a joint rally at Worli Dome in Mumbai on Saturday. **AN**

What are the pros and cons of the ELI scheme?

What are the incentives of the employment-linked incentive and whom will it benefit?

A.M. Joseph

The story so far:

The Union Cabinet approved an Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme with an outlay of ₹89,449 crore. The scheme, a promise made in the 2024-25 budget, is aimed at creating employment, particularly in the manufacturing sector. It is a part of the Prime Minister's package of five schemes to facilitate employment such as internships with big companies and measures to improve skills of the youth.

What are the key provisions?

The ELI scheme, according to the Labour Ministry, incentivises creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs over a period of two years. The Centre expects 1.50 crore newly employed people to get the benefit of the scheme, which comes into operation from August 1, 2025 and ends on July 31, 2027. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will implement the scheme. Newly recruited employees, with salaries up to ₹1 lakh, will get a one-month EPF wage up to ₹8,000 in two instalments. The EPFO will pay the first instalment after six months of service and the second instalment after 12 months of service – both as direct bank transfer. A portion of the incentive will be kept in "a savings instrument of deposit account for a fixed period and can be withdrawn by the employee at a later date".

The BJP-backed Bharatiya Janata Party has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment. The establishment, registered with EPFO, will get up to ₹8,000 per month, for two years, "for each additional employee with sustained employment for at least six months". The Centre adds that for the manufacturing sector, incentives will be extended to third and fourth years as well.

How have employers responded?

Employers have welcomed the scheme, with caveat. Former Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry president B.K. Mishra said that ELI is a "laudable initiative". It will drive employment, especially in the manufacturing sector, through an innovative approach which combines support for those joining the workforce for the first time with incentives for creating sustained employment, he added. CII office-bearer Sachin Jain said the ELI scheme has the potential to reshape India's employment landscape and boost labour-intensive sectors. The BJP-backed Lajpat Singh Khosla Bharatiya Janata Party pointed out that the focus of the scheme must be directed towards micro, small manufacturing units and allied service sectors. "We also urge that units with less than 30 employees, which form the majority, are not left behind. These units must be included under the scheme benefits," it demanded in a statement.

The leader of the Association of Indian Entrepreneurs, K.E. Raghunathan, said the Centre must reposition the scheme under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with a sustained reimbursement model based on actual payroll data advance. "For every new employee a specific percentage of the salary must be paid to the employee and employer as a subsidy directly on a monthly basis, so long as the employee remains in service. Make it simple and ensure a wider coverage," he suggested.

What about trade unions?

Barring the BJP-backed Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), all 30 central trade unions have endorsed the scheme. The AITUC has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment. Other unions fear that worker agency will be used to poach their employees. Citing the fate of the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) of 2020, wherein certain sectors were given scope by the Centre to create jobs, but the money had gone into the pockets of big companies. They argued that the EPFO had to conduct a probe and ban certain companies after finding the scheme was misused for employee benefits.

What are some of the concerns?

There are concerns on the role of the EPFO in the scheme. As EPFO is only a custodian of savings of employees, unions are asking how it can act as an agency to implement the scheme. As the EPFO has no government funds in its hands, there are doubts over the reimbursement of the money which must go to the employer as a newly recruited employee. As EPFO is not an agency with the responsibility of creating jobs, there are demands to create a separate agency to implement the scheme.

Industry experts are also questioning why the government is not addressing the slowdown in the economy, and not taking steps to improve the purchasing power of workers.

Déjà vu in Trump's student witch-hunt

JIVRAJ BURMAN

History repeats itself in America when fear-driven policies turn foreign students into scapegoats under shifting ideological pretexts.

US President Donald Trump's proverbial sword is hanging over the American dream of many Indian and other international students studying at Harvard and other Ivy League colleges, as he has threatened to revoke their study visas. According to him, they are spending more time in protest rallies than in the classroom. He couldn't care less if the US treasury loses as much as \$43.8 billion on account of the step he has taken, as long as these students are kept away from the Ivy Leagues for their radical views, like support for Hamas and the Palestinian cause. Not stopping at that, the Trump administration is holding back federal funds Harvard annually receives, because the college is not acting against these "radicals."

The US security apparatus is now working overtime to keep a hawk's eye on all the international students studying in America. So, they do not know when their study visas will be revoked and they will be deported. The only relief for them now is the ruling a US court has given, blocking the administration's "attempt to bar international students from enrolling at Harvard," though it has since been challenged. Calling it unlawful, different international student associations in the US have filed a lawsuit against the US government for terminating the SEVIS records (SEVIS is the web-based information system that the US agencies use to track and monitor international students.)

Is Trump the first US President to hound

students from abroad coming to study in US universities? No. Today it is Hamas; earlier it was communism, which was used as an alibi to harass foreign students coming to the US. There was a time in the 1950s and 1960s when the US police picked up anyone coming to or living in America if they suspected them of being even enchanted by communist ideas. The police held them for what at that time was known as 'Un-American Activities.' No less a person than the great filmmaker Charlie Chaplin had to self-deport to Switzerland from America when the US administration of the day summoned him to Washington out of the blue one day to appear before the committee of 'Un-American Activities,' as it suddenly discovered, rather late in his life, that he was a communist sympathiser. Chaplin, who had retained his British citizenship in spite of making films in America for years on end, wrote back to the committee: "For your convenience I will tell you what I think you want to know. I am not a communist, neither have I joined any political party or organisation in my life. I am what you call a 'peacemaker.' I hope this will not offend you." But, as the committee continued to badger him with the charge, he finally decided to leave America for good.

Here I quote below in translation what our own Dr Bhupen Hazarika had written in Assamese about the predicament he faced when, as a 23-year-old youth, he landed in America in 1949 for his postgraduate research on mass communication at

Columbia University, New York:

"On September 12, 1949, I arrived in New York by a TWA flight via Paris for my postgraduate research at Columbia University. As I was walking towards the Immigration Booth at the airport, a tall Black policeman tapped on my shoulder from behind and said, 'Sonny, your papers need a check-up. Follow me.'

"Before I could realise what the fuss was all about, I found myself in a prison on Ellis Island across the New York harbour. What was my crime? 'This is a routine check-up,' a policeman there said. A prisoner I encountered in the corridor said I could be quarantined. But the 'routine check-up' continued for five days, as I found myself in a cell sharing it with a boy from Iraq named Misbah-ul, who had come to do his MA in Political Science at California University.

"He said he also did not know why he was being incarcerated, as none in the prison authority had told him about it. On the sixth day, a magistrate came to the cell and asked me, through a policeman accompanying him, 'How do you propose to remove poverty in India... Did you write a book called *Temple of Freedom*?'"

"I was surprised, because I had never written any book, and certainly not by that name. Then I remembered that Bishnu Rabha (the noted non-conformist cultural icon of Assam) had written a book called *Mukh Deoi* in Assamese and had put my name as its co-author as it contained two of my songs. But how did the American police know about

that? Then the policeman asked: 'What do you mean by these two lines - *Deadly arms I'll make out of the bones of human skeleton, and Retrieve to the destitute all they've lost?*' (the Assamese original: *Narakankolar astha garhi sarbakarar sarbasua phirai aani*). I told him that the song from which the lines were being quoted had been written by me some years ago as a mark of my protest against British imperialism. Then, without saying anything, the magistrate left the cell with the policeman. The next morning, an officer from the prison came and told me, 'You are now free to go to your university. Your release has been informed to the Indian Embassy.'

"During my seven-day incarceration in the Ellis Island prison, I met a Black prisoner who had one leg amputated. I asked him why he was in prison. He smiled weakly. 'Look,' he said, pointing to his amputated leg, 'I had sacrificed it for America during World War II. Now they say I'm an enemy of America. You know, I've been charged with Un-American Activities. No fault is, I supported Paul Robeson for his demand for equal rights for Black and White.'" Bhupen Hazarika wrote nothing about that episode.

So, it is clear that Trump is not the first "troublesome" President of the US, only a bit more gung-ho in his MAGA mission. Perhaps he is oblivious to the fact that should a reverse brain drain happen sooner or later starting with the Ivy Leagues, he may unwittingly bring about a MAGA (Make India Great Again) time! 905/131

Brain drain slowing India's rise

NARENDRA SARAWGI

Had it not been for the talent exodus driven by flawed policy and limited opportunity, India would have achieved greater progress.

India is bleeding talent. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, over 1.3 million Indians renounced their citizenship between 2014 and 2023. Among them, a growing number are engineers, doctors, scientists, and management graduates trained at public expense.

The Bureau of Immigration data shows that around 7.5 to 8 lakh students go abroad for higher studies every year. Estimates suggest around 65 to 70% do not return.

Assam is no exception. With only 1,800 postgraduate seats at Gauhati University for over 24,000 applicants, even meritorious students have few options at home. The number of registered educated job seekers in Assam skyrocketed from 1.4 lakh in 2021 to 9.83 lakh in 2022. Many students and professionals from Assam migrate to big cities or abroad for better jobs and fairer systems.

The quota quagmire

While socio-economic equity is a noble pursuit, India's reservation policies have evolved into a labyrinth of rigid quotas, often crowding out deserving candidates. India currently reserves 49.5% of public education seats and government jobs: 15% for Scheduled Castes, 7.5% for Scheduled Tribes, and 27% for Other Backward Classes. The 10% EWS reservation, introduced in 2019, further restricts open competition. With vertical and horizontal reservations intersecting, the share of open, merit-based seats keeps shrinking.

Political opportunism compounds the issue. Vote-bank politics, exemplified by Rahul Gandhi's call to break the 50% cap imposed by the Supreme Court, threatens to eclipse policy prudence. States like Tamil Nadu and Telangana already exceed the cap with 69% and 64% reservations, respectively. If this becomes a national norm, open

competition may become extinct.

A study by Azim Premji University shows that the private sector attracts those pushed out of public opportunities. However, with limited private jobs in Tier II and III cities, migration becomes inevitable. In states like Assam, talent simply does not stay.

Beyond the reservation system, brain drain is also fuelled by fewer quality technical, medical, and management institutes, intense competition, limited research funding, bureaucratic delays, lack of academic freedom, and stagnation in public sector careers. Students seek global exposure, better infrastructure, and higher salaries—areas where Indian institutions often lag. Delayed exams, underemployment, and poor work-life balance push the ambitious to seek opportunity and recognition abroad.

Pay disparities and poor R&D infrastructure drive talent flight. A software engineer in India earns Rs 15-17 lakh per year, compared to Rs 1 crore-plus in Silicon Valley. India invests less than 1% of GDP in R&D versus 3.74% in the US.

A rising number of Indian students, especially from Tier II and Tier III cities, are opting for medical education in countries like Iran, Egypt, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. This is due to limited MBBS seats in India, tough NEET competition, and high private college fees. India must urgently expand public medical seats, regulate fees, and improve infrastructure to reverse this trend.

When quotas are expanded without increasing capacity, the system cannibalises itself. It discourages high-achievers and prompts them to seek greener pastures.

The price of losing talent

A generation of educated youth, denied access and agency, is increasingly seeking

refuge outside the State—and often, the country.

The economic costs are huge. Every skilled migrant contributes to another nation's GDP, representing a lost investment for India. The World Bank estimates billions lost in tax revenue, productivity, and innovation annually due to outbound migration.

A 2023 NBER study found about 33% of IIT graduates migrate abroad each year. Considering BTech, MTech, and PhD students across IITs, India loses an estimated Rs 850 crore annually in public subsidies on migrating students. Over three decades, this loss exceeds Rs 25,000 crore—an enormous drain on taxpayer-funded investment. Including management, medical, and other disciplines, the overall opportunity cost becomes staggering.

These figures raise serious concerns about India's institutional retention strategies and whether we're investing in future nation-builders—or future expatriates.

Assam suffers doubly. It loses its brightest minds and struggles to attract new industry due to a lack of high-end talent. This brain drain weakens innovation, reduces job creation, diminishes competitiveness and investor confidence, and reinforces a vicious cycle of outmigration.

Reform before ruin

Globally, countries balance inclusion with merit. Canada, the UK, and Australia focus on socio-economic disadvantage while enforcing performance thresholds. South Africa's BEE model brings private industry into the inclusion fold without diluting competitiveness.

India must act. First, it must decouple reservations from politics. The Supreme Court-imposed 50% reservation cap must be preserved. Any exceptions must be defini-

ted, time-bound, and subject to judicial and independent review.

Second, introduce a 'Merit-Plus' category—reserving 10-15% seats for high performers from all backgrounds, and introduce income criteria in reservation eligibility.

Third, expand institutional capacity. Assam must double postgraduate seats at Gauhati University, fill over 70% of faculty vacancies in SCERT/DIET, and invest in labs, digital tools, and research.

Fourth, boost education spending to 5% of GDP, double research funding, and promote industry-academia collaboration akin to Innovation Hubs in Australia.

Fifth, reverse the brain drain. Assam should pilot a 'Return & Build' programme—offering seed funding, research grants, tax breaks, and prestigious local roles to its diaspora—similar to South Korea's Innovation Zones.

Finally, foster local job ecosystems: create Assam-based tech hubs, remote work infrastructure, industry-academia linkages; align university courses with job markets; introduce vocational modules, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship pathways.

Without reforms, we will lose the generational opportunity embedded in the bright minds.

India at a crossroads

India and Assam stand at a crossroads. Do we want to continue losing our best minds to foreign shores and metropolitan magnets, or do we build a just, competitive ecosystem that rewards effort and nurtures potential? The quota debate is not just about numbers; it's about the kind of nation we wish to become. Quotas must serve as bridges and ladders, not walls and cages. The time has come to act, before the brain drain becomes a brain drought.

Sanil Raj Johnson

Research was a time-consuming procedure in the early 1990s, when I was pursuing my M.Phil. in English Literature. Weeks and months were spent browsing library shelves, taking handwritten notes, and meticulously crafting arguments. Gathering even the most basic resources required time and perseverance. By the late 1990s, when I was doing my Ph.D., digital bibliographies replaced old card systems in libraries, cutting months of effort down to a few weeks.

Now that I am a research supervisor, I see a different world. Artificial intelligence (AI) programmes can summarise whole works – including novels, critical essays, and poetry collections – in seconds and provide immediate access to character analysis, theme overviews, and pertinent secondary sources. This technological breakthrough poses significant questions: Should research still take years in an era when foundational data is instantaneously available? Should we reconsider the objectives and structure of academic research?

What AI can do

Traditional research was deep and arduous. Reading ought to be in-depth and sustained. However, with AI, most of the mechanical work has been automated. For example, a scholar researching 21st century responses to *Hamlet* can instruct an AI programme to provide a synopsis, psychological in-



Archives to algorithms

Should we reconsider the objectives and structure of academic research in a world with AI?

sights, and an overview of growing critique in minutes. My Ph.D. research on the Black Mountain Poets required me to travel across the U.S., consult archives and original manuscripts, and interact with scholars. As a Fulbright scholar, I had the privilege of visiting Black Mountain College and engaging with source material that had rarely been explored. AI can now scan and analyse

such archives in seconds.

Consider a student studying a historical figure. Previously, gathering biographical details, appraising social achievements, and comprehending personal challenges required days or weeks. AI tools such as Google Lens and natural language processors can now compile and format such data instantly. Provide a clear prompt, and the necessary material will

arrive, frequently with references and structure already in place. At a recent symposium on AI in education, an MIT professor stated that AI had saved him at least 15 years of academic labour. This statement encapsulates the massive transition we are witnessing.

In literary studies, it facilitates cross-textual analysis, aids in the identification of intertextual relationships,

and quickly offers historical context. Summaries, translations, and bibliographies are widely available, allowing scholars to focus more on interpretation and synthesis. Previously, a PhD may last three-to-five years and focus on a particular topic, but scholars today can investigate many themes or collaborate across fields. The time saved from data collecting can now be used for higher-level thinking and creative analysis.

What AI can't do

However, AI has its limitations. It cannot replace human intelligence, empathy, or interpretive nuance. Literary research is more than mere summary of content; it is also about dealing with ambiguity, comprehending historical and cultural contexts, and providing unique interpretations. These are essentially human tasks.

Over-dependence on AI can lead to conceptual shortcuts. Students may avoid the hard effort of intensive reading and critical engagement, resulting in shallow understanding.

AI may potentially misinterpret sophisticated analogies or overlook subtle themes, resulting in generalised responses that miss the essence of the issue. Authentic research thrives on depth, paradox, and a sustained intellectual engagement. If the process is rushed, we risk losing the richness of this academic pursuit.

Instead of resisting these developments, we must rethink research. Its core focus has always been generat-

ing new knowledge, developing new interpretations, and contributing meaningfully to academic discussions. The process of gathering information is just the beginning. The researcher's function is transitioning from data collector to meaning maker. In this new world, critical thinking, imagination, and the willingness to question must be prioritised. Academic training must prepare students to use AI tools wisely, without letting them control the outcome.

Institutions too, must re-evaluate their traditional research models. Is the worth of a Ph.D. determined solely by its duration, or by the breadth and uniqueness of its contribution? Could shorter, more targeted undertakings facilitated by AI, be equally impactful? While AI has transformed research by making it faster, easier, and more collaborative, the fundamental component of scholarship remains unchanged. Critical thinking, intellectual rigour, and creative insight remain central and uniquely human.

As a research supervisor, I feel that the key issue is not whether research should span years, but how we wisely use the time available. AI frees us from routine tasks, encouraging us to go further and think deeper. Thus, the actual purpose of contemporary research should not be to accomplish more, but to do it better.

The writer is Professor of English and Dean of Student Affairs, Sandhya College of Advanced Studies (Autonomous), Madurai, Thrissur, Kerala.

GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

Pivot away

The squeeze on U.S. student visas is indicative of right-wing dominance

Fresh appointments for U.S. student visa interviews have commenced at consulates as per the extended vetting programme that includes rigorous checking of the applicant's social media activities. A chunk of visa applications is still pending at a time when the visa processing winds down and students prepare to depart. Fresh appointments were frozen for nearly a month until the extended vetting programme could be launched. With a wait time of more than a month, many visa applications may go down to the wire as classes begin by the end of August/beginning of September. The extended vetting is only one among many disruptors to the flow of Indian students to the U.S. Many other policy proposals have had a chilling effect. The Trump administration's nominee to head the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has vowed to end the Optional Practical Training programme (OPT) that allows students time to work in the U.S. after graduation while still on student visa, and which serves as a segue toward jobs, work visas and green cards. Ending OPT will disincentivise studying in America. The Trump administration has also said that it will provide only fixed-tenure student visas. The axing of government spending and funding of research and other activities of higher education institutions has had its impact – there are reports of universities rescinding PhD admissions of Indian students. Anecdotal evidence points to a sharp decline in visa issuance in several cities and increased scrutiny of the ranking of institutions granting admissions. Many of the applicants this year had begun the application process before the 2024 U.S. presidential election and, therefore, have sought to go through the process despite the fears. Next year will truly gauge how attractive the U.S. still is for Indian students.

When the Trump administration took office, it was felt that the worst of its anti-immigrant impulses would be softened by the tech billionaires who were supporting it. In the past, too, big business had driven policies bringing in talented immigrant workers and foreign students in Republican administrations. The exit of Elon Musk, however, is not a singular event but part of a trend of top techies exiting the Trump team. The cuts on green energy research in the recently passed "Big Beautiful Bill" only serve to highlight the almost complete dominance of right-wing extremists in the administration, marked by the extreme views of its leading lights such as Stephen Miller, White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy. The decline of the U.S. as a major attraction for Indian talent is perhaps only an indicator of how much India may have to pivot away from the U.S. in other areas as well. *WIK*

DRAWING LOTS

Patna University's appointments by lottery break with a legacy of academic cronyism. Deeper reforms must follow

PATNA UNIVERSITY'S APPOINTMENT of five college principals through a lottery, supervised by a Raj Bhawan panel and conducted under videographic surveillance, is a welcome departure from established procedure. On the surface, it appears at odds with the gravity of higher education frameworks and their structures of evaluation. But it is also a well-deserved indictment of the status quo, and it could become an act of institutional truth-telling — in a system corroded by nepotism, caste and political patronage, randomisation may be an impartial arbiter.

All criticism of the procedure, though, may not be without merit. Assigning a home science professor to head a science college, for instance, could raise legitimate concerns about subject expertise and institutional fit. Leadership in academia demands vision, domain knowledge, and the capacity to foster intellectual growth — qualities not easily left to chance. BSP leader Mayawati has decried the lottery as a "distorted experiment"; others have echoed the discomfort. But this indignation obscures a larger reality. For decades, government appointments in Bihar, including in its university system, have been hostage to cronyism, and its administration treated as an extension of the political machinery. Last month, Bihar's LoP Tejashwi Prasad Yadav accused the ruling NDA government of "blatant favouritism", questioning government appointments. In 2015, the Patna High Court quashed the appointment of 12 college principals under Magadh University for procedural irregularities. In 2017, an FIR was filed against JD(U) leader Mewalal Choudhary for manipulating faculty recruitments as vice-chancellor of Bihar Agriculture University in Bhagalpur between 2010 and 2015. As reported in this newspaper, shortlisted candidates in Bihar State University Service Commission this year include several well-connected individuals. The decision to conduct a lottery could mean a radical reset, disrupting entrenched power networks and infusing a form of neutrality into a deeply flawed system.

Higher education in Bihar, however, needs more. The lottery should be viewed as a short-term experiment, not a long-term prescription. Focus on transparent, specialised selection panels, independent oversight bodies, public appointment records and rotational leadership — many colleges have been under interim principals for almost 15 years in the absence of timely appointments — must bolster the roadmap for the future. By acknowledging that fairness must be deliberately engineered, Bihar has taken a difficult but necessary first step. It must convert this unconventional gambit into the groundwork for governance.

24/7/25

Children still need teachers in the age of AI

SECOND Opinion

In an age where Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising every sphere of life — from healthcare to transportation to education — it is tempting to assume that machines can replace humans in all capacities. A common refrain these days suggests that children no longer need teachers, given the rapid advancement of AI. However, this belief is not only premature but also deeply flawed. In truth, this is a paradox: the more sophisticated our technology becomes, the more critical the role of the teacher will be. There is no denying that AI tools can deliver personalised content, generate instant solutions, and help students learn at their own pace.

Learning applications are available around the clock, digital tutors never tire, and machines don't forget — but we must remember: education is not merely about information; it is more about transformation. AI may be brilliant at delivering answers, but it doesn't pause to ask, "Are you okay today?" It doesn't notice the trembling voice behind a brave front or the distant gaze of a child whose mind is burdened by something too heavy to carry alone. It won't pick up on the silence that speaks louder than words or the smile that doesn't quite reach the eyes. A machine can process data, but it cannot feel pain, confusion, or joy. It can compute, but it cannot

care. Intelligence may be artificial, but empathy — that warm, human touch — is something which only, and only, a teacher can offer. The classroom has always been more than four walls and a blackboard. It is a sanctuary, a training ground, and often a second home. The teacher plays multiple roles — educator, mentor, counsellor, confidant, and role model. As Albert Einstein once remarked, "*It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.*" That art cannot be automated. Children are emotional and social beings. They need affirmation, encouragement, guidance, and, at times, correction — none of which a machine can provide with genuine warmth.



SAKSHI
SETHI

As Aristotle wisely said, "*Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.*" AI can tutor; it cannot nurture. It can test; it cannot inspire. And that's the difference between learning and being educated. Moreover, in a time when children are exposed to increasing digital overload, emotional stress, and moral ambiguity, teachers serve as moral anchors.

They teach values, build resilience, and model empathy — qualities that are neither programmed nor processed by machines. To rely solely on AI for a child's holistic development is like using Google Maps to find purpose in life — convenient, but directionless. Of course, it would be foolish to ignore the benefits AI brings to the classroom.

It can support differentiated instruction, handle administrative tasks, and help bridge learning gaps. But let's call a spade a spade — AI is a tool, not a teacher. It is the assistant, not the architect. In the right hands, it becomes an enabler, allowing educators to focus more on meaningful interaction and less on mechanical tasks.

As the old saying goes, "*It's the poor workman who blames his tools,*" and today's skilled teacher is learning to use AI wisely, not fear it. At its core, teaching is not about delivering content; it's about cultivating curiosity, instilling confidence, and shaping character.

No child ever grew up to say, "An algorithm changed my life." But many successful people trace their journey back to a teacher who believed in them when no one else did. The true essence of teaching lies in connection — something no chatbot can simulate. It is the teacher who lights that lamp and keeps it burning through storms of self-doubt, distraction, and failure.

Remember, Artificial Intelligence may assist in delivering education, but it is the teacher who delivers humanity. The danger is not that AI will become more intelligent than us; the danger is that we might forget what makes us human in the first place. Let us not hand over the chalk entirely to a machine. In fact, let's continue to honour the irreplaceable presence of a teacher — the heartbeat of every meaningful classroom, and the compass in every young learner's journey.

(The writer is an educator and a counsellor.
Views are personal)

sid/6

Growth push: Betting big on R&D

The Union Cabinet's approval for the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) scheme is an important step towards boosting the country's performance in innovation and research. The government proposes to launch a Rs-1 lakh crore fund to support and encourage research and development in the private sector through low-interest, long-term loans. The focus on promoting private sector participation in R&D efforts is a new theme in government policy. Titled the Anusandhan National Research Foundation, the initiative comes with a two-tiered structure. While its top tier will handle the Rs-1 lakh crore corpus through a special purpose fund, the funds will be passed on at zero or low interest to a second tier of fund managers who will disburse them for projects in the private sector. The aim is to encourage the private sector to undertake research in sunrise domains and strategic sectors which will aid the country's development.

India's R&D performance is low, both in the public and the private sector. The country's total R&D spending is only 0.65% of its GDP which is much less than the spending by other major countries. The US spends over 2.5%, China over 2.4%, and South Korea and Israel about 4-5% of their GDP on research. The private sector accounts for only 35% of the R&D investment in India while the sector contributes 75% of R&D in the US and China. A robust R&D ecosystem is crucial in creating new products and processes, and helping companies to become competitive and to grow. India's inability

With affordable financing, RDI scheme aims at greater private sector investment

to create strong global brands can be traced to the low priority accorded to R&D. Research lags in comparison with advanced countries, as reflected in the number of patents and publication of papers. India's aspirations to become a developed country also hinge on its encouragement of creative spirit and innovation.

The new initiative will hopefully result in funding support for research in important sectors such as industry, science, engineering, and agriculture. Research in pure science is the basis of discovery of new processes and technologies and it should get adequate attention. There should be better linkages between industry and academia in research and related academic activities as they can strengthen each other. An ecosystem that further encourages start-ups and small companies should be developed as they are more likely than larger firms to adopt innovation. It is also important to improve the standards of education at all levels so that there is adequate human resources support for the R&D programmes. 22/8/25

The Hindi in Hindutva

The language question is central to its politics. In Maharashtra and elsewhere, protests rooted in regional pride miss the bigger picture



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

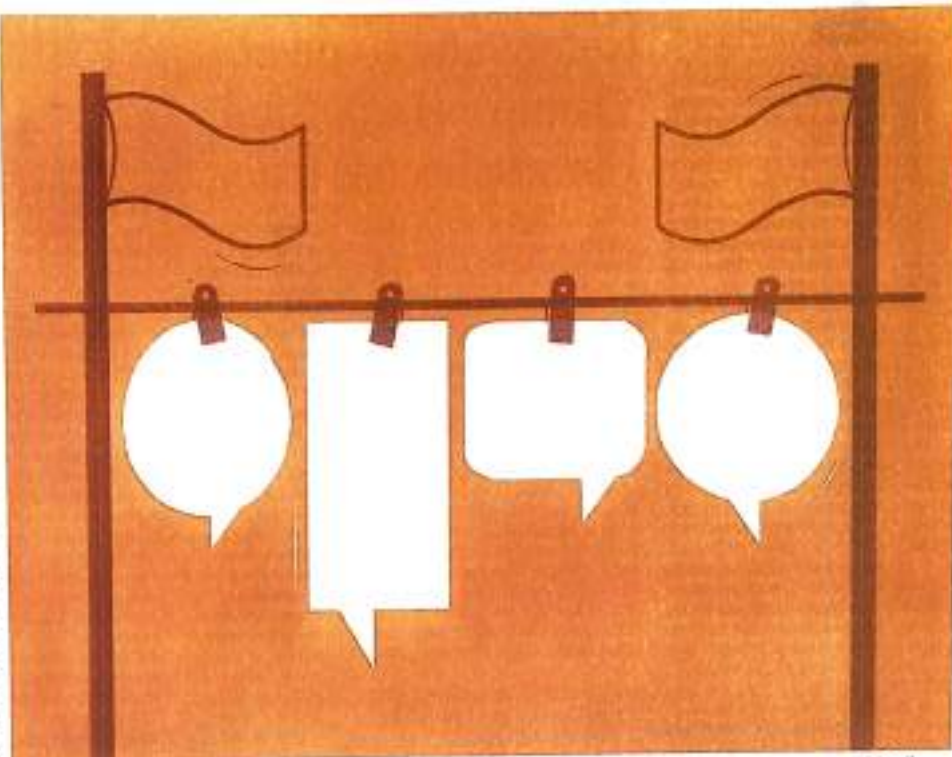
AFTER WEEKS OF twists and turns, the Maharashtra government has suspended its proposed policy of introducing Hindi as a compulsory language from the first standard in state schools. This may appear to be merely a state-level issue. Opposition to it may seem like a seasonal bout of opportunistic politics. It is neither. The pro-Hindi policy of the state government has been in line with the BJP's longstanding ambition to have Hindi (shuddh Hindi, not Hindustani) as the national language — a policy that dovetails with its penchant for enforcing uniformity in every respect and implementing a one nation, one language policy. The recent troubles over education policy in Maharashtra, therefore, need to be understood in a larger context, beyond pedagogic wisdom, state-level party politics and Marathi pride. These troubles amplify the debate over what we mean by the Indian nation, and in turn, the deeper, routine practices of majoritarianism.

When the Maharashtra government kept insisting on introducing Hindi in the first standard, only two responses against it seem to have mobilised public opinion in the state. One somewhat apolitical response has been about the wisdom of introducing three languages when a child begins her education. This argument is confined to the child's capacity to grasp multiple languages at an early age and the question of burden. The other response, predictably, was triggered by the pro-Marathi sentiment. This helped the estranged Thackeray cousins to share the same ideological ground after a long time. Sections of the media, and intellectuals who have always romanticised the idea that a strong pro-Marathi lobby would help the language, have naturally been excited over this second development concerning Marathi pride, so quick on the heels of Marathi being declared a classical language by the Narendra Modi government.

But there is not much awareness of the larger ideological implications of the pro-Hindi policy. This is not restricted to Maharashtra alone. Many administrators and policymakers have always remained somewhat narrow in their approach to the language question — looking at it only in terms of convenience, and therefore, reducing it to the question of official language or link language. For many of us, diversity is always a clumsy inconvenience.

The question of language, however, has always spilled over beyond administrative convenience to the realm of unity and nationhood. Thus, even within Congress, there has always been a strong Hindi lobby that believed a common language was necessary for a nation and that Hindi could naturally claim that status. There were even some from the south in this lobby, and though they were not necessarily inclined to surrender their own linguistic traditions, they supported the idea of a national language — *sanskrit*. That is why we had *naitikashiksha* seminars pushing for Hindi education through voluntary efforts.

This idea that Hindi would gradually involve to become a national language often overlapped with the imagination that a nation requires one common language. Among north India's Hindi lobby, this overlap was more pronounced. But that overlap was not exclusive to Hindi-speaking pro-Hindi activists. Where does this craving for a national language come from?



CR Senikumar

During much of the time when India's national struggle was shaping up in the early 20th century, the more prominent model of nationalism in Europe often privileged uniformity over anything else. This had a deep influence on many Indian social and political activists and thinkers. But the Hindutva nationalism of VD Savarkar and the RSS most enthusiastically adopted the idea of uniformity. Many in Congress were attracted to it, but believed that such uniformity was either culturally inherent in India's practices or that it would evolve over time through persuasion and practice. Thus, two different models of uniformity operated in actual politics as India became independent. The more predominant one was uniformity through mutual exchange, give-and-take, and historical sharing, while the Hindutva vision believed in the primacy and urgency of uniformity over anything else. This applied to the language question, too.

Debates over Hindutva have often remained confined to the question of religion. But Hindutva as an ideology and politics should be understood not merely in terms of the Hindu-Muslim question. True, the practical politics of Hindutva obsessively revolves around, and is based on, deep Islamophobia, coupled with anti-minority sentiments and Hindu supremacy. But at the root of it is a more general imagination that democracy means a free play for the majority community. In the case of the language question, too, it would be a mistake to ignore this foundational belief that has shaped Hindutva. It is often argued that a certain percentage of people in India speak Hindi. It is another matter that this "number" is derived historically through amalgamating speakers of many other languages and claiming those languages as variants of Hindi — that is exactly how "majorities" are constructed, whether based on religion, language or culture. In the majoritarian project, some traits of one section of society are posited as common to most. It is then argued that all those who manifest those traits constitute one community, enjoying large numbers.

More recently, the systematic push in favour of making Hindi the official language

Debates over Hindutva have often remained confined to the question of religion. But Hindutva as an ideology and politics should be understood not merely in terms of the Hindu-Muslim question.

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unofficially has been evident. While sometimes, the majoritarians hope for assimilation (*ramrasai*), they don't have the political patience to wait for that to happen. Majoritarian projects, when out of power, speak of assimilation in order to save themselves from state action, but when in power, exercise the same state power to enforce uniformity. Since the BJP knows that its coalition partners have nowhere to go, it nudges them to support the idea of uniformity on the question of language. A large electoral majority in Maharashtra has encouraged the BJP-led government to adopt the policy of enforcing Hindi while its domesticated allies in Andhra Pradesh talk of willingly adopting Hindi.

In withdrawing its controversial decision in Maharashtra, the BJP may have accepted a tactical retreat temporarily, but it knows that the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena neither comprehend nor want to counter the majoritarian project. With a soon-to-be-formed "expert committee", the state government will subsequently find ways of continuing with a majoritarian politics of enforced uniformity. Just like in Maharashtra, the BJP's pro-Hindi policy will receive only limited opposition elsewhere, be it in West Bengal or Tamil Nadu. That response will be in terms of regional identity, language protectionism and an anti-Hindi stance. Recent history shows that Hindutva has the capacity to absorb such regionalist tendencies at state level.

Thus, Maharashtra's protests against Hindi imposition will only produce a Marathi pride that is oblivious of the larger majoritarian project. That project will mostly go unchallenged as anti-Hindi politics will neither protect our linguistic diversity nor sensitise the public about the dangers of imposing uniformity. The day when votaries of regional languages appreciate the link between making one language "national" and making one culture national, we shall have a better handle to understand the politics of nationalism masquerading as the politics of a national language.

The writer, based in Pune, teaches Political Science

Fueling innovation:

Why a PG in entrepreneurship boosts careers

SHERINE ABDEL-SALAM MOHAMED

In a rapidly evolving global economy, innovation is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity. As traditional industries undergo disruption and new technologies reshape the world of work, the demand for agile, innovation-driven professionals is skyrocketing.

Today's world doesn't just need more business graduates; we need bold thinkers. Individuals with an entrepreneurial mindset who can identify opportunities, implement innovations, and navigate change are invaluable in any context. In a recent study, while 84 per cent of CEOs acknowledge innovation as vital for growth, only 6 per cent express satisfaction with their company's innovation performance. This highlights a gap between the importance of innovation and the ability and mindset to effectively implement and manage it.

Even within established organisations, we need employees with an entrepreneurial mindset, who think like entrepreneurs, who challenge conventional thinking, who seek efficiencies, or envision new products. They are the true powerful drivers of growth for our future. From fintech to health-tech, from AI to sustainability ventures, economies are placing their bets on bold thinkers, with an entrepreneurial mindset, who can turn ideas into impactful enterprises.

India is at the forefront of this transformation. As one of the world's fastest-growing digital economies, the country is experiencing a profound entrepreneurial boom. With over 100 unicorns and a startup ecosystem ranked among the top globally (the 3rd largest startup ecosystem in the world!), India has become a hub for innovation. Government initiatives such as Startup India and Digital India, along with increasing internet penetration and a youthful demographic, have laid fertile ground for digital enterprises to flourish.



In this context, the appetite for entrepreneurial education is growing. Aspiring founders, product managers, venture builders, and intrapreneurs are seeking not just business knowledge but the tools to lead in a technology-first world. Pursuing a postgraduate programme that develops the skills and mindset valued by organisations of all sizes can position India's leaders of tomorrow to navigate future shifts in the business landscape – equipping them to adapt, evolve, and succeed in any setting.

A postgraduate degree focused on entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology provides ambitious individuals with the expertise to launch or scale their own ventures, contribute to high-growth startups, or drive innovation within established companies. That becomes especially relevant to the future leaders of India.

Specialised MSc programmes should be designed to meet the needs of the next generation of entrepreneurial leaders. Programmes should equip students with the mindset, skills and experience needed to lead in the entrepreneurial world – whether as startup founders, product innovators or change-makers within established organisations.

When considering a postgraduate programme, look for modules covering new venture creation, business modelling, and innovation strategy, and opt for courses which are both interdisciplinary and future-facing. Importantly, students should learn not only how to generate great ideas, but also how to test, refine, and implement them. It's ideal if a programme blends theoretical learning with practical application, offering students the opportunity to engage with real-world problems, develop business plans, collaborate with startups, and connect with local innovation ecosystems.

Postgraduate programmes in entrepreneurship should equip students to make a difference and empower them to join a global community of innovators while gaining the skills and insights needed to contribute to India's dynamic innovation landscape.

Graduates from entrepreneurial programmes will have gained the skills to pursue a wide range of exciting career paths. Some may launch their own startups or social enterprises; others might take up roles in product development, innovation strategy, venture capital, or digital transformation. Some could go on to lead intrapreneurial projects within large organisations, while others could use the programme as a stepping stone into policy, consultancy, or further academic research. The versatility of this type of degree lies in its strong foundation in both strategic thinking and technological awareness, making it highly adaptable to evolving market needs.

What unites these diverse career outcomes is a shared need for essential 21st-century capabilities: adaptability, innovation leadership, and critical thinking. These are not just desirable traits, but rather the requirements in a global economy where technological change and market volatility are the norm.

Studying for a postgraduate degree in entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology empowers students to move beyond traditional career pathways and shape the future, whether by building new ventures, transforming organisations, or solving societal challenges. For India's future leaders with global ambitions, this type of programme offers the tools, network, and inspiration to thrive in the innovation economy.

The future belongs to those who can create it. By learning entrepreneurial and innovation skills, students are not just preparing for tomorrow – they're building it!

The author is the programme director of MSc Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Technology, Strathclyde Business School, Glasgow.

Necessary toolkit

P. JOHN J. KENNEDY

In April, the Supreme Court cleared the way for the University Grants Commission to implement its long-awaited Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions Regulations, 2025. Heralded as a progressive leap toward institutional justice, the notification came in the wake of decades of systemic caste discrimination and months after a powerful legal petition led by Radhika Vemula and Abeda Tadvj, the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvj, whose suicides laid bare the entrenched violence of caste in India's universities. While the legal sanction is welcome, some lingering questions haunt the academic corridors: how far can a notification go? How might the proposed national caste survey contribute in uprooting these deep social hierarchies within higher education?

The UGC's new regulations are not merely bureaucratic rewordings of older, toothless guidelines. For the first time, non-compliance comes with tangible consequences, such as funding cuts, potential derecognition, and mandatory Equity Committees with SC/ST and female representation. Additionally, a National Task Force on student suicides and mental health is to oversee the policy's implementation. However, the caution raised by Indira Jaising, senior advocate for the petitioners, is pertinent. By clubbing caste discrimination with other forms of abuse like ragging, bullying, and sexual harassment, the regulation risks masking the specificity and structural depth of caste-based exclusion. Earlier drafts had explicitly named practices like the denial of caste certificates, humiliation during viva exams, and withdrawal of fellowships as indicators of caste violence in campuses. Their quiet omission is not merely a redaction; it's a political retreat.

This is where the proposed caste survey can act as a powerful complement. If implemented with political will and academic integrity, the survey could provide the data necessary to both expose and confront caste injustices

that regulations alone cannot address.

A comprehensive caste survey would offer updated, disaggregated data on educational attainment, socio-economic background, dropout rates, and institutional representation of SCs, STs, OBCs, and other marginalised communities. This allows for a far more targeted equity framework that revisits reservation policies, reevaluates the creamy layer within OBCs, and builds support mechanisms. For example, what if universities had to publish 'diversity dashboards', transparently displaying the representation of caste groups among students, faculty, and administrators? What if grievance redressal mechanisms were not generic but rooted in lived, caste-based vulnerabilities? Data can shame institutions into action and guide them toward corrective interventions. Currently available data are shocking: a 2021 study found that 70% of Dalit and Adivasi students in IITs faced caste-based discrimination; between 2015 and 2019, only 1.6% of PhD seats at IIT Bombay went to ST candidates.

Curricular change is another space where regulation and survey findings must work together. Caste cannot continue to be taught as a relic of India's feudal past. It must be addressed as a living, breathing system of inequality. Equally urgent is the diversification of faculty. The invisibility of SC/ST/OBC faculty in elite institutions denies marginalised students mentors who understand their lives and aspirations.

At the heart of institutional resistance to regulation and survey lies the sanctified notion of 'merit'. However, 'merit', as sociologists and even the Supreme Court have acknowledged, is often caste privilege in disguise. The caste survey can challenge the myth head-on by exposing how access to quality schooling, preparatory coaching, and academic networks is deeply unequal.

The caste survey isn't without risks. Data can be weaponised and misused. But these are not reasons to abandon the survey. The 2025 UGC notification and the proposed caste survey, one offering legal legitimacy, the other empirical clarity, are both necessary. *Telegraph*

P. John J. Kennedy is former professor and dean, Christ (Deemed to be) University, Bengaluru

More Than Just Comp Geeks



T K Arun

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) brings out occupational outlook handbooks. After you apply filters for pay, projected growth rate and new jobs, the 2025 Outlook picks 10 occupations. Six of them relate to computer and information sciences, two to finance, one to management, and one to medical and health service management.

Of course, if you are gifted with special talent in music, sport, writing or other creative arts, you would be well-advised to ignore the BLS and nurture your talent all the way to success, or even fame. If you have an aptitude for celebrity, venality, draft-dodging, tax-dodging, felony real estate development and grievance-mongering, you know where to head.

In India, we do have a National Career Service. But it only offers to direct you to counsellors. But practically all the 7,000-odd engineering colleges have their own lists of preferred engineering courses. Here, too, the first preference is for computer sciences, laced with AI and ML now.

Computer sciences and software development have, indeed, been India's favoured engineering disciplines ever since Indian geeks on H-1B visas gained a toehold and foothold in the land of opportunity for the express purpose of slaying the Y2K dragon.

The highest revenue per employee among India's big tech companies is for HCL, at a little over \$61,000. This is puny compared to the \$1 mn-plus earning per employee for US tech giants. Still, this was enough for the In-



Drone acharyas

dian tech industry to serve as the vehicle through which India's young achieved social mobility.

Actually, whatever branch of engineering you studied, you joined a tech company, learned to code, and you entered the ranks of the middle class, paying EMIs for homes, phones, cars and holidays, and boosting the Indian economy. AI threatens to put paid to a whole lot of routine programming jobs, enabling an efficient coder to increase his productivity 15-20x. In the US, where software developers are engineers, and programmers are anybody who can write code, programming jobs have been joining the bison, the 4-legged cougar, and the American liberal, as they grope their way into the sunset.



Building low Earth-orbiting satellites, and launching them at scale, will create an entire new space industry, calling for engineering talent specific to it

in India will not even get a look-in at such jobs. However, opportunities are opening up in all kinds of engineering fields, thanks to the green energy transition, and compulsion on India to fortify national security in communications and power transmission, and indigenise defence technology and manufacture.

Take the latest scare over Chinese withholding of rare earth magnets to users around the world, including in India. We either have to get more rare earths of our own than is available from IREL (India) Ltd, or develop motors that do not depend on rare earth-doped permanent magnets. Along with battery minerals, this creates demands for power engineers, and mining, mechanical and chemical engineers.

The transition to sustainable energy calls for significant increases in RE generation, whether wind, solar or biodigestion, and battery storage. Battery minerals call for expertise in prospecting, mining and ore refining. Developing batteries with high-storage capacity, fast-charging times, and low weight calls for expertise in power engineering, chemistry, materials, design and miniaturisation.

Developing magnetic reluctance motors that dispense with rare earth-doped permanent magnets calls for expertise in power engineering, and in microelectronics to control the speed of these motors.

Drones are the high flying hope in new deftech, especially after Ukraine's Operation Spider against Russia, in which drones packed into crates inside trucks were smuggled into Russia, parked near air force bases, and remotely released from their cages to attack parked planes and inflict heavy damage on strategic bombers.

Designing and building drones that are lightweight and long-range, are capable of acting as loitering munitions or early warning systems, that can be controlled without radio guidance, and all sorts of other kinds, calls for combinations of different kinds of engineering and design. How to kill enemy drones is another challenge. Bursts of laser or microwave radiation could kill their electronics. How to miniaturise power sources for such bursts and make them mobile all along the border is another challenge.

Preventing our power grid, drones or computer systems from being hacked and disabled calls for another combination of engineering skills.



AI threatens to put paid to a whole lot of routine programming jobs, enabling an efficient coder to increase his productivity 15-20x

Low Earth-orbiting (LEO) satellites are increasingly vital in communications and national security. Building LEOs, and launching them at scale, will create an entire new space industry, calling for engineering talent specific to it.

Bliss it is, in this dawn of new opportunity to be an engineer. But to be a young engineer in any discipline, is very heaven. Let us stop obsessing over computer sciences alone.

How a Student's Courage Triggered a District-Wide Financial Reckoning

A young girl's request for education loan of ₹35,000 is turned down. But her dignity, resolve and handwritten application set off a chain of events that would expose bureaucratic apathy, reveal systemic market failures

FIRST
Column

It was a warm July afternoon in 2014, and I was chairing a committee meeting in my capacity as Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Una, a district in Himachal Pradesh. Just as the meeting was winding down, a young girl walked into my office. She introduced herself as Rabita Thakur (name changed) and said she needed ₹35,000. On further inquiry, she explained that the amount was for pursuing her college education.

Her courage struck me. For a young girl from a rural background to step into the DC's office alone and ask for help showed grit and determination — especially given how intimidating such spaces are to the common citizen, more so to girls from underprivileged backgrounds. I wanted to know more. She had completed her schooling from a Hindi-medium Government school in her village, passed with first division marks, and scored 57 per cent in her senior secondary exams. Her dream was to study BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) at Government College, Una. When I asked about her family background, the simply said her father was a daily wage labourer. She belonged to the 'Other' (General) category and did not qualify for most reserved-category scholarships.

I offered her financial assistance from the Red Cross Fund — a corpus the DC oversees for welfare needs. But Rabita politely declined. "I don't want charity," she said. "I want a student loan." Her dignity and clarity of thought impressed me. She wanted an opportunity, not a handout.

She had come prepared, with a neatly handwritten application requesting a loan. Without any hesitation, I signed the application and rushed it to the Branch Manager of the local XYZ Bank in her village, requesting them to process the loan "in my name." I asked her to personally hand it over to the manager. She left my office beaming with hope.

Three months later, in October, Rabita was back — this time with her father, both of them visibly distressed. Tears welled up in her eyes as she told me her college admission window had closed. She had lost a whole academic year because the bank never sanctioned her loan.

I was shocked. Hadn't she submitted the application bearing my official recommendation? She had. But the Branch Manager kept postponing the process. After two or three visits, he finally told her that the loan could only be granted if they provided collateral. Then he remembered, "Poor people like her don't have and never return them. That's why bank NPAs are rising — something the DC notices at our Bankers Committee meetings."

Her father, a daily wage labourer, had no property to offer as collateral, but that shouldn't have mattered. Government norms clearly state that education loans up to a certain limit (typically ₹7.5 lakh) do not require collateral. The bank manager's response was not only incorrect — it was scabrous. Yet, for me, it wasn't just about the flouting of guidelines or the blatant disregard of a DC's order. It was the loss of a precious year in the life of an



Young girl who had done everything right.

aspiring girl who had done everything right. I called the Lead Bank Manager (LBM) of the district — coincidentally from the same Bank — and asked him to look into the matter. His response was evasive: "I will see." But what good was that? The damage had already been done. The academic year had ended in July.

The LBM was newly posted, while the Branch Manager in question had been stationed in that village for seven or eight years. He also happened to be a relative of a local political figure. Despite my clear displeasure, the Branch Manager didn't bother to call or visit me. Nor did the LBM offer any meaningful resolution.

That's when I decided to take a step — not out of vengeance, but to uphold accountability. I summoned my Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) and Personal Assistant and asked them to issue no request directions to all Government departments in Una district were to withdraw their deposits from XYZ

Bank and transfer them to other public sector banks with immediate effect.

Government deposits form a significant portion of a bank's funds, and their withdrawal is a strong signal of institutional displeasure. Departments like Education, Health, Rural Development, Revenue, and various local administrative bodies often maintain multiple accounts across bank branches. Since alternative public sector banks were available in almost every town and block, the shift could be done quickly. The very next morning, my ADC reported back: ₹80 crore had been withdrawn from the Bank's branches across Una district in a single day. This message was received loud and clear.

Within hours, the LBM, along with the writing Branch Manager, came knocking on my office. I refused to meet them. Later, the State LBM called and expressed regret.

I nuzzled the full story and demanded a written explanation for the bank's denial. But no explanation, could undo the reputation Rabita had faced. No administrative correction could bring back her lost academic year.

Rabita's case reflects multiple layers of market failure. As Kataria and Shuk-ping note in *The Service of the Republic* (2007), market failures necessitate state intervention — usually, with financial direc-

tion and cost.

This incident illustrates several such failures:

- **Asymmetric Information:** Many students, especially from rural areas, are unaware of other financial options or scholarship schemes.
- **Externalities:** A girl's higher education creates positive spillover effects — not just for her future income but for her family's socio-economic upliftment.
- **Market Power:** PSU banks enjoy a near-monopoly in rural areas due to the absence of private players.
- **Controlled Risk:** There's a harmful stereotype that poor people default more, whereas large-scale NPAs often stem from corporate borrowers.

What Needs to Be Done

- **Improved Communication:** Banks must disseminate clear and simple information about educational loans through posters, rangis, and digital platforms.
- **Capacity Building:** Colleges should set up dedicated Loans & Scholarship Assistance Centres to guide students through the process.
- **Policy Clarification:** Educational loans up to ₹7.5 lakh need not require collateral. Bank staff must be reminded of this.

- **Digital Simplification:** Portals like Vidyalokshmi should be made user-friendly. Terms like 'HLLR + 80P + 0.75 per cent' confuse students and must be translated into plain language.
- **Involving Government Officers:** District Programme Officers and Deputy Directors of Higher Education must act as facilitators between students and banks.
- **Revisiting Ration:** The belief that the poor are more likely to default is not backed by data or behavioural economics. Nobel laureate Duffo and Banerjee, in *Poor Economics* (2011), argue that poor borrowers are more conscientious because they feel a moral weight of repayment.

In my tenure as DC in three districts (Kullu, Hamirpur, Una), I have witnessed how some private institutions and businesses wilfully default, requiring court orders or tribunals for recovery. One big corporate NPA can equal thousands of small education loans.

Reforms and Innovations

Education is a merit good — not a pure public good, but one that deserves state support. This case takes many lessons.

- **Direct Benefit Transfer:** For girls from low-income families.
- **Scholarship Impersonation:** Under Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women & Child Development schemes.
- **Lower Interest Rates:** For girls (SBI offers a 8.5 per cent concession).
- **Wider Coverage:** of schemes like PM Vidyalokshmi (Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar) and other public banks already offer collateral-free loans up to ₹5 lakh. But the policy must be implemented uniformly and with empathy.

Final Reflections

This incident began merely as a real-life episode, reveals deep insights into financial inclusion, gender equity, and the ethics of public administration. I still reflect on whether withdrawing ₹80 crore from a bank was the right response. Should an entire district have paid the price for one Branch Manager's apathy and a Lead Bank Manager's silence? Perhaps. Because in the three years I served as DC Una, not one such case resurfaced. Students loans were promptly disbursed, and departments took a proactive role in guiding students. This story became a conversation of my message in State-level Bankers' Committee meetings, and I continue to cite it in my present role as Secretary (Finance) in the Government of Himachal Pradesh. Rabita lost one year, but her story, her courage, and that small application she wrote became a ripple of accountability that changed how education loans were treated in an entire district. And that, I believe, is a story worth telling.

(The author is Secretary (Finance), Planning, P&I, Government of Himachal Pradesh. She is engaged in research.)



ASHISH KUMAR

Personal Assistant and asked them to issue no request directions to all Government departments in Una district were to withdraw their deposits from XYZ

'Innovation doesn't happen in silos... Our academic institutions must build structures that allow different minds to meet'

In an era when students are seeking more than just degrees, India's top academic institutions are being called to rethink their purpose. At the heart of this shift is a quiet but urgent transformation – one that places innovation, entrepreneurship, and real-world impact at the centre of higher education. V Ramgopal Rao, group vice chancellor of BITS Pilani campuses, spoke with Hemali Chhapia on why academia must evolve from being a place of knowledge creation to a platform for problem-solving.

● You've said Indian academia needs transformation. What might such a transformation look like?

It's about reimagining the core of what our institutions stand for. For too long, we've measured academic success through publications, citations, and patents.



But the world has changed – and so have the expectations from students and society. They don't just want degrees; they want to solve problems, create value, make impact. For that, we need to put entrepreneurship, innovation, and relevance at the centre of our academic DNA.

Q&A

● You're suggesting knowledge is no longer enough, that it must translate into something more tangible?

Exactly. Knowledge has to move beyond paper. It must travel, touch lives, and evolve into solutions. Think of it as a journey: a problem becomes a project, the project becomes a paper, then a patent. But why stop there? That patent must become a prototype. A prototype, after feedback, becomes a product. And when that product reaches people and solves a real-world issue – it generates not just profit, but purpose. This arc – from problem to product to public good – is what our institutions must institutionalise.

● But is that kind of translation possible in our current academic structure?

It's hard, but not impossible. We need a mindset shift – and structural support. At BITS Pilani, we're piloting a model through our PhD DRIVE programme – Deep-tech Research, Innovation, Value generation and Entrepreneurship. It encourages scholars to think about the

real-world applications of their work from day one. We're also aligning faculty evaluations to include patents, prototypes, and startup impact – not just journal metrics.

● You've spoken about looking westward for inspiration – like Stanford or MIT. But what should we take away from their success?

Not their patent count – but how they deploy them. Less than 1% of Stanford's revenues come from patent licensing. Yet their IP, leveraged through startups and collaborations, has created over \$3tn in economic value.



The lesson? Filing IP isn't enough. You need an ecosystem where ideas don't gather dust but get to work.

● What barriers held back Indian institutions?

Two big ones: collaboration and culture. First, collaboration. Innovation doesn't happen in silos. It happens when technologists talk to economists, when clinicians brainstorm with data scientists. Our institutions must build structures that allow different minds to meet. Second, culture. We currently celebrate academic depth – Nature papers, H-indexes – but not translational breadth. A student solving a sanitation

issue in a village doesn't get applause if there's no publication attached. That must change.

● You mention culture – but surely this also ties into how our institutions are funded and governed?

Absolutely. US transformed its academic landscape with the Morrill Act in 1862, creating land-grant universities tied to national development. We need our Morrill moment. NEP 2020 can be that turning point – but only if we act on it boldly. Our institutions rely heavily on tuition or govt grants. Compare that to US, where diversified income – endowments, philanthropy, industry ties – gives freedom to dream, experiment, and fail forward.

● How do we bridge the disconnect between academia and industry?

We need to speak the same language. Industry wants results; academia wants inquiry. Industry guards secrets; we publish them. To collaborate meaningfully, we need professional tech transfer offices, flexible IP policies, faster MoUs – and most importantly, mutual trust. At BITS, we're working to streamline these processes and embed industry orientation into student and faculty mindset alike.

● And for students? How do you nurture entrepreneurial thinking?

We stop treating entrepreneurship as an extra-curricular activity. It must become an academic outcome. We tell students it's okay to fail. We celebrate the ones who build, not just those who memorise. We give them platforms – not just degrees. At BITS Pilani, we're actively fusing research, innovation, and enterprise. Because the real mark of a university isn't just how many graduates it produces, but how many changemakers it inspires.

● What do you hope to see in Indian academia in five years?

I hope to see universities that are not ivory towers but innovation platforms. That doesn't just award degrees, but solves problems. That redefines success, not by how much they publish, but by how much they change lives. It's a long road – but if institutions like ours take the first steps, I'm certain many will follow. The time to act is now.

10/7/15

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Embrace reform, not inflated results

The Karnataka State School Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB) has proposed aligning the SSLC examination pattern with the CBSE system, notably by reducing the minimum pass marks from 35 to 33 and scaling down the first language paper from 125 to 100 marks. This follows pressure from stakeholders such as the Associated Management of Primary and Secondary Schools, who argue that state board students are at a disadvantage compared to their peers in CBSE and ICSE systems. The intent to create parity among boards is understandable, but it also raises concerns about compromising the quality of education. With declining SSLC results – only 62% passed this year – and the poor performance in North Karnataka districts, some kind of intervention is warranted. However, does lowering the benchmark constitute meaningful reform, or is it merely a superficial fix that sidesteps the deeper malaise in the state's education system?

A closer look at the Karnataka Residential Educational Institutions Society (KREIS) schools reveals a more effective approach. Catering largely to disadvantaged students, these institutions, run by the Social Welfare Department, consistently report pass percentages exceeding 90%. Their success stems not from diluted standards, but from comprehensive academic support, structured residential schooling, dedicated and well-trained teachers, focussed coaching, and continuous assessment. In contrast, many government schools grapple with crumbling infrastructure, chronic teacher shortages, and reliance on nearly 50,000 guest teachers. Without stable mentorship, students are left ill-prepared. In such conditions, lowering the pass marks risks promoting rote learning and superficial evaluation.

**Lowering
pass marks
is a shortcut;
the move
sidesteps
questions on
poor learning
outcomes**

Rather than shifting goal posts, the government must conduct a thorough audit of the entire education system. The focus should extend beyond pass percentages to address the root causes behind poor learning outcomes, both in public and private institutions. Is the syllabus too demanding? Are teachers adequately trained? Are fundamental concepts being grasped by the students? Are schools providing the support needed to overcome socio-economic hurdles? Promoting students who lack basic understanding may temporarily inflate results but could severely hamper their progress in higher education and future careers. Alignment with national boards is not inherently flawed, but it must be paired with systemic investment in quality teaching, infrastructure, and student support. Karnataka does not need a lower bar; it needs to raise educational standards to create a strong foundation. The state must embrace comprehensive reform, not settle for shortcuts that sacrifice long-term growth for short-term gains. The government should realise that true progress lies not in easing the path but in ensuring every student is equipped to walk it successfully. *anil*

Remembering VKRV Rao

R S DESHPANDE

If we consider individuals from Karnataka who have made significant contributions to social science research in India through dedicated effort, Prof Vijayendra Kasturiranga Varadaraja Rao (V K R V Rao) distinctly stands out. On his birthday (July 8), we honour this remarkable scholar and institution-builder, who established numerous social science research centres across the country.

Born in Kancheepuram and raised in Mumbai, Prof Rao studied at Cambridge and maintained deep ties with Karnataka. He was elected twice to Parliament, representing the Bellary constituency. Prof Rao also served as vice-chancellor of Delhi University and a member of the Planning Commission, offering guidance on education. He was instrumental in the founding of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), aiming to improve national income estimates and foster social science research.

Prof Rao was also the first Union Minister of Education from Karnataka, serving in Indira Gandhi's cabinet. He introduced reforms that bolstered social science research nationwide and later also held the portfolio of transport and shipping. After resigning from the Union Cabinet, he returned to Bengaluru, driven by his love for Karnataka, and founded the Institute for Social and Economic Change, realising his long-held dream of establishing a research institute in the city.

Prof V K R V Rao was an exceptional educator and founder of several key institutions. He established the Delhi School of Economics, where he appointed our former PM, Dr Manmohan Singh, as a professor. Later, he founded the Institute of Economic Growth in Delhi and the Institute for Social and Economic Change in Bengaluru.

As Minister of Education, he was instrumental in creating the Indian Council of Social Science Research in Delhi, along with Agro-Economic Centres, Population Research Centres, Demographic Research Centres, the National Sample Survey Organisation, Population Research Centres, and the Central Institute of Indian Languages. He served as vice-chancellor of Delhi University, launching the Delhi School of Economics and assembling renowned scholars such as Amartya Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty, Jagdish Bhagwati, Manmohan Singh, Tapan Raychaudhuri, A L Nagar, Raj Krishna, K N Raj, and Pranab Bardhan. He also established

a strong sociology faculty with figures like M N Srinivas, Andre Beteille, and Veena Das. He served as a member of the Planning Commission under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. From 1967 to 1971, he was a minister in Indira Gandhi's Cabinet and was elected to Parliament from Karnataka's Bellary constituency, representing the Congress Party. He lived simply in Jayanagar until his death on July 25, 1991. Through his efforts, he impacted many economists and policymakers, including members of the Planning Commission and Economic Advisers, and contributed to numerous policies during Mrs. Gandhi's tenure, who held him in high esteem.

After completing his education in Mumbai, Professor Rao graduated with a BA from Gonville and Caius College at Cambridge as an exceptional student, specialising in economics. He was part of the cohort taught by John Maynard Keynes and was recognised as one of Lord Keynes' talented students and a persuasive speaker. He completed his doctoral thesis titled "The National Income of British India, 1931-1932" under Professor Colin Clark's supervision. This work was published in 1936 by George Allen and Unwin and became a pioneering study worldwide on calculating national income and its methodologies. Professor Rao authored 39 books and monographs and approximately 250 articles and delivered numerous lectures at national and international conferences. He was highly esteemed worldwide for his contributions to economics, receiving praise from Nobel laureates who visited ISEC during his tenure. Despite some of his contemporaries staying back in England, he returned to India.

Today, we celebrate Prof Rao's impactful contributions to education, academic research, and training thousands of skilled social scientists. Karnataka values his work and the initiatives he fostered for its economy, such as decentralisation and federal financial relations. These efforts involved leading academicians and even the chief ministers of several states at ISEC. Late Prof Brahmavarada wrote movingly, "The life of this great son of India was a saga of liberal giving. Probably few economists anywhere in the world have given so much to so many and yet taken so little for themselves and their families."

(The writer is a former director of the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru) 20/7/2025

The Role of Management Education in India's Ascent

Management programs, with their future-focused curriculum and global outlook, develop visionary leaders to drive India's next growth phase.

In a nation where over 66% of the population is under the age of 35, education stands as the cornerstone of India's journey toward economic leadership and self-reliance. As the country accelerates its transformation into a knowledge-driven economy, professional education has become a key catalyst for growth, particularly in fields that develop strategic thinking, leadership, and innovation. Management education, offered across both undergraduate and post-graduate levels, continues to be one of the most sought-after streams, reflecting the growing demand for business and leadership skills in a rapidly evolving job market. With India emerging as one of the fastest-growing major economies, management education is playing a critical role in preparing the next generation of professionals to navigate complexity, lead enterprises, and contribute meaningfully to the country's development trajectory.

The Rise and Relevance of Management Education in India

India's management education sector has witnessed remarkable growth over the last two decades, both in terms of the number of institutions and the diversity of programs offered. This expansion coincides with India's consistent economic momentum and the increasing need for skilled managerial professionals across industries. The demand for management programs such as the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Master of Business Administration (MBA), and Post Graduate Diploma in Management (PGDM) remains high, driven by their ability to blend theoretical frameworks with real-world applicability across academic levels. As industries undergo digital transformation and global integration, organizations seek professionals who can think strategically, manage resources efficiently, and lead with a global mindset. Management education fills this gap by grooming graduates with analytical abilities, people management skills, and business acumen essential in the current job market.

Moreover, the government's push for entrepreneurship, innovation, and self-reliance has opened up fresh avenues for



management graduates. From start-ups to multinational corporations, the scope of career opportunities has broadened significantly. This shift has positioned management programs at the center of India's economic story, empowering professionals to lead in domains like tech-driven finance, e-commerce, sustainable business practices, and more.

Diversifying Horizons: Evolving Courses and Emerging Specializations

As industries transform, so does the curriculum of India's leading business schools. While traditional streams like Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, and Operations continue to be popular, newer specializations are gaining considerable traction. Business Analytics, for instance, is emerging as a key discipline as companies increasingly rely on data-driven decision-making. Digital Marketing has seen explosive growth, mirroring the broader digitalization of business operations and consumer behavior.

Additionally, specializations in areas like Sustainability Management, FinTech, Supply Chain Management, and Entrepreneurship are becoming part of mainstream offerings. These evolving domains reflect the changing nature of the business world and the increasing emphasis on niche expertise. In response, management programs are continuously evolving—becoming more agile, interdisciplinary, and industry-relevant—enabling students to develop skill sets that align

with the dynamic needs of emerging sectors and future-ready careers.

Catalysts for Career Growth and Corporate Success

Management education in India has become synonymous with career acceleration. While undergraduate programs such as BBA provide an early foundation in business principles, graduates of MBA and PGDM programs often enter the workforce with a significant edge, not just in knowledge, but in leadership potential and strategic thinking.

These programs nurture critical soft skills—communication, collaboration, decision-making—that are essential for managerial roles. They also offer structured exposure to case studies, simulations, and peer learning environments that replicate real-world corporate challenges.

More importantly, management education opens doors to fast-track career paths. Many companies, especially in consulting, finance, technology, and consumer services, prefer hiring management graduates for mid-level and senior positions. This reflects the value that employers place on a holistic business education, one that combines domain knowledge with an ability to lead and adapt in dynamic environments. Recognizing this, even working professionals are increasingly turning to executive management programs as a means to upskill, transition into emerging sectors, and accelerate their growth within the corporate hierarchy.

Experiential and Global Learning: Shaping Industry-Ready Talent

One of the defining strengths of contemporary management programs is their strong focus on experiential learning. Internships, live projects, and case competitions have become integral to the curriculum, offering students first-hand exposure to real-time business challenges. These experiences foster practical learning, encourage teamwork, and help students understand the nuances of various industries.

Industry tie-ups further enrich this ecosystem. Through collaborations with corporates, business schools are able to bring in guest lectures, mentorship programs, capstone projects, and customized training modules. These engagements ensure that students stay aligned with current industry practices and develop a mindset tuned to corporate problem-solving. The outcome is a pool of graduates who are not only academically proficient but also confident and job-ready from day one.

Complementing this hands-on approach is the rise of global academic collaborations and international immersion programs. Student exchange opportunities, joint degrees, and study tours offer exposure to diverse business environments and cross-cultural leadership perspectives. These initiatives enhance global competencies and broaden career possibilities, preparing graduates for success in both domestic and international markets.

Empowering India's Rise through Visionary Business Leadership

India's ascent on the global economic stage is no longer a distant vision—it is a fast-evolving reality. As per projections by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in April 2024, India is poised to become the world's third-largest economy by 2027. In this context, management education plays a transformative role in realizing the promise of a self-reliant India anchored in the principles of sustainability, innovation, and inclusive growth—alongside grooming the business leaders, entrepreneurs, and policy shapers of tomorrow, who will remain at the forefront leading the way with insight, integrity, and impact.

The soul of education

One of the most striking features of Indian Knowledge Systems — and one that Swami Vivekananda emphasized — is the integration of personal dharma with social purpose. Whether it is the Kautilyan model of just governance or the Gita's call for detached action, Indian thought has always linked individual excellence with collective well-being. This has direct relevance for the leaders of tomorrow. Whether in government, business, or civil society, we need decision-makers who are driven not just by profit or power but by principle

INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

"A nation is advanced in proportion to education and intelligence spread among the masses."



India today stands at a crucial crossroads in its educational journey. Over the decades we have built an expansive network of schools, colleges, and universities that churn out millions of graduates annually. On paper, our youth are more qualified than ever. Yet, behind this impressive quantitative expansion lies a qualitative void — one that manifests in a growing mental health crisis, ethical ambiguity in leadership, and a palpable loss of meaning among the young.

This crisis is not merely institutional; it is civilizational. We have spent the last century borrowing pedagogical models from the West while steadily distancing ourselves from our own intellectual and moral traditions. The result is a system that prepares the youth to earn a living but leaves them ill-equipped to live fully and purposefully.

It is in this context that India must turn inward — not in retreat, but in resurgence. We must re-anchor our education system in the civilizational wisdom of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and in the inspirational vision of Swami Vivekananda, whose call for "reclaiming education" is more relevant today than ever.

Modern education in India has become overly transactional. Marks, placements, and packages dominate the discourse, crowding out conversations about character, citizenship, or reasonableness. This overemphasis on utility has created a generation that may be employable but not always ethical, informed but not necessarily wise.

Swami Vivekananda's conception of education stood in stark contrast. For him, education was "the manifestation of the perfection already in man" — a process not of accumulation, but of awakening.

The enlightened character we careen, inner strength over outer success. "We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet," he declared.

Such an education is not

about feeding facts into young minds but about lighting the fire of self-discovery.

It is not about creating workers for the economy alone, but whole human beings who can shoulder the responsibilities of society and self.

India's traditional education systems — epitomized by the Gurukula model — embraced this holistic vision. Students were not just taught logic and linguistics, but also humility, self-reliance, and spiritual discipline. Learning was experiential; values were internalized through example and immersion, and the teacher (Guru) was both a source of knowledge and a moral exemplar. Disciplines like Ayurveda, Vastu Shastra, Asthasastra, and Vedic Mathematics were not esoteric abstractions, but practical sciences geared towards sustainable living and societal welfare.

Ethics was not a separate subject but the foundation of every discipline. In this model, education served three intertwined purposes — personal transformation, social responsibility, and spiritual evolution. It was never a means to climb the ladder of individual success alone — it was a path to uplift society through dharmic action.

Encouragingly, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 acknowledges the limitations of a purely Western, career-centric approach to education. It calls for the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems into curricula, placing equal emphasis on cultural moorings and critical thinking. This is a welcome corrective — but one that will require more than cosmetic changes.

For IKS to be meaningfully embedded, it must move beyond token references. We need pedagogy that is immersive, interdisciplinary, and aligned with Indian epistemologies. Storytelling from the epics, project-based comparisons between modern and ancient sciences, and the inclusion of yoga, meditation, and Sanskrit are all promising approaches.

Equally important is the transformation of the teacher's role — from a content deliverer to a mentor, guide, and value exemplar. As Vivekananda envisioned, the student must be treated not as an empty vessel but as a divine being, full of latent potential waiting to be awakened.

The role of a teacher now needs to evolve into a facilitator, a co-creator of knowledge who seeks to work with the students and not on them. We need to move from hierarchical instructional design to a humility-driven learning design.

Across India, there are promising models already at work. Institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission, the Chinmaya Mission, Krishnamurthi Foundation and several other educational foundations are blending modern curricula with moral instruction, contemplative practices, and service learning. These efforts have shown measurable improvements in student well-being, confidence, and ethical clarity.

Importantly, this approach is not anti-modern. It is, in fact, a better preparation for modernity. In an age of digital distractions and rising loneliness, practices like meditation build focus and resilience. In a time of environmental crisis, traditional ecological knowledge offers sustainable alternatives. In a world obsessed with individualism, the values of seva (service), satya (truth), and ahimsa (non-violence) help foster compassionate citizenship.

One of the most striking features of IKS — and one that

Swami Vivekananda emphasized — is the integration of personal dharma with social purpose. Whether it is the Kautilyan model of just governance or the Gita's call for detached action, Indian thought has always linked individual excellence with collective well-being. This has direct relevance for the leaders of tomorrow. Whether in government, business, or civil society, we need decision-makers who are driven not just by profit or power but by principle.

A few Indian companies have drawn upon Vedic ideas of trusteeship, balancing profitability with nation-building. This model of "compassionate capitalism" can become India's unique contribution to global leadership in the 21st century.

Moreover, IKS opens new avenues for careers rooted in culture — Ayurveda, classical arts, Sanskrit scholarship, and heritage conservation. These are not just preservationist vocations; they are economic sectors aligned with the rising global demand for wellness, sustainability, and cultural tourism.

As India aspires to become a knowledge superpower, we must ask the critical question: "Knowledge for what?" If we are to lead the world, it cannot be through borrowed paradigms. It must be through an educational model that is authentically Indian, ethically sound, and globally relevant.

Swami Vivekananda reminded us that education is not an end but a means — a means to inner awakening and societal transformation. He urged us to "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached." That goal, in today's context, is a \$3 trillion economy along with a nation of awakened citizens.

We must reclaim the soul of education — not by retreating into the past, but by reinterpreting our civilizational wisdom for the needs of today. In doing so, India can offer the world an educational model that unites intellect with integrity, competence with compassion, and ambition with meaning. The time is now to craft such a renaissance. Let us not wait another century to heed the call.



DR. R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

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English dreams

Imposing any language as the medium of instruction is unacceptable

English medium education is an aspiration for many Indians, but state policy regarding the medium of instruction has been uneven across time and regions. The ongoing language debate in India, which stems from the renewed efforts of the Bharatiya Janata Party to enforce a three-language policy, has many components, the medium of instruction being one. Educationists generally argue that instruction in the mother tongue helps children achieve better learning goals in their early stages of development. This view is supported by pedagogical research, but it cannot, and does not, operate in isolation from other factors such as constitutional rights and ground realities. India's linguistic diversity and distribution is such that even the question of what is a child's mother tongue can often be a contested one. There is also the constitutional question of freedom of expression and choice. In 2014, after a protracted legal tussle, the Supreme Court of India held that a Karnataka government order of 1994 that made instruction in Kannada mandatory until Class four was not valid under the Constitution. For, children have a right to choose, and the state cannot enforce its view on what is good for them. The rights of private educational institutions to offer education as per market demand is another related issue.

The National Education Policy that is being aggressively pushed by the Centre has a particularly anti-English edge, which is not in line with popular aspiration. Many States that want to promote their local language and culture also want to promote English education and English as a medium of instruction. In Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, there are aided English medium schools. The demand for English medium education is growing – this includes the Hindi-speaking regions – which is met largely by sub-standard and expensive private institutions. English skills help individuals and the country in gaining a place in the global services sector. India's subaltern caste groups in particular seek to empower themselves through English education, which remains a currency for upward mobility. If state schools do not offer English medium instruction, relatively richer families could still access it through private schools. In this context, education becomes a continuing reproduction and even aggravation of social inequalities, which is the exact opposite of its purpose. The fact is that knowledge of English is empowering and convertible for other outcomes. There can be a debate on whether it should be the medium of instruction at the primary level, but a basic test of any policy is in how it advances the ambitions of the most disadvantaged sections.

BASIC FAILURES

Two recent reports show the alarming condition of India's foundational literacy and numeracy levels. The education ministry's PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan tested 21,15,022 children of classes III, VI and IX across 74, 229 private and government schools in 36 states and Union Territories. The comparatively better performer was Class III. But even there, only 55% could arrange numbers upwards to 99 and downwards again and 58% could do addition and subtraction of two-digit numbers. But the percentages are reversed in Class VI, where 54% cannot compare whole numbers and read large numbers. The 2025 UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals-4 mentions that India's average in completion of primary and lower secondary education is better than the South Asia region's, although in high-income countries this is almost universal. But what is the


use of completion if, as the Indian report says, 43% of class VI children in the country cannot grasp the main ideas in texts and 51% have no understanding of local institutions like the *panchayat* or identify rivers and mountains?

The SDG-4 report shows that India is worryingly off-track in upper secondary and tertiary education and that 21% of the 15-17 age-group are out of school. The seeds of this are sown in Class IX, as shown in the Indian report. For example, 63% cannot identify simple patterns in numbers or understand fractions or integers. Tasks like finding multiples of 7 or powers of 3 are a struggle as are describing chang-

es in matter or the properties of a magnet; 60% failed to meet the benchmark in any subject. On the whole, mathematics has the poorest achievement level in all three classes. The urban-rural divide continues, with Classes VI and IX in urban schools being better performers than in rural schools, although in Class III rural schools are better in language and mathematics. The SDG-4 report says India has moved towards gender parity with some other countries in the region, but the Indian survey is still unhappy about the gender gap.

The most important point made by the SDG-4 report is India's inadequate educational funding. In 2023, it was only 3.1% of the gross domestic product whereas the regional average is 3.4% and the SDG target is 4%. The National Educational Policy 2020 had aimed for 6%. The percentage in high-income countries ranges

The poor state of Indian children's foundational education has been revealed by the education ministry and UNESCO

from 4.8% to 5.5% of GDP. It explains their close to full success in school education benchmarks. Allied to this issue is another foundational problem — the scarcity of properly trained pre-primary teachers in India. So in spite of making primary and lower secondary education almost universal and increasing connectivity, which the SDG-4 report mentions in a positive spirit, the basis of school education in India remains weak. The comparisons in the SDG-4 report are far from reassuring. But the Indian report comes closer to the bone and its rather shocking results urge the necessity of identifying and focusing immediately on the roots of the problems. 



Emergency in school education

The findings of the nationwide student survey have laid bare a disturbing reality: Nearly half of India's school students lack foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and situational awareness. From Class III students (45 per cent struggling to correctly arrange numbers up to 99) to Class IX students (66 per cent) unable to distinguish between living and non-living features, the data reveals a systemic crisis in learning outcomes that could derail India's economic and developmental ambitions and tear the social fabric as the nation gets older.

This is not just an educational challenge. It is a national emergency. If 69 per cent of Class IX students cannot understand basic number systems and percentages, how can one expect them to be employable and contribute to the country's development? If two-thirds of Class IX students do not know the difference between living and non-living features, the demographic dividend that the government boasts of today could turn into a demographic disaster.

The learning gaps in rural areas are greater than average numbers. Similarly, small private schools often have relatively ill-equipped teachers and poor infrastructure.

With the world embracing artificial intelligence and machine learning, people must be strong in fundamentals to get a decent job. However, India's future youth with such glaring learning gaps threaten to hollow out the very foundations of our future workforce.

The government must, therefore, treat education reforms at par with infrastructure or defence and introduce measures to ensure that the crisis in the learning gap is addressed. School education is a subject of national importance and should not be politicised either for the benefit of the ruling party or the Opposition parties — anything to the contrary would be a disservice to the future generations of India and jeopardise India's rise to superpower status.

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Quality of Learning (Teaching) is Strained

Whichever way you dice the data, the message is blunt: schools are packed, but minds aren't being sharpened. PARAKH (Performance, Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024 finds 43% of Class 6 students can't grasp the main idea in a text, and 63% of Class 9 students struggle with basic maths. The December 2024 GoI survey tested over 21 lakh students from Classes 3, 6 and 9 across 74,229 schools in 781 districts, spanning all 36 states/UTs. Pratham's ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) and earlier government surveys have long warned the foundation of India's school system is cracking.

NEP 2020 rightly prioritises foundational literacy and numeracy for all. But as the PARAKH findings



make clear, classroom reforms alone won't move the needle. Learning is deeply influenced by a broader ecosystem — family background, community support, school infra and quality of teachers. Without alignment across these, even best policies will stall. The survey also shows that stu-

dents who perform better come from households with educated parents, access to electricity and digital tools.

That's why focus must remain on core reforms: shifting curriculum and assessment away from rote learning, investing in foundational learning, strengthening teacher training and pedagogical support, and expanding linkage between school and family to track progress. Struggling students must be identified early. As Unesco's Global Education Monitoring Report 2024-25 stresses, investment in leadership is also critical — through standardised principal training, gender-sensitive recruitment, induction support and clearly defined roles. India is losing far too much time, and potential, by not getting education right.

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Vasanth G.

For an equitable future

How an inclusive campus culture can empower students from under-represented communities

Higher education isn't just about academics; it's about making sure every student feels welcome, supported, and valued. When campuses embrace inclusivity, they don't just check a box. They create an environment where students from all backgrounds, especially those from under-represented communities, can truly thrive.

Why it matters

For many students from marginalised backgrounds, college is both a dream and a challenge. The weight of history can make academic spaces feel unwelcoming and, without the right support, talented students may struggle to find their footing. But when universities actively cultivate inclusive practices such as ensuring diverse voices in the curriculum, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and celebrating different cultures, students

feel seen and heard. That sense of belonging isn't just nice to have; it's a game-changer for academic success.

When students see themselves represented in what they're learning, they gain confidence. They participate more in discussions, connect deeply with their studies, and develop a genuine passion for learning. Inclusivity transforms classrooms into vibrant spaces where multiple perspectives enrich conversations and push everyone toward deeper understanding.

The impact of inclusivity isn't just emotional; it directly affects performance. In classrooms where students engage with diverse narratives and viewpoints, learning becomes dynamic

and relevant. Imagine a History class that highlights global perspectives rather than just a Western lens, or a Science course that acknowledges contributions from researchers of all backgrounds. Suddenly, students don't just feel like passive learners; they see themselves as part of the academic conversation.

Beyond content, inclusive teaching methods – like adaptive learning strategies and culturally aware mentoring – help reduce anxiety and encourage intellectual risk-taking. When students feel safe, they're more likely to challenge themselves, ask questions, and push beyond their limits leading to stronger academic outcomes.

Build support systems

College isn't just about getting in; it's about staying in and finishing strong. But for students facing financial hardships, social barriers, or the pressure of stereotypes, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. That's why institutions must go beyond academics and build real support systems.

Mentorship programmes, culturally competent counselling, and personalised academic advising can make all the difference. Knowing that help is just a conversation away empowers students to push through challenges rather than walk away from their education. When universities show that they care about students as individuals – not

just as numbers on a roster – retention rates improve, and students are more likely to achieve their goals.

Representation isn't just symbolic; it shapes reality. When students see faculty and leaders who share their backgrounds, they gain more than teachers. They gain role models. Diversity in leadership reassures students that success isn't limited by where they come from. It also creates an environment of trust, where students feel encouraged to dream big and work toward ambitious goals.

The influence of inclusivity doesn't stop at the classroom door. Today, learning happens everywhere: on digital platforms, social media, and

virtual classrooms. Universities that prioritise accessibility and diversity in their digital resources ensure that inclusivity extends into every part of the student experience. From culturally diverse online content to accessible learning platforms, creating a truly inclusive academic environment means embracing technology as a tool for connection and empowerment.

An inclusive campus isn't just an ideal; it's a necessity for academic success. By diversifying curricula, fostering supportive networks, and ensuring representation at all levels, universities empower students to overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential. In doing so, they're not just changing individual lives. They're shaping a more equitable and innovative future for higher education.

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The changing landscape of employment

Each year, lakhs of students graduate from universities, colleges, Industrial Training Institutes, and skill programmes in India. Yet the system continues to face challenges not only in accommodating them, but also effectively integrating them into meaningful employment.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) plays a central role in India's social security system by managing retirement savings for workers in the organised sector. With over 7 crore members, it remains one of the world's largest social security organisations. EPFO data serves as a valuable indicator of formal employment trends. The share decline in net new EPFO enrolments post-2019 reflected the pandemic effect on formal employment. However, the March 2025 data shows a steady increase in formal workforce participation. Young professionals, particularly fresh graduates, constitute a significant portion of new enrolments. The 18-25 age group consistently represents a large share with the 18-21 subgroup alone accounting for around 18%-22% of the total new subscribers in the recent months. The trend signals a push towards formalisation but demands a deeper analysis of job stability, wages and long-term financial security.

Youth unemployment

According to the India Employment Report 2024, published by the International Labour Organization and the Institute for Human Development, the youth account for 83% of India's unemployed population. Alarming, the share of unemployed individuals with secondary or higher education has nearly doubled over two decades.

The issue goes beyond unemployment; this is a crisis of unemployability. The Economic Survey 2023-24 states that only about half of India's youth are deemed job-ready after graduation. One in two lacks the



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Urgent structural reforms are needed to address the growing disconnect between education and employment in India

digital and professional skills employers' demand, particularly in an economy undergoing rapid technological transformation. Moreover, the looming influence of AI threatens India's tech sector, putting several traditional job roles at the risk of displacement. Without adequate reskilling and upskilling efforts, the gap between graduate output and available opportunities will only widen.

Despite economic progress, India's workforce remains predominantly informal. The India Employment Report 2024 notes nearly 90% of employment is informal with the proportion of salaried, regular jobs declining since 2018. While contractual employment has grown, concerns about job security and social welfare remain unresolved.

Many young Indians struggle with technical skills. The report states that 75% of young people struggle with basic digital tasks such as sending an email with an attachment. Over 60% cannot perform simple file operations such as copy-pasting and 90% lack fundamental spreadsheet skills such as working with formulas.

These statistics are worrying given that the Future of Jobs Report 2025 by the World Economic Forum forecasts major shifts in employment dynamics.

The report states that by 2030, an estimated 170 million new jobs will be created representing 14% of total employment. However, 92 million existing jobs (8% of total employment) will be displaced. This means there will be a net growth of 78 million jobs, or a 7% increase in total employment. While these projections offer optimism, they also highlight the urgency of bridging the skill gap to ensure that India's workforce is adequately prepared for the evolving job landscape.

What India must do

India stands at a critical crossroads. Without targeted policy interventions and expansive reskilling initiatives, millions of graduates will continue struggling to secure meaningful

employment. Investing in education, vocational training, and digital literacy is essential for aligning the workforce with future job demands.

Urgent structural reforms are needed. First, there should be stronger collaboration between industry and academia, if necessary, by law. Each higher education institution must ideally have at least one formal partnership with industry partners. Second, educational institutions need to be held accountable for placements and not just educational degrees. We need to create accreditation systems for educational institutions aligned with job placements for the outgoing students. Idea Labs and Tinker Labs should be made mandatory components of every high school and higher education institution. The integration of the humanities, foreign language learning, and soft skills should be made mandatory across all levels of education.

Third, India needs to extend its focus beyond national borders. Skilling and training programmes should be designed to meet the needs of ageing societies in many Western nations, where the demand for young professionals is expected to increase. This approach aligns with the Indian government's strategy for enhancing the international mobility of skilled workers. The International Institute of Migration and Development is currently working as the Indian partner in the European Union's Link4Skills project that utilises the migration corridor framework to evaluate the skill demands and labour shortages in various European countries and beyond. Fourth, to drive these transformations, an Indian Education Services, similar in stature to the Indian Administrative Services, should be established; it would attract the best minds into the education sector. Finally, the education system should open its doors to professionals from the industry. This would help bridge the gap between theory and application.

STRAIGHTFORWARD

Shashi Shekhar



Language row attempts to revive a dead horse

It can help a politician hiss, but doesn't offer enough political venom to bite

It was the "swinging sixties" in Allahabad (present-day Prayagraj). British rule had ended two decades ago, but in a city teeming with the old gentry, the colonial ways were still visible. The Civil Lines observed the tradition of a lunch break, and in many shops, salesmen wearing ties could be found speaking in English with their esteemed, genteel customers.

The city was proud of its university, dubbed the Oxford of the East. The Indian Civil Service had been rechristened as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). Yet the nomenclature change did nothing to dampen its power or its regalia. Admission to Allahabad University was considered the essential first step towards realising the goal of cracking the civil services examination. The city hosted many poets and writers. The city had enough reasons to feel snooty and entitled.

In such an atmosphere, the residents woke up to a surprise one day when they saw slogans written in coal tar on the walls of the local church, convent schools, and some other prominent places exhorting the English language exhorting, "Angrez hatoo, Bharat bachao"

(remove English and save the country). In the initial days, people failed to fathom the long-term impact of a larger movement. The anti-English campaign was the brainchild of socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia, who initiated it in 1957. It took a decade to gather steam, and received the support of the Jana Sangh and other political parties. Sensing an imminent public outcry, then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri made some critical moves in support of Hindi, leading to violent reactions in the Southern states, resulting in 70 cases of self-immolation or death by poisoning. Some died in the police firing on the protesters.

In 1967, for the first time, assembly elections led to the formation of non-Congress governments in eight states. The language row played a key role in this outcome. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. Language is the repository of our cultural moorings, and we shouldn't blame people if they feel emotionally attached to it, considering language as an integral part of their identity.

Language played a pivotal role in the formation of the states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, both once a part of Punjab province. While creating these two states, Indira Gandhi wouldn't have imagined in her wildest dreams that the decision would in later years provide impetus to the rise of terrorism in Punjab. Earlier, the mobilisation to create Andhra Pradesh, based on Telugu linguistic

identity, witnessed extreme violence.

Let's return to Allahabad. While studying in the state inter college from class 6 to class 8, Hindi, English, and one regional Indian language were compulsory for all the students. I chose Bangla. I am proud that through Bangla, I was able to connect with a great civilisation, its writers, their intellectual depth, philosophy, history, and the nuances of the Independence Movement. The Bangla language and Bengali people helped shape my personality.

This is the reason I was happy when the government of India launched the tri-language formula with some minor tweaks. I firmly believe that every young Indian, along with their mother tongue, should be well-versed in one regional language and in English.

There is no better way to bring Indians closer to their Indian roots. As far as English is concerned, let there be no doubt about its relevance and effectiveness in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

But politics and politicians are on a different tangent. This is the reason we witnessed the spectacle of Uddhav Thackeray and his estranged cousin, Raj, coming together on a public stage, 19 years after parting ways. They insisted they weren't against Hindi, but Marathi should be given its due and respected in Maharashtra. But is it the case?

If there was consistency in their words and deeds, they wouldn't have



Migrants to a state should try to learn the local language, but violence against those who can't speak it is simply unconstitutional. HINDUSTAN TIMES

uploaded viral videos of thugs beating unsuspecting shop owners, insisting that they speak in Marathi. While addressing his workers, Raj Thackeray told them that they can rough up those who fail to speak Marathi, but they shouldn't make and upload videos of this. It's a strange way of showing love for your language.

Unfortunately, this malady is spreading quickly in the neighbouring state of Karnataka. The cyber city of Bengaluru witnessed public shaming of Hindi-speaking people when they failed to speak in Kannada. I believe that those who relocate to a new state should make the effort to learn the local language, but perpetrating violence against those who can't speak the language is not only unconstitutional but a dangerous trend for the nation.

These incidents have opened a personal wound. In 1980, I went to Calcutta (present-day Kolkata) for the first time. At that time, whenever you asked the locals for an address, they would rebuff you, saying they didn't know Hindi. At such times, I would wonder, I could talk in Bengali, but how will anyone survive in

the metropolis if they don't know the local language? During the coverage of the Punjab insurgency, I found that people in rural areas had difficulty understanding Hindi.

However, during the last two decades, the winds of encouraging change have been blowing in the southern states. Hindi Heartland isn't far behind. Some months ago, when southern superstar Alia Arjun came to Patna, a huge crowd gathered to welcome him. Can we attribute the miracle to central government services, the old tri-language formula, and the culture of corporatisation?

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has tried to douse the flames of the language row by insisting that every Indian language is a national language. However, the moot point is whether politicians will stop fomenting trouble? It pays to remember the language controversy has lost its sting. It can help a politician hiss, but doesn't offer enough political venom to bite.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal



What CUET's critics overlook

System is evolving with each cycle toward a more inclusive admission process

MAMIDALA JAGADESH KUMAR

LET'S TAKE A closer look at the policy rationale behind the introduction of CUET. A handful of elite schools dominated the intake at DU in yesteryears. Students from under-resourced boards and rural schools were locked out, not because they were less capable but because their boards followed a more conservative evaluation. CUET, despite its growing pains, attempts to correct that imbalance.

The claim of 5,000 empty seats in a year isn't surprising. With CUET's structured system, students now navigate a wider array of choices across top central universities, which naturally shifts how seats fill up and leaves some spots open in certain colleges. When CUET was introduced in 2022, it wasn't a knee-jerk response, but a step aligned with the National Education Policy 2020 vision. Concerns around coaching and proxy schools merit serious attention, but the blame cannot be laid at CUET's doorstep alone. The coaching culture in India has predated CUET for decades. CUET has disrupted this space by designing a test that aligns closely with the NCERT curriculum, making it less dependent on external coaching.

CUET doesn't dismantle the federal character as claimed by the critics — it recalibrates it. By including regional languages, CUET decentralises access while maintaining a common evaluative baseline. While early hiccups are inevitable, these challenges open the door to real improvements, such as more test centres in remote areas and tailored help for students with disabilities. The accurate measure won't be this year's roll-

out. It is whether future graduates reflect a system that truly values inclusion.

Acknowledging the anxiety caused by shifting dates and delayed admissions is fair. However, in the context of large-scale national exams, occasional rescheduling is part of operational reality. Rather than disrupting Delhi University's academic calendar, CUET is gradually introducing a unified timeline — something DU has long needed after years of calendar drift, delayed results, and fragmented planning.

"Mop-up" rounds, far from being a sign of system failure, actually recognise the real-life messiness of student choices — adolescents navigating high-stakes decisions deserve second chances, not rigid deadlines. As for the science streams, the real question is whether undergraduate science education has kept pace with student ambition; CUET may streamline access, but revitalising these disciplines calls for better labs, inspired teaching, and fresh curricular thinking. Some say CUET is driving students toward private universities. Perhaps a few students are making that shift. A truly strong public university system won't collapse under this competition. It will adapt, invest, and elevate the learning experience.

Strengthening NTA's foundation means investing in better exam tech, harmonising university timelines, and widening the circle of access to students. Calling CUET a disruption overlooks the magnitude of what it's managing — across more than 250 universities, 13 languages, and lakhs of as-

pirants navigating multiple subject combinations. The system is evolving with each cycle toward a more responsive and inclusive admission process. Admitting 20 per cent extra students to DU was a step required to make sure no deserving student missed admission. Critics overlook the fact that Indian university calendars were never synchronised. By making admissions following a national timeline, CUET provides an opportunity for academic mobility and efficient scheduling.

Colleges shifting classes online due to a lack of classroom space to experiment with flexible delivery models is perhaps not such a bad thing. The previous DU system privileged a few with high board marks. Now, students from rural areas, tribal-dominated districts and government schools can access the same opportunity pool with a national entrance test. The very idea of a "normative" calendar, "normative" workload, or "normative" admissions model is being challenged, and rightly so. Teaching roles will need redefinition. Technology will have to become an ally. CUET isn't the problem. It's the mirror revealing all the things we've long postponed fixing.

CUET challenges outdated assumptions that all Class XII marks carry equal weight. It exposes hidden disparities and makes space for a more level field. Clubs, cultural fests, and co-curricular activities are integral to the university experience. However, their functioning has always had to navigate scheduling challenges, faculty availability, and examination pressures. CUET

did not invent these constraints. The idea that CUET is tilted toward CBSE doesn't hold up to closer scrutiny. CUET has subject-specific choices aligned to multiple state syllabi, multilingual papers, and an expanding network of test centres. CUET is evolving into a more inclusive system.

Attributing the dip in female participation in DU entirely to CUET oversimplifies the issue. If paired with clear information campaigns in aspirational districts, CUET can still become a powerful bridge for young women from small towns to access India's leading universities. CUET has not become a tool of over-centralisation. It is a shared national benchmark with space for regional languages and subject flexibility. The idea of normalising board scores sounds reasonable on paper. The problem is that no formula has truly levelled disparate systems across the more than 60 boards, each with its own curriculum design, marking leniency, and internal policies.

NTA is honestly confronting the paper leak allegations and logistical hiccups. It is working on safeguarding exam integrity. Scrapping CUET due to initial hiccups would be like abandoning a national highway because the first few kilometres were uneven. CUET isn't just an exam; it's a shift from fragmented access to national inclusion. It might take a few years to settle. But can we go back to a system that hid its exclusions behind the mask of Class XII scores?

The writer is former chairman, UGC and Former VC, JNU. Views are personal

18/07/23

Why education must lead to employment for women in India

Despite notable progress in female literacy and higher education, women's participation in the Indian workforce remains alarmingly low. According to the Women Empowerment Principles (WEP), female literacy in India has crossed 77 per cent, and women now account for 48 per cent of higher education enrollment. Yet, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) stood at just 41.7 per cent in 2023-24 — significantly below the global average. This stark disparity reveals a troubling disconnect between educational attainment and actual employment outcomes.

The real issue lies in what happens after women complete their education. While colleges and universities proudly highlight rising female enrollment, few track or support how many of these women transition into formal jobs, entrepreneurship, or leadership roles. This oversight undermines the productive potential of nearly half the country's population.

According to WEP data, only 20 per cent of academically strong female graduates enter the formal workforce or launch businesses. Clearly, qualifications alone are not enough — there is a pressing need for a more supportive ecosystem to help women take the next step in their professional journey.

One practical and impactful solution is to include a "conversion rate" — the percentage of students, particularly women, who transition from education to employment or entrepreneurship — as a critical parameter in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).

By integrating this into institutional rankings, colleges and universities would be incentivised to move beyond academics and focus on real-world outcomes. It's not enough to admit and educate women; institutions must also enable their success in the workforce.

To bridge this transition gap, educational institutions must proactively offer structured career counseling, entrepreneurship training, and mentorship programs.

Leadership development courses designed specifically for women can help build confidence, develop community-building skills, and nurture ambition — equipping them to take on impactful roles and inspire others.

Although the FLFPR has shown a slight uptick in recent years, much of this growth comes from self-employment or unpaid family work, especially in rural India. These forms of employment are often unsustainable and do not guarantee financial independence.

In urban settings, while women hold 31 per cent of entry-level jobs, their representation drops

dramatically to just 13 per cent in leadership roles. This gender imbalance not only reflects deep-rooted structural issues but also poses a significant roadblock to India's aspiration of becoming a developed nation, or *Viksit Bharat*.

Research shows that closing the gender gap in employment could add up to \$770 billion to India's GDP, significantly accelerating the country's progress toward becoming a \$5 trillion economy.

Ensuring equal workforce participation for women is not just a matter of fairness — it is a strategic economic imperative. It's time for accountability. Educational institutions must take responsibility not just for degrees awarded, but for the real-life outcomes of their graduates.

By incorporating conversion rates into NIRF rankings, we can begin to reshape the higher education landscape into one that actively empowers women to succeed in the workforce. This is not just a policy recommendation — it is a call to action.

If institutions and authorities align their goals with this vision, "women empowerment" will move from being a slogan to a measurable reality. India's economic engine can no longer afford to run on half its potential. The journey to inclusive growth starts where careers begin: in our colleges and universities.

Conclusion

India stands at a critical juncture where empowering women in the workforce is not just a moral imperative but a strategic economic necessity.

Despite high literacy rates and increasing female enrollment in higher education, the low Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) exposes a serious gap between education and employability. Introducing "conversion rate" as a metric in the

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) can hold institutions accountable for ensuring women transition from classrooms to careers.

By offering career counseling, entrepreneurship support, and leadership training, colleges can become true catalysts of change.

Sustainable economic growth, especially the vision of a \$5 trillion economy and a *Viksit Bharat*, depends on fully utilizing the potential of India's women. Bridging this gap could add up to \$770 billion to India's GDP. The time to act is now — when we empower women to lead, we empower India to grow stronger, faster, and more equitably.



TRIPTI SOMANI

(The writer is founder of Womeninnovator. Views expressed are personal)

अलग-अलग राज्यों में पहले इस तरह के जो प्रयोग हुए, उनमें से ज्यादातर में असफलता ही हासिल हुई मेडिकल कॉलेजों का PPP मॉडल ठीक है?



रीना नागराजन

देश में कई स्वास्थ्य केंद्र निजी हाथों में खड़े हैं। इसके पीछे 'सोच' यह है कि निजी क्षेत्र लोगों को बेहतर स्वास्थ्य सुविधाएं मुहैया कराए। माना जा रहा है कि इन प्राइवेट हाथों में जाने के बाद न केवल इन अस्पतालों का स्तर ऊंचा होगा बल्कि नए मेडिकल कॉलेज भी बनेंगे, जिनसे हजारों नए डॉक्टर निकलेंगे।

आइडिया में कितना दम। इस दिशा में पहली बड़ी प्रगति तब हुई, जब 2017 में भारत सरकार और नीति आयोग ने विश्व बैंक के साथ मिलकर इस योजना को हरी झंडी दिखाई कि 300 या उससे कम बिस्तार वाले सरकारी अस्पताल प्राइवेट ऑपरेटर्स को खोप दिए जाएं, जो इनके पास मेडिकल कॉलेज बन जाएं। सभी राज्य सरकारों को यह आइडिया पसंद नहीं आया। कुल मिलाकर, अब तक 15 राज्यों ने इस मॉडल को अपनाया है। फिर भी, यह आइडिया इतना दमदार है कि पूछा जाय कि, क्या वह गरीब भारतीयों को फायदा पहुंचा सकता है?

अतीत के अनुभव। इस नए पब्लिक प्राइवेट पार्टनरशिप के तहत प्राइवेट कंपनियों द्वारा चलाए जा रहे पूर्व सरकारी अस्पतालों में एक खास अनुपात में बिस्तार मुक्त चिकित्सा के लिए रिजर्व रहते हैं। लेकिन अतीत में फिर गए ऐसे प्रयोगों में दिखा कि सरकारें निजी कंपनियों से इस प्रावधान का पालन करने में असफल रही।



AJ - Adobe Stock

नाकाम प्रयोग। कुछ PPP प्रयोग बुरी तरह नाकाम साबित हुए। मसलन, छत्तीसगढ़ सरकार ने 2002 में एस्कॉर्ट्स हार्ट हस्पिटल एंड रिसर्च सेंटर के साथ साझेदारी में कार्डिएक केयर सेंटर स्थापित किया था। लेकिन 2017 तक सरकार को इसे खोपस अपने हाथों में लेना पड़ा। काशी पहले 1953 में स्थापित कस्तूरबा मेडिकल कॉलेज, मैंगलूर जरूर PPP मॉडल को सफलता का उदाहरण है, लेकिन कर्नाटक में उसके बाद के सारे प्रयोग कड़े अनुभव ही साबित हुए। इनमें से ज्यादातर नकाम रहे और सरकार को कई MoU रद्द करने पड़े।

कई राज्यों में उत्साह। दिलचस्प है कि इसके बावजूद कर्नाटक सरकार PPP मॉडल में नए नए मेडिकल कॉलेज खोलने जा रही है। इसका मतलब है नौविला अस्पतालों में इन्फ्रस्ट्रक्चर के लिए 1000 करोड़ रुपये से

सवाल ज्यादा, जवाब कम

- निजी संस्थानों को बेतहाशा मुनाफा
- सरकारी अस्पतालों से मांस इलाज
- मेडिकल की पढ़ाई का खर्च ज्यादा

ऊपर का सरकारी खर्च होगा। उत्तर प्रदेश और आंध्र प्रदेश ने 16-16 और मध्य प्रदेश ने 12 ऐसे कॉलेज खोलने की घोषणा की है।

मुक्त चिकित्सा या इश्वरों से। इस किंदू पर समझने वाली एक अहम बात यह है कि जब सरकारें कहती हैं कि इलाज आयुष्मान या राज्य की खास इंपीरेंस पॉलिसी के तहत होगा तो वे दरअसल सच्चाई छुपा रही होती हैं। इंपीरेंस सिर्फ इन-पेमेंट ट्रीमेंट और उसमें भी इलाज की खास प्रक्रियाओं को ही कवर करता है। साथ ही इसमें 5 लाख रुपये की अधिकतम सीमा होती है। इसका एक

अच्छा उदाहरण पश्चिम बंगाल है, जहां PPP मॉडल के चार मेडिकल कॉलेज अस्पताल हैं। प्रति परिवार 5 लाख रुपये की अधिकतम सीमा के साथ राज्य सरकार की बीमा स्कीम इन्हें कवर करती है। लेकिन विशेषता का कहना है, अगर सरकारी अस्पतालों में मुक्त चिकित्सा की सुविधा उपलब्ध है तो PPP मॉडल वाले अस्पतालों में कोई नहीं आएगा इलाज करने।

इलाज महंगा। नेशनल सैपल सर्वे ऑफिस (NSSO) रिपोर्ट, 2017-18 के मुताबिक बच्चों के जन्म के मामले छोड़ दिए जाएं तो अस्पताल में भर्ती के हर एक मामले में ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों के सरकारी अस्पतालों इलाज का औसतन खर्च 4,290 रुपये पड़ता है जबकि निजी अस्पतालों में 27,347 रुपये पाने छह गुना ज्यादा। शहरी क्षेत्रों के सरकारी अस्पतालों में यह खर्च 4887 रुपये

बैठता है, जबकि निजी अस्पतालों में 38,822 रुपये पाने आठ गुना ज्यादा।

मेडिकल की महंगी पढ़ाई। PPP मॉडल में मेडिकल कॉलेज भले ज्यादा खुल जाएं, मेडिकल की पढ़ाई का खर्च उठाना सबके लिए संभव नहीं होगा। दूरी के सरकारी मेडिकल कॉलेजों में सालाना फीस करीब 40,000 रुपये है जबकि प्राइवेट कॉलेजों में यह औसतन 12 लाख रुपये पड़ती है।

बेतहाशा कमाई। कोलकाता के पास स्थित हावड़ा में एक PPP मॉडल में कॉलेज चलाने वाला प्राइवेट ग्रुप एक बैच के स्टूडेंट्स से सालाना कम से कम 26 करोड़ रुपये वसूलता है। अस्पताल के बिस्तारों के इस्तेमाल की दृष्टि से यह सरकार को सालाना करीब 9 करोड़ रुपये देता है। ऐसे ही गुजरात में चंहर जिला अस्पताल 1 रुपये की प्रतीकल्पक कीमत पर 33 खल के लिए निजी हाथों में खोप दिए गए और सरकार यहां मेडिकल कॉलेज बनाने में करीब 290 करोड़ रुपये खर्च करने वाली है। इनमें से तीन कॉलेजों ने दृष्टान फीस के तौर पर पहले साल औसतन 6.5-6.5 करोड़ रुपये और दूसरे साल 16-16 करोड़ रुपये वसूले। इन कॉलेजों के जबरदस्त मुनाफे का आसानी से अंदाजा लगाया जा सकता है।

कहछाल, स्वास्थ्य क्षेत्र में इस तरह के प्रयोग पर कोई नतीजा निकालना अभी जल्दबाजी है, लेकिन इतना तय है कि मुक्त बिस्तारों से मुकामले सवाल कहीं ज्यादा है। ऐसे सवाल जिन पर केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों को गंभीरता से विचार करना चाहिए।

14/7/25

Youth, skilling and employability

KAUSTUVMONI DAS

Equipping the youth with in-demand skills is the cornerstone of employability, sustainable development, and India's transformation into a future-ready economy.

With the rapid advancement of emerging technologies, our everyday lives – whether at work, at home, or in the evolving nature of job roles – are undergoing significant transformation. In order to keep pace with these changes, acquiring new-age skills has become not just important but essential, particularly for the younger generation. Skilling is quickly becoming the new buzzword, seen as a key to securing sustainable livelihoods in an increasingly competitive global job market.

The reality is becoming clear: academic degrees alone may no longer be enough. The future belongs to those who can combine formal education with practical, in-demand skills. Soon, having a degree without a relevant skill set may not serve the intended purpose, especially when it comes to employability and career growth. To stay relevant and resilient in the face of technological disruption, the youth must embrace continuous learning and skill development.

Keeping in mind the overall development of youth with the passage of time, the United Nations General Assembly designated July 15 as World Youth Skills Day (WYSD) starting in 2014. Each year, the day is observed with a specific theme, fostering global discourse and action across various platforms. This year, the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) celebrated WYSD under the theme 'Youth Empowerment Through AI and Digital Skills.' Echoing this theme, India has also commemorated the day by reaffirming its commitment to youth development. The country continues to invest in skill-building initiatives, empowering young people to contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

In this pivotal era of youth development, it is of utmost importance to engage in meaningful discussions on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and digital skilling. As the global job market continues to evolve, there is a marked shift towards these new skill domains. Recognising this transformation, the NITI Aayog has also emphasised the need for widespread adoption of AI-driven technologies, highlighting how these advancements are transitioning efforts away from traditional jobs and towards emerging livelihoods. This calls for a renewed focus on continuous skilling, innovation, and entrepreneurship to ensure that the youth are not only job-ready but also future-ready.

Despite being one of the youngest countries by age, a significant portion of India's youth is still not ready to embrace the emerging skill trends that are crucial for thriving in the future job market. While there are some encouraging signs – for instance, the Assam Budget for FY 2025-26 shows a notable decline in the unemployment rate from 9.9% in 2020 to 7.9% in 2024 – there remains much to be done.

This decline is undoubtedly a positive indicator and reflects the impact of initiatives like the Assam government's direct recruitment processes for various jobs. However, the larger picture still presents challenges. Many youths remain unemployed and are forced to migrate to other States or countries in search of livelihood opportunities.

It is important to recognise that government jobs can absorb less than 1% of the educated youth population. This leaves a vast, talented, and potential-rich segment of young people outside the formal job market – often due to a lack of required skills or an over-dependence on the hope of securing a government position.

To harness the full potential of India's demographic dividend and make meaningful progress towards the goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047, we must prioritise skilling, re-skilling, and up-skilling at a national scale. Skilling the youth is not just an employment issue – it's a nation-building strategy. The future of India depends on how effectively we equip our young population with the skills needed to lead, innovate, and drive economic growth.

It is worth mentioning that Advantage Assam 2.0 has unlocked numerous skill development investments, which are expected to significantly enhance the skill landscape in Assam over the coming years. Initiatives such as the establishment of a Skill Hub for Overseas Employment and a Centre of Excellence for Semiconductor Technology will play a crucial role in boosting the skill sets of Assam's youth. Advantage Assam 2.0 also served as a wake-up call for the State's education and skill development sectors, highlighting the urgent need to align with industry demands. Investors are seeking a skilled workforce to operate their industrial units in sectors such as manufacturing, agro-processing, information technology, and renewable energy.

The Assam Chief Minister has also acknowledged the importance of skill development to provide a skilled workforce for investors in their workshops and workstations in the coming days. At the same time, the State aims to send skilled workers to countries like Japan and Singapore.

Some of the commendable efforts that deserve to be highlighted are expected to significantly transform the education system and the skill development ecosystem in the State. The government has been actively implementing a series of skill development initiatives. These programmes aim to equip the

youth with industry-relevant skills, thereby enhancing their employability.

The initiatives are being supported through both State budget allocations and Central funding. A key institutional milestone in this journey is the establishment of the Skill Development University at Mangaldai, Darrang, which, along with the Assam Skill Development Mission, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), engineering colleges, medical and management institutions, and universities, will play a pivotal role in training a future-ready workforce.

A notable advancement in the skill ecosystem is the initiative by Pan-IT alumni to establish 10 Skill Development Centres across the State. With an investment of Rs 90 crore under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, these centres promise guaranteed placement support, thereby ensuring that skill acquisition leads to tangible employment outcomes.

Moreover, the introduction of digital platforms like the Atmanirbhar Skilled Employee Mapping (ASEEM) is another forward-looking measure. ASEEM aims to connect skilled individuals with prospective employers, creating a seamless match between market demand and workforce capabilities.

The emphasis on skill development through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is crucial for bridging the gap between education and employability. By aligning skill development with traditional academic courses, NEP can help young people gain practical, industry-relevant skills, making them more competitive in the job market. For this to happen, it is essential to create awareness among students and encourage them to prioritise skill-building alongside their regular academic pursuits.

15/7/24

Women, STEM careers and a more receptive industry

Every year on July 15, as we observe World Youth Skills Day, we are reminded that skills development is fundamental to reducing unemployment and promoting decent work. India faces a critical paradox: 43% of India's STEM graduates are women, the highest proportion among major economies globally. Yet, women represent only 27% of the STEM workforce, limiting women's access to career opportunities offered by the STEM sector.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, India's overall female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) has risen to 41.7%, a meaningful jump after years of stagnation. However, the increase is sharper for rural women (47.6%) than in urban areas (25.4%), reflecting barriers in formal employment, workplace safety, and societal expectations. In STEM, the paradox is more pronounced. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2021), only 31.5% of researchers worldwide are women. This education-employment gap reflects systemic barriers that industry is uniquely positioned to address. The economic stakes are clear. According to estimates by the McKinsey Global Institute, enabling 68 million more women to participate in India's workforce could boost India's GDP by up to \$700 billion by 2025. Similarly, the World Bank suggests that achieving a 50% female workforce participation rate could elevate GDP growth by 1%.

Government vision and STEM skilling

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 paved the way for higher retention and opportunities in the fields of STEM. The nodal Ministry of Education (MoE) has integrated education with skills development and life skills training. The Government's renewed focus on revitalising Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and expanding



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World Youth Skills Day is a reminder that industry is losing out by not investing in STEM careers for India's women

vocational skilling is bringing high-quality technical education and training closer to villages and small towns, ensuring broader access for youth across rural India.

This progress aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of *Viksit Bharat* (or developed India), where women's economic mobility forms the cornerstone of inclusive development. The share of the gender budget in the total national Budget has increased from 6.8% in 2024-25 to 8.8% in 2025-26 with ₹4.49 lakh crore in allocation toward gender-specific programmes.

Further, the Union Budget 2025-26 introduced term loans for women entrepreneurs, new National Skill Training Institutes, and investments in technology-driven skilling. India's policy framework, from Skill India to Digital India, and from 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' to PM Vishwakarma Yojana, has the right intent. However, government policy alone cannot bridge the education-employment gap. Industry must transform from passive recruiter to active enabler of women's career transitions.

Industry as the missing link

Industry plays a critical role in bridging the gap between skilling and employment, especially for women. Persistent social norms, such as the belief that "mechanical means masculine" or that "coding isn't for girls", continue to create invisible barriers for skilled women entering technical fields. These stereotypes are well-documented in multiple studies, including those by the World Bank and UNESCO, which highlight how gendered perceptions limit women's participation in STEM and technical trades. Evidence also shows that women do not leave STEM fields due to a lack of ability, but instead because workplaces are often unwelcoming, families lack awareness of career

opportunities, and roles remain deeply gendered. Addressing these perceptions, alongside ensuring workplace safety, equitable pay, and support for career transitions related to marriage, childbirth, and caregiving, is key to unlocking the full potential of the workforce.

India's private sector is increasingly stepping up, with many companies championing structured mentoring programmes, industry-linked training initiatives and partnerships with educational institutions to create direct pathways from classrooms to careers. One such initiative is the UN Women's *WestEM* programme, being implemented in collaboration with the Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and supported by the Micron Foundation. This programme provides access to skills and bridges the talent gap. By engaging families and community leaders, conducting workplace safety sessions, and introducing women role models in classrooms, the programme recognises that skill-building requires a shift in mindsets to be effective.

A blueprint for industry leadership

Industry partnerships with educational institutions, mentorship networks linking professionals with students, and workplace policies that accommodate life transitions and ensure safety, can bridge the education-employment gap. The question is not whether India can afford to invest in women's STEM careers. It is whether industry can afford not to. By equipping women and girls with the skills and training needed to succeed in STEM fields, we can create a more inclusive and robust society. When a woman earns, her voice and impact echoes across dinner tables, shop floors, policy rooms and entire industries. And in that voice lies the blueprint of a future ready India.



The possibilities and limits of the Tamil Nadu model

Drawing attention to the sharp differences in incomes across developing countries, the Nobel-winning economist Robert Lucas had suggested that we should see these differences as possibilities. "Is there some action a government of India could take that would lead the Indian economy to grow like Indonesia's or Egypt's?" Lucas wrote in an oft-cited 1988 paper (the Indian economy was considered a global developmental laggard then). "If so, what, exactly? If not, what is it about the 'nature of India' that makes it so? The consequences for human welfare involved in questions like these are simply staggering: Once one starts to think about them, it is hard to think about anything else."

Looking at the stark differences in incomes and human development indicators across Indian states, similar questions come to mind: Is there something that Uttar Pradesh could do to grow like Tamil Nadu or Maharashtra? If so, what exactly? If not, why not? Such questions have gained greater salience as inter-state disparities have widened in recent years.

Some economists and policy wonks seem to have found an ideal growth "model" in the state of Tamil Nadu. With manufacturing accounting for a quarter of the state's economic output, Tamil Nadu is seen as a *desi* version of Vietnam. Former chief economic advisor Arvind Subramanian has argued that the Tamil Nadu model could be adopted by other states to improve their industrial performance. Venture capitalist-turned-philanthropist Ashish Dhawan has also made similar arguments, praising the role of the state government in hand-holding new investors.

Compared to other industrialised states such as Haryana or Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu has more impressive attainments in health and educational outcomes. That makes it more attractive as a developmental model compared to either Kerala (which lacks a modern industrial base) or Gujarat (which has relatively poorer human development outcomes), economist Pranab Bardhan has argued.

What lies behind Tamil Nadu's developmental success? A part of the answer lies in the unique political economy of the state. The two major Dravidian parties share a common heritage and have adopted similar policy positions on key socio-economic issues. Both parties were born out of an anti-Brahminical movement going back to the British Raj, and have sought to empower the intermediate castes (OBCs). As some of these communities transitioned from traditional farm-based activities to modern businesses, they received bipartisan support from the

state's politicians. Entrepreneurs were never seen as "class enemies" to begin with, and continue to enjoy greater social legitimacy than in many other parts of the country.

Dravidian ideologues advocated industrialisation and modernisation of the economy so that Tamil society could break free from the shackles of caste-based occupations and hierarchical traditions, economists Kalaiyarasan A and Vijayabaskar M wrote in their 2021 book, *The Dravidian Model*. The Dravidian ideologues envisioned a democratisation of capitalist activities, and promoted the interests of local businessmen, the duo argue. The pro-business tilt in the state's policy stance has endured despite a series of corruption scandals over the past three decades.

Any state-level policymaker who wishes to emulate the Tamil Nadu model must also note its limits. Over the past decade, Tamil Nadu's share in manufacturing employment has declined even as those of other states have increased. While the organised manufacturing sector has grown rapidly, the unorganised sector seems to have languished. Since the unorganised sector employs more people, the gains in employment have been much less impressive than the gains in manufacturing output.

Second, despite the state government's significant investments in health and education, a growing section of the state's population has been turning to private educational and health care providers in search of better quality, as Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar note.

Third, the state government's OBC-friendly tilt in social policies seem to have benefited some sub-castes (or *jatis*) much more than others. For instance, in 2007, Tamil Nadu abolished the common entrance test (CET) for admissions to professional courses since it was deemed to favour socially privileged communities (who could afford private coaching). While the move helped widen access to technical education, it is the better-off communities within OBCs that gained most, a 2019 analysis by R Srinivasan and N Raghunath showed.

Despite these limitations, Tamil Nadu's track record in delivering inclusive growth remains better than most other states. The southern state offers useful lessons for other regions.

However, it may not be easy to replicate the Dravidian model in toto, since that model rests on an unique demographic endowment. Most Tamils belong to lower caste groups and hence it has been relatively easy to build a consensus in favour of egalitarian policies in the state. Upper castes account for only 2% of Tamil Nadu's population according to the last National Family Health Survey.

In states such as Uttar Pradesh — where upper castes account for nearly a fourth of the population — the Dravidian model may not be easy to implement. Yet, if Uttar Pradesh were to achieve a (Tamil Nadu-style) political consensus on socio-economic reforms, it will find it easier to generate inclusive growth.

COMPARED TO OTHER INDUSTRIALISED STATES SUCH AS HARYANA OR MAHARASHTRA, TAMIL NADU HAS MORE IMPRESSIVE ATTAINMENTS IN HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.

Empowering India's Youth

To become a Viksit Bharat, empowering youth through skills is not an option — it is a necessity that will make it happen

In India, we are at a very crucial point in our demographic journey. Right now, India has more youth than elderly people, which means the country has a sizable productive population — deemed necessary for ushering in economic growth. Indeed, that is encouraging, but it is also a double-edged weapon. If the youth are not provided with the right kind of environment to grow and work, this energy is dissipated and can even lead to chaos and confusion, which often results in violence, rioting and an increased crime rate. Thus, youth is an energy that needs to be carefully harnessed and nurtured.

On July 15, the world marks World Youth Skills Day — a day dedicated to celebrating the importance of equipping young people with the skills they need for employment, entrepreneurship, and meaningful participation in society. For India, a country where over 60 per cent of the population is under 35, the occasion carries deeper significance. Today, the country has what economists call a demographic dividend — a once-in-a-generation opportunity to supercharge economic growth. But this dividend is not automatic. It must be earned, and that means preparing young people with the skills that align with tomorrow's jobs. Unfortunately, a recent Government study revealed a worrying gap: only 47 per cent of schools offer skill-based courses, and just 29 per cent of students participate in them. The skills gap is especially wide in rural areas and among disadvantaged groups.

To create a future-ready workforce, the Indian Government has launched several major skill development initiatives. The Skill India Mission serves as an umbrella programme offering training across diverse domains. PMKVY provides free, industry-aligned training with certification and job support. SANKALP and STRIVE, backed by the World Bank, focus on modernising ITIs and improving local skill delivery. The PM Vishwakarma Yojana supports traditional artisans with tools, training, credit, and market access. The Government has also deepened collaboration with industry and international bodies. For instance, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has partnered with Shell India to provide training in green energy and electric vehicle (EV) maintenance. India is also drafting a National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2025–2035) to bring coherence and long-term vision to these diverse initiatives. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has made a bold attempt to dismantle the wall between academic and vocational learning. These schemes and initiatives, though impressive, still lag behind the requirements. Besides, the implementation of many of these schemes leaves much to be desired. World Youth Skills Day reminds us that skills are the new currency in an economy driven by innovation, automation, and global integration. For India, this day is not just about commemorating a UN resolution — it is about recommitting to a national mission.

However, challenges remain. There is a need for better trainers, real-time data on market demand, and more inclusive access to training — especially for women and rural youth. India's young population is its greatest strength — and its greatest responsibility. World Youth Skills Day is a moment to reflect on how far we have come and how much further we must go.

g-16

Courses That Don't Matter, Graduates Whom No One Wants

Almost 20mn college-goers study subjects irrelevant to their future, delinked from what employers demand. They should be taught useful trades in training institutes

Binay Panda



India at Independence envisioned a vital role for higher educational institutions (HEIs), especially in science & tech. HEIs were to impart practical skills, create knowledge, and build character. Eight decades on, we need a balance between education (knowledge) and training (skills) in the HEI ecosystem.

Training in practical skills secures employment. Academic knowledge alone may be insufficient for several tasks. Yes, medicine, engineering, experimental sciences require years of experience, practical skills, and theoretical knowledge to perform the job. But outside of technical institutes, do any HEIs in India teach skills that secure jobs?

Apprenticeship & innovation | The question is whether college or university is necessary to gain practical skills. Those who built the Konarak sun temple or the Qutab Minar in Delhi, or the Taj Mahal in Agra, did not attend organised learning centres or universities. How did they build these wonders with mathematical and geometrical precision without attending university? Because they had honed their skills to the highest level through years of practice and apprenticeship.

It's a mistake to think that the role of modern HEIs in technical and scientific fields is to teach only practical skills. One can acquire these by working with an expert. What HEIs need to nurture is the imagination and appetite for innovations. HEIs need to teach students to innovate new techniques and materials through research and take them to scale. A modern university thus must teach to innovate and combine skills with scale.

China has shown the world that when practical skill acquisition is matched with scale, a country can build more than 45,000 km of high-speed rail infra in less than 20 years. Skills earn jobs, not college degrees. However, when matched with scale, skills can build nations quickly.

What jobs need | In education in HEIs for non-technical subjects, knowledge creation comes to the forefront. But knowledge alone has few jobs. Skills required for employment in non-technical fields – such as a shop manager, a traffic cop, or a bureaucrat – are learned on the job, not taught in our HEIs.

No single HEI can teach such diverse skills under any single curriculum. Sure, the college experience may be helpful for some, but is it the best and most



efficient path toward getting a job? Would it not be better if future administrative officers and traffic inspectors were selected after high school and entered a multi-year specialised college, similar to National Defence Academy? NDA teaches general and public administration, law and order, law enforcement, finance, the Constitution, and traffic law, among other relevant subjects.

Gap between study & work | Close to 60% of India's 34mn students enrolled in undergraduate degree courses may end up in jobs unrelated to what they study in

college or university. That's nearly 20mn studying subjects irrelevant to their future. Is this not a waste of national resources?

Question is: What proportion of our HEIs should focus on teaching practical skills and how many should concentrate on creating knowledge? In addition to skills and knowledge, good character is essential in every profession. Character-building must be an inherent part of every HEI.

HEIs that create knowledge give rise to thinkers and should not be evaluated on the number of jobs they create. This should be reserved for specialised HEIs – engineering, medical, or technical colleges and polytechnics.

Balanced approach | Striking the right balance can be achieved by reducing the number of HEIs and students trained in subjects unrelated to specific skills or jobs. This would not be retrograde – HEIs that focus on knowledge creation and quality education have to continue to receive generous, long-term financial support to continue their mission, albeit with a leaner structure.

India has to create jobs to sustain its economic growth. Jobless educated youth pose a disaster waiting to happen. Courses ranging from 1-4 years at training centres and colleges in practical subjects to train plumbers, masons, electricians, drivers, shop managers, and construction technicians are the need of the hour.

Mind the mismatch | American economist Bryan Caplan in *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System is a Waste of Time and Money*, argues that higher education has an insignificant effect on improving human capital. He suggests that most students attend college to certify conformity and intelligence. The signalling effect of present-day education does not produce a workforce that matches the years of training students receive in our HEIs.

HEIs should mirror a pyramid structure – more institutions offering skill-based training at the bottom, followed by those that generate knowledge through education in the middle, and research universities at the very top.

The writer is a professor at JNU

7/15

India's moonshot moment for research and innovation

India has long grappled with an uncomfortable truth: Our research and development spending, despite being the world's fifth-largest economy and a global talent hub, remains among the lowest in the world. At under 0.7% of GDP, our national research and development spend pales not only in comparison with countries like the US (3.5%) or China (2.7%), but also with smaller economies such as South Korea (5%) and Brazil (1.2%). This has had a compounding effect. It has limited our scientific ambition, discouraged patient capital from entering deep-tech, and left India too often a consumer rather than a creator of advanced technology.

Against this backdrop, the government's announcement of a ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) scheme is both timely and transformative. It is not just an economic intervention but an institutional one. Structured through the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), the scheme aims to correct a deficit in India's innovation ecosystem. It is a bold signal of intent to move from being a user of imported technology to a nation that creates and commercialises its own, and eventually, exports it to the world.

The scheme to be implemented through a Special Purpose Vehicle will have oversight from an empowered group of secretaries and will be chaired by the Prime Minister (PM). The architecture signals not just administrative backing, but clear political ownership, suggesting that this is not a routine policy measure but a national priority.

The scheme's emphasis on sunrise sectors, including clean energy, climate tech, robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI) in key areas, biotech, agritech is encouraging. To maximise impact, India must also identify areas where it has both strategic interest and a strong potential to lead. In agritech, for instance, the opportunity is not abstract but deeply national. With more than 45% of India's workforce employed in agriculture, targeted R&D in precision farming, climate-resilient seeds, and AI-driven supply chains can yield enormous social and economic dividends. In clean tech, rather than replicating global models, India can lead in areas that suit its own realities, such as decentralised solar, high-temperature grid storage, or waste-to-energy solutions for peri-urban areas.

India also has a unique structural advantage that few countries possess at the same scale: A billion-plus population layered with a maturing digital public infrastructure stack. Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, ONDC, Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA), Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) and other platforms give Indian innovators a home-grown testbed that is unmatched in size and complexity. Combined with AI and blockchain, this can unlock innovations in financial inclusion, digital health, micro-credit, and public service delivery. It is not just a policy advantage but a technological edge and must be treated as such in our national R&D priorities.

Startups will play a foundational role in realising this ambition. India has already seen a strong base of deep-tech startups emerge across sectors including medical diagnostics, space technology and battery innovation, amongst others. Companies in these sectors have shown how Indian ventures can compete globally while solving distinctly Indian problems. With the right support, this next generation of technology-led startups can do for science and engineering what the previous wave did for consumer internet and fintech.

India's academic ecosystem will be vital in

sustaining the innovation pipeline. While the IITs and IISc represent some of our strongest research hubs, they would benefit from deeper investment to realise their full potential. At the same time, there is an opportunity to expand research capacity across a broader set of universities and technical institutes. By fostering a more inclusive and well-supported academic research environment, India can unlock innovation that is geographically, institutionally, and intellectually diverse.

The success of this approach is evident in countries such as the US and Germany, where deep-tech innovation is underwritten by consistent public investment in academic research, often with mechanisms for seamless technology transfer to the private sector. The US offers a compelling example through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (Darpa), which has consistently backed high-risk, high-reward research in academic institutions. Over the decades, Darpa has played a pivotal role in developing foundational technologies, including the internet, GPS, voice assistants, and stealth aircraft systems, many of which originated as blue-sky research projects in universities and later, evolved into world-changing innovations. This model shows how strategic public funding, when paired with academic talent and long-term vision, can unlock breakthroughs with far-reaching economic and societal impact.

The scale of funding is a powerful beginning. The focus must now shift to world-class execution. Attracting high-quality second-level fund managers with domain expertise and entrepreneurial instincts will be critical to ensuring that capital flows to the most promising ideas. A governance framework that champions transparency, timely disbursements, and a healthy appetite for risk will enable innovation to thrive. With the right people and processes in place, this initiative can serve as a model for how bold public investment can translate into transformative national capability.

Equally important is the opportunity to align India's regulatory and compliance landscape with its innovation ambitions. By streamlining pathways for IP protection, tax processes, lab access, and international research collaboration, we can create an environment where startups and research-intensive enterprises thrive. Simplifying these frameworks will amplify the impact of the RDI scheme.

This initiative also presents an opportunity for India's private sector, not just startups, but family offices, foundations, and corporates, to co-invest in national capability. The government has taken the first step with capital. Now, industry must match it with conviction, institutions, and risk capital. Public-private co-funding platforms and industry-led R&D clusters can help align efforts and multiply outcomes.

India has missed critical moments before—the semiconductor revolution of the 1990s, the early years of industrial robotics, and the first wave of AI. The RDI scheme is a second chance. This time, the urgency is greater. Global supply chains are shifting. Climate timelines are shortening. Tech disruptions are accelerating. The countries that lead in innovation will shape the future rules of trade, security, and diplomacy.

The money has finally arrived. What we need now is thoughtful focus, nurturing of the R&D ecosystem with institutional strength and intellectual agility and above all, a long-term view. This will be a multi-decadal endeavour. The ₹1 lakh crore is a strong beginning.



Kunal Bahl

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SOCIAL
PULSE

Tongues on Fire

The frequent language-related confrontations across India have reignited old tensions, raising concerns about coexistence and national unity in a country known for its rich linguistic and cultural diversity.



KDP RAO

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It is perplexing to see linguistic tensions surface even in today's India when films from both Bollywood and Tollywood are doing roaring business all over the country, and the cuisines of both South and North have become equally popular across India

The ghost of linguistic unrest of the 60s seems to haunt the country once again. Unfortunately, the last few months have seen frequent incidents of violence in Maharashtra and Karnataka over the perceived domination of other languages over the regional languages, sparking a strong feeling of 'insiders' versus 'outsiders'. In February, tensions mounted in the Belagavi region, known for its mixed Kannada and Marathi-speaking population, resulting in violent clashes and vandalism. In April, two women were assaulted in Thane for speaking English instead of Marathi. Last month, a sweet shop vendor in Mira Road, Mumbai was allegedly assaulted for not speaking in Marathi, and early this month, a migrant auto-rickshaw driver in Palghar was beaten for asserting that he would only speak in Hindi. Similarly, an investor's office was vandalised over his post on X that he would not learn Marathi despite living in Mumbai for 30 years. Controversy erupted when a lady Bank Manager of SBI in the Chandapura branch in Bengaluru refused to speak Kannada, saying, "This is India, I won't speak Kannada." In 2023, the Kannada Signboard Protests turned violent, with vandals targeting establishments for not using Kannada prominently (at least 60 per cent of signage as mandated by law).

Language evolved as a medium of communication which helped the evolution of various social, religious, and political institutions in the world. A language signifies the unique socio-cultural identity of people in a geographical context with emotional overtones. Nevertheless, in spite of the numerous languages spoken in the world, political and economic institutions have transgressed linguistic boundaries as humans learnt to live in harmony with mutual respect and cooperation. Learning a language is an asset, for it widens one's perspective and opens the doors to various opportunities.

However, language has also been a trigger for violent agitations across the world. For example, the 1952 Bengali language movement against the imposition of Urdu in East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) culminated in the 1971 Bangladesh independence war, claiming around 3 million lives. In Turkey, the suppression of the Kurdish language (spoken by 15 per cent of the population) has fuelled unending ethnic conflict. Over 500 languages are spoken in Nigeria, with Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo being the major ones; tensions have led to periodic violence and ethno-linguistic



It is unfortunate that language wars are surfacing again at a time when India is struggling hard to address more serious issues like poverty and unemployment

clashes, like the Hainan-Yoruba tensions. The Biafran Igbo secession (1967-1970), which caused 1 million deaths, had linguistic roots. In Spain, tensions exist between Spanish (Castilian) and regional languages like Catalan, Basque, and Galician. The Catalan and Basque regions often push for linguistic autonomy; the Catalan independence movement in 2010 saw widespread violent clashes. In Canada, the Quebec separatist movement led to referendums in 1980 and 1995, though violence has been rare. In Belgium, the Dutch (Flemish, 60 per cent) versus French (Walloon, 40 per cent) divide is glaring but generally peaceful.

It is perplexing to see linguistic tensions surface even in today's India when films from both Bollywood and Tollywood are doing roaring business all over the country, and the cuisines of both South and North have become equally popular across India. When the iconic movie 'Sholay' of the 70s ran for a year in Madras (today's Chennai), a huge fan following for Rajnikanth became evident even in the northern belt; Babubai, Puriya, RRR, et al. have become household names in the North. Today, cricket has transcended linguistic boundaries, with players and fans drawn from all over the country, and the business runs in crores. One can go on counting various aspects of cultural and linguistic synthesis between the North and South, which is a true blessing for the unity of India. At the end of the day, it all seems to boil down to a 'love and hate' syndrome with sporadic outbursts rather than an

outright antagonism among people on linguistic lines.

However, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," they say. It is intriguing that people living in a state for years refuse to speak the local language with the people of that state. But at the same time, acts of violence and vandalism are equally reprehensible. A sense of proportion is also expected from the agitators with regard to establishments where the use of Hindi or English is necessary, such as central government offices, the banking sector, hospitality sector, postal department, aviation and transport sector, etc. Respect for local language and culture is an uncomproisable principle. As far as possible, settlers in a state must try to communicate in the local language with the people of that state. Refusal to do so only reflects juvenile chauvinism. For example, it would be ridiculous to imagine Indians settled abroad insisting on speaking only in an Indian language with people out there—no less than expecting people in those countries to learn such Indian languages to communicate with Indians in their own land.

The framers of the Constitution had the foresight to visualise linguistic discord in the country and accordingly provided for the Eighth Schedule to honour linguistic diversity and to prevent one single language from dominating. Hindi was given the status of 'official language' (Art. 343) alongside English, but not as the 'national language'. The original list in 1950 included 14 languages: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya (now

Odia), Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. Later, through amendments to the Constitution in 1962, 1992, and 2003, eight more were added: Sindhi, Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali, Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, and Santali—making it a total of 22 regional languages.

As per Census 2010, Hindi is spoken by 52.83 crore (43.63 per cent), Bengali by 9.7 crore (8.03 per cent), Marathi by 8.3 crore (6.86 per cent), Telugu by 8.11 crore (6.70 per cent), while other major languages like Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Urdu are spoken by people ranging between 3 crore to 6 crore respectively, each with distinct cultural identities. As a counterweight to the numerical strength of Hindi, the Eighth Schedule specifies different regional languages for official use in government, Parliament, judiciary, and education so that a balance is maintained among all languages. The Schedule supports the development and preservation of the listed languages through the promotion of literature, education, and official use. However, promoting Hindi as a common language is a constitutional directive (Art. 351), but of course not by imposition. We need cooperation and consensus in this regard, as opposed to confrontation.

Whatever the triggers may be, it is unfortunate that language wars are surfacing again at a time when India is struggling hard to address more serious issues such as poverty, unemployment, healthcare, climate change—not to mention terrorism, which is pushing our defence preparedness to the edge. Moreover, if linguistic tensions persist, they will hamper growth by depriving people—and the entire economy—of economic opportunities. Migrant workers, who struggle to make ends meet, can be the worst victims. If not addressed in time, these linguistic tensions may potentially endanger the national unity which the framers of our Constitution laboured hard to ensure. It is the responsibility of all citizens to cultivate tolerance and extend cooperation to one another irrespective of language, faith, or culture to live up to the intent of Article 19. Political leaders should prefer constitutional methods to address their genuine concerns rather than play to the gallery. Surely, we do not want to prove Churchill right on his racist remarks that "once independence is given, Indians will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles."

Views expressed are personal

Dealing with language fears

SATADAL BHATTACHARJEE

In a big and polyglot country like India, language policy and language education are important and sensitive issues. In the recent past, the issue of learning or not learning three languages under the National Education Policy has become the centre of a stormy debate in the country. The debate and the cacophony linger on, because the complex issue, having political dimensions, is not going to get a solution very easily.

In this context it is necessary to identify the root of the disputes around the matter. The unwillingness of the state of Tamil Nadu to implement the three-language formula springs from a quite reasonable apprehension that this will ultimately decimate English to a position of irrelevance as a pan-Indian official language. At the base of such apprehension is a lack of trust in the outlook of people who, being in power at the Centre, frame and implement linguistic policies according to their own vision and predilection.

People in Tamil Nadu may not be wrong in believing that the option of learning a third language may pave the way for eventual establishment of Hindi as the most dominant language for southerners too. Since the administrative machinery of the Union seems often to be very ardently focussed on opening opportunities to sway the sceptre of the Hindi language up and down the country, it may be feared by many that the three-language formula may with time turn into an effective tool in non-Hindi states for replacing other languages in the public sphere with Hindi.

That the policy-makers operating from Delhi are as a general trend inclined towards promoting or facilitating the hegemony of the Hindi language is evident from various facts. Nowadays, even the names or captions of new central statutes framed in English are phrased in Hindi. It is difficult to understand why a law officially written and published in English should have its name in Hindi and only in Hindi.

For many years the Central Government has been formally naming its newly established organisations, corporations or institutions in Hindi instead of English. At the national level there is undoubtedly a growing tendency at work which serves to

gradually relegate the use of English in the administrative arena to insignificance or non-existence. Often we hear rhetoric claiming that Hindi is the 'national language' of our country, though the Constitution never said that.

These events definitely create an atmosphere where people become sceptical about the future of English as an administrative language in India. Tamils and other non-Hindi speaking communities in India will not ultimately profit from the declaration of English in administrative use, because monopoly of Hindi in the national administrative scenario may – and indeed will – turn all other Indian languages into insignificant dialects in the long run. There are examples galore in history which would prompt us to predict such an eventuality.

As for the education policy in question, students theoretically have a choice to learn any language as a third language in this three-language scheme, but it is most likely that there will hardly be any scope in institutions for engaging teachers for many other languages except Hindi in addition to English and the local language (Tamil in the case of Tamil Nadu). For promoting Hindi learning, there are and will always be robust central funds.

Things would be better if the State Government should have the authority as well as the funds to decide and implement what other language should be taught in addition to the predominant local idiom and English if the formula is implemented within the state. As for the individual student and his or her personal aspirations, there are ample opportunities in the larger social environment beyond school curricula to get training in any other language.

The language education issue in the context of Tamil Nadu stirred up a nationwide debate which has been continuing for long. Meanwhile, a small yet significant matter has recently come up in news which has a bearing on the issue. Reports say that the Lakshadweep administration, in implementing the current education policies, has recently dropped Mahal and Arabic from the school curriculum in the Minicoy island and has replaced them with Hindi. Mahal is a distinct local language in the insular region with its own popularity and cultural value. Mahal is an Indo-Aryan language and traces its origin to the Old Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit).



Banishing even Mahal from the local education system by the administrative authorities of the Union Territory to make room for Hindi cannot be said to be a good or encouraging example for the non-Hindi-speaking regions of the country. The Minicoy islanders may have for the present obtained some protection in the matter from the judiciary, but the issue persists. If people speaking any regional language sustain a fear that administrative and educational policies framed by authorities sitting far away from the region may ultimately serve to take away the former's linguistic independence and bulldoze all cultural variations in the country, such apprehensiveness will be detrimental to the promotion of social cohesion in the nation.

As a matter of fact, the culture of recognising the dignity of regional languages in India, especially in the official context, has not yet fully achieved the standard of inclusivity which ought to have developed in a pluralistic democracy like ours much earlier. Had it not been so, the number of languages in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution would have been much greater than what it is now. It is not clear why the Central Government has not to this day included many popular regional languages such as Rajasthani, Garo, Kachchhi, Khasi, Sikkimese, Mundari and Tulu in the VIIIth Schedule. The VIIIth Schedule excludes English too, though it includes Hindi. We, furthermore, do not understand why Bengali, in spite of being spoken as the mother tongue by the largest community in the islands, has not been recognised as an official language of the Union Territory of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Hindi is a nice language and familiarity with this language may certainly enrich one's literary taste. As a colloquial lingua franca Hindi surely plays a useful role in many parts of our country. But the role of English as the foremost administrative and legal language in the length and breadth of our country is no less important and profitable. India is a country of unity in diversity as well as of diversity in unity. The English language in the context of our composite socio-cultural life and multibreeded socio-political dynamics is a suitable cementing agent that can foster unity in India without killing diversity.

As English is practically equidistant from all Indian languages and it is nobody's mother-tongue on our soil, its use in administration, especially in administrative affairs, does have a neutrality which would put all of us in equal or equivalent positions and will consequently protect us against losing our mother-tongue as a result of acquisition of dominant

administrative position by any particular Indian language. The Tamil people, therefore, should not be criticised for asserting the fact that the local language and English would suffice to supply a bilingualism necessary for administrative purposes.

We should not forget the role the English language played as a link language in the past in forging a united spirit of nationalism throughout the entire British India which, indeed, was more extensive in size and diversity than the country in which we live today. Today we should not have any hesitation to recognise that English deserves to be continued and promoted as a link language for official purposes throughout India.

A rigid attitude on the part of the central policy-makers will only fetch an equally rigid response from regional stakeholders.

Only an environment of trust, sympathy and dialogue can help all sides to reach a harmonious consensus in the matter of language education and language application in this polyglot country. The onus for creating such an environment lies primarily on those who alone have the official power and authority to maintain or decimate the official use of English in the national context.

(The writer is an essayist and occasional contributor.)

Give languages room to coexist, flourish

The notion of linguistic dominance is flawed — it breeds division, resentment and social fracture



SANJAY HEGDE

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LANGUAGE binds us, divides us and often defines us. Recently, a junior colleague from a Hindi-speaking state sighed at the latest language controversy, calling it a fresh irritant. I reminded him sharply of Rahat Indori's line, "Humarey moonh mein, tumhari zubaan thodi hai" (It's not in my mouth that your language dwells). I argued that the notion of a single national language belonged to an outdated era — 1920s to 1940s. Today, insisting on linguistic uniformity feels as obsolete as driving an Ambassador in the age of Tesla.

Historically, languages have profoundly shaped nations. Kemal Pasha modernised Turkish, solidifying Turkey's identity as distinct from its Ottoman past. Israel brought back Hebrew, once confined to religious rituals, into daily life, creating a sense of cultural pride and unity. Yet, these successes weren't universal. In Pakistan, when Muhammad Ali Jinnah sought to impose Urdu as the sole national language in 1948, students at Dacca University fiercely opposed it. Their demand for equal respect for Bengali ignited the linguistic nationalism that eventually birthed Bangladesh. This vividly illustrates that linguistic imposition rarely achieves unity but instead fuels resistance.

India, rich in linguistic diversity, faced even greater complexities at Independence. The framers of our Constitution selected Hindi, crafted in Devanagari script by British scholars at Fort William in Calcutta, hoping it would unify the nation. But resistance erupted soon thereafter. The strongest protests erupted in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s, and resistance



PRIORITY: Let's embrace linguistic diversity not as a challenge to unity but as its greatest strength. **AN**

echoed across several states, not just in the South.

Punjab rejected Hindi, asserting its right to use Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script. After an intense agitation, Punjab achieved its separate linguistic identity in 1966. Similarly, in eastern India, Oriya speakers resisted the dominance of Bengali, securing Odisha's cultural autonomy. Assam's linguistic anxieties triggered riots against perceived Bengali encroachment, leaving scars still visible in the stereotyping of every Bengali-speaking Muslim as Bangladeshi.

These disputes underline a critical truth: language is deeply tied to identity, dignity and pride. The Supreme Court recently affirmed, "Language is culture. Language is the yardstick to measure the civilisational march of a community and its people... its earliest and primary purpose will always remain communication." Language should serve as a bridge, not a barrier. Yet, it often becomes a tool manipulated by political interests seeking dominance.

Despite historical lessons, periodically, the official impulse to enforce Hindi resurfaces, especially in moments of heightened nationalism. Politicians sometimes view language as an easy shortcut to national unity, overlooking the complex realities of

The push for linguistic homogeneity ignores the deeply emotional & personal attachment communities have to their mother tongues.

India's multilingual society. But India's unity thrives precisely because of its linguistic diversity, not despite it. Imposing Hindi risks alienation, not cohesion. The notion of linguistic dominance is fundamentally flawed — it breeds division, resentment and social fracture.

Today's digital age, dominated by English, further transforms language dynamics. English has become a global linguistic bridge, essential for international commerce, science, technology and diplomacy. Regional languages, in contrast, have become islands of localised expression. In this new landscape, demand-

ing Hindi exclusivity is impractical and irrelevant. Language flexibility, multilingual capabilities and openness are now prerequisites for global success and even domestic harmony.

For instance, a Hindi-speaking businessman who masters Chinese or Russian has enormous global advantages. Can he realistically insist that everyone with in India, whether in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal or Punjab, must respond solely in Hindi? Such an insistence would not only harm business interests but also create unnecessary friction. Effective communication thrives on mutual understanding, respect, and linguistic adaptability, not on forced uniformity.

Moreover, the Supreme Court's judgment in April emphasised multilingual coexistence: "Our misconceptions, perhaps even our prejudices against a language, have to be courageously and truthfully tested against reality, which is the great diversity of our nation: Our strength can never be our weakness," wrote Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia in *Vishva Shiksha vs Maharashtra*. Indeed, India's strength lies in its diversity, including linguistic diversity. Social harmony depends on respecting this diversity, not suppressing it.

Educational systems should also reflect an inclusive

approach. Linguistic education should aim not merely at proficiency in a single national language but at nurturing multilingual skills, promoting linguistic respect and appreciating diverse cultural heritages. Schools must emphasise linguistic equality rather than superiority. It would foster greater national integration, cultural appreciation and mutual respect among citizens.

Furthermore, languages are repositories of history and culture. They carry unique stories, traditions and perspectives. Suppressing a language or elevating one at the expense of others risks erasing these rich cultural narratives. The push for linguistic homogeneity ignores the deeply emotional and personal attachment communities have to their mother tongues. It disregards the truth that language is more than just communication — it is heritage, emotion and identity.

The solution lies not in forcing a uniform language but in fostering an environment where languages can coexist and flourish together. The challenge is to encourage linguistic harmony without dominance, promoting multilingualism as an asset, not a problem.

As I firmly told my colleague, no one has the right to dictate another person's language or force their understanding. Your language does not reside in my mouth. The freedom to choose one's language is fundamental, reflecting individual and community dignity. Respecting linguistic autonomy fosters social cohesion, mutual respect and true national unity.

India's melody emerges from diverse voices harmonise — like the timeless "Miley meri tumhara..."

Unity isn't uniformity; it's about celebrating our differences and creating a vibrant national symphony together. True nationalism appreciates diversity and seeks strength through inclusion, not exclusion. Let's embrace linguistic diversity not as a challenge to unity but as its greatest strength. After all, language is about communicating, understanding and connecting — not dominating or dividing.

AI cannot enable a student to 'see a world in a grain of rice'



AVUL PANKAR
SOCIOLGIST

IT is easy to get carried away by every new piece of technology. It is tempting to believe that the techno-scientific revolution can take us to a promised land. I am, therefore, not surprised when I come across bands of over-enthusiastic proponents of artificial intelligence. In fact, many of them believe that AI can revolutionise every sphere of life, including the domain of education.

Take, for instance, Sanjeev Sanyal, a prominent member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India. Recently, in a podcast hosted by the Indian School of Business, he said that AI would render traditional undergraduate lectures unnecessary. He said, "You don't need to spend four years in a university listening to something you can just easily learn from AI."

Sanyal's faith in AI seems to be as strong as a traditional believer's faith that a bath in the 'holy river can free him from all sorts of 'sins' that he may have com-

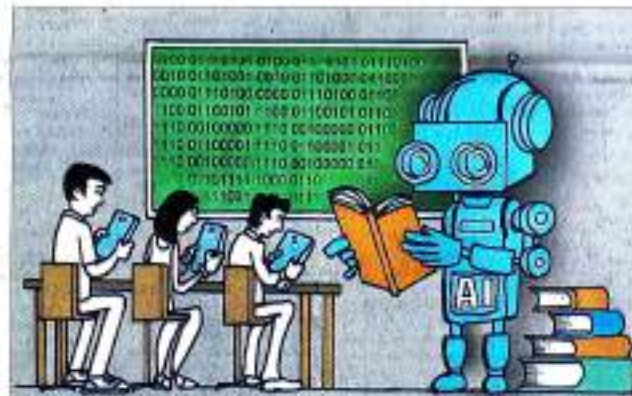
mitted over the years!

"Whether you are in Harvard or Bathinda, the access to knowledge is the same," added Sanyal. Indeed, for him, nothing matters, be it the social milieus of the learning community, the pedagogic art of the professor or the dynamics of the classroom. What matters is the packaged knowledge capsule that AI provides instantly and seamlessly.

The irony is that this kind of religious faith in modern techno-science to solve all human problems seems to have become the latest fashion.

I am not a technologist. I am a teacher, and I have always loved the vibrations of a living/interactive classroom. And, hence, I can say with a reasonable degree of confidence that the culture of teaching/learning, far from being a mechanical act of dissemination of information, hard data and theories, is primarily an act of deep communion. It is a relationship. And, a living classroom is a dialogic space: a teacher and his/her students walk together, learn and unlearn, expand their mental horizons, sharpen the art of listening, evolve life-sustaining relationships and explore the new frontiers of knowledge.

No machine, however sophisticated, can replace this humane and relational aspect of education.



STUPIDITY: If we devalue our own intelligence and surrender before AI, it is not smartness. SWAPN K

Take a simple illustration. As a student of political philosophy, you not always ask AI about, say, the theory of justice, and get an instant answer. However, it cannot replace, for instance, the experience of sitting in Professor Michael Sandel's class at Harvard, listening to his amazing lectures on justice and feeling the warmth of his dialogic interaction with his students.

Well, you can equip the classroom with smart boards and computers; you can even encourage young students to use AI occasionally. However, there are limits to this sort of technological solution.

There is yet another mis-

Let the orthodox worshippers of AI not deprive young learners of the company of great teachers in an interactive classroom.

take the over-enthusiastic proponents of AI like Sanyal make. They fail to realise that technology is not and should not be our master. Instead, it is for us to decide when and how to use it.

If we allow ourselves to be completely hypnotised by the miracles of technology, we invite a danger. We tend to lose our creative agency and subjectivity.

Hence, I have no hesitation in saying that if our students and teachers become excessively dependant on new technological devices, including AI, it will lead to the poverty of critical thinking and creative spirit.

Let me give an illustration.

Once I met a professor of educational philosophy in a seminar. Yes, this techno-savvy professor was ready with his laptop for the Powerpoint presentation. However, because of some technical fault, he could not open his laptop. Believe me, he refused to deliver the lecture because, as he said, he was so used to the Powerpoint presentation that it would be really difficult for him to speak anything substantial spontaneously.

Think of X. Technology, far from enriching him, had disempowered him.

If it can happen to a senior professor, imagine what would happen if for everything — even for writing a small essay on, say, one's own college — a student begins to rely on AI. It is certainly not a good thing if we begin to devalue our own intelligence and surrender unconditionally before AI. It is not smartness; it is stupidity.

Unlike those who worship modern technology as an idol, I value human imperfection rather than technologically mediated 'perfection'. For instance, a techno-savvy student can use ChatGPT, write a smart essay on, say, Franz Kafka's literary creation, and impress her teacher. However, in this process, she will miss the experience of reading Kafka mindfully; she will fail to become suffi-

ciently empathic to experience the existential pain and agony of Kafka that led him to write a story like 'Metamorphosis' or a novel like 'Castle'. She will fail to learn through his/her own reading, life experience and interpretative skills. Her reliance on ChatGPT for writing a 'perfect' answer is essentially her tragedy.

Possibly, in the near future, the worshippers of AI will have to be told that the likes of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein trusted their own intelligence, sharpened it, worked on it and enriched our understanding of culture, politics, economics, psychology and science. They became what they were without AI.

Well, one might say that AI is an advanced that it can even write a better poem than what, say, the likes of William Blake, Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore wrote. Yet, AI cannot make us familiar with the experience of being a poet. Possibly, it is only a sensitive teacher of literature or a great poet who can make a young student understand what it meant for William Blake 'to see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower'.

Let the orthodox worshippers of AI not deprive young learners of the company of great teachers in an interactive classroom. [9]

व्यवस्था पर सवाल

ओडिशा के बालासोर में कॉलेज फैकल्टी पर यौन उत्पीड़न का आरोप लगाने वाली छात्रा की मौत पूरे सिस्टम की हार है। सरकारी स्तर पर अभी जिस तरह की सक्रियता दिख रही है, अगर वह पहले दिखती, तो शायद इस तरह की मौत नहीं आती।

सुनवाई नहीं। बीएड स्टूडेंट ने अपने हेड ऑफ डिपार्टमेंट की शिकायत प्रिंसिपल से की थी। अब यह तथ्य सामने है कि खुद को आग लगाने से कुछ दिनों पहले भी उसने एक्स (पहले ट्विटर) पर



ओडिशा में छात्रा की मौत

सार्वजनिक रूप से अपनी शिकायत रखते हुए चेताया था कि अगर कार्रवाई नहीं हुई, तो वह जान दे देगी। कॉलेज की इंटरनल कंप्लेंट कमिटी से लेकर प्रिंसिपल तक, वह जहां तक पहुंच सकती थी, गई, लेकिन कहीं सुनवाई नहीं हुई।

यह कैसी इमेज। आरोप है कि प्रिंसिपल ने पीड़िता पर शिकायत वापस लेने का दबाव बनाया, क्योंकि उन्हें कॉलेज की

'इमेज' खराब होने की चिंता थी। इस मामले में एक बड़ी भूमिका इस कथित 'इमेज' की है, जिसे बचाने के चक्कर में अक्सर अपराध को छिपाया जाता है। लेकिन क्या किसी शैक्षणिक संस्थान की छवि एक छात्रा के जीवन से बढ़कर हो सकती है और क्या अपराध की शिकायत पर कार्रवाई करने से इमेज दागदार होती है?

बार-बार लापरवाही। ओडिशा का नाम पिछले कुछ महीनों में इस तरह की घटनाओं में लगातार आया है। इस साल फरवरी में भुवनेश्वर के कलिंगा इंस्टिट्यूट ऑफ इंडस्ट्रियल टेक्नॉलजी (KIIT) में बीटेक थर्ड ईयर की एक नेपाली स्टूडेंट ने खुदकुशी कर ली थी। वहां भी पीड़िता ने एक छात्र पर प्रताड़ित करने का आरोप लगाया था और उसके केस में भी विश्वविद्यालय प्रशासन ने लापरवाही बरती थी, जिसकी वजह से मामला भारत-नेपाल के बीच कूटनीतिक स्तर तक पहुंच गया था।

बढ़ते मामले। ओडिशा के मुख्यमंत्री मोहन चरण मांझी ने मार्च में विधानसभा में बताया था कि 2020 से फरवरी 2025 के दौरान पूरे राज्य के विभिन्न स्कूल-कॉलेजों में 72 स्टूडेंट्स खुदकुशी कर चुके हैं। इनमें से ज्यादातर के पीछे वजह थी - मेंटल प्रेशर, उत्पीड़न, पढ़ाई का दबाव, घरेलू परेशानियां, डिप्रेशन वगैरह।

औपचारिकता न हो। UGC की गाइडलाइंस के मुताबिक, हर शैक्षणिक संस्थान में सेक्सुअल हारैसमेंट की जांच के लिए कमिटी होनी चाहिए। हालांकि यह सबसे शुरुआती जरूरत है। कमिटी तो हो, लेकिन साथ में संवेदनशीलता भी चाहिए - जो स्टूडेंट्स के साथ संवाद और तय समय सीमा के भीतर जांच करे। जांच में दोषी पाए जाने पर उस शख्स को सजा भी मिलनी चाहिए। तभी ऐसे मामलों में इंसफ हो पाएगा।



Heed students' distress calls

Every student in a Third World country carries on their shoulders hopes and aspirations of not just themselves but of their family, too, and in some cases, of their whole village and community. And that is just one reason among many as to why a crime against such a person is a crime against society and especially when it results in their lives being snuffed out on campus. Yet instances of students committing suicide for various reasons keep coming to light from various states with the numbers in Odisha of late being unacceptably high.

The latest student to take her own life is a B. Ed. undergraduate in Balasore. She committed self-immolation. This is not only the darkest of tragedies, but also a preventable one, for the young woman had complained to the authorities about the harassment she had been subjected to by the head of her department. She even mentioned that the man in question was asking her for sexual favours, yet the authorities took no action. A couple of Nepali students were found dead on campus in February and May this year, while a girl and boy took the extreme step in April and earlier this month, following ragging by seniors.

There are laws to prevent ragging on campus; and then there are indeed laws that seek to address sexual harassment in the workplace. However, the events in Odisha are testimony to their ineffectiveness and/or tardy implementation. The authorities and the agencies tasked to implement them either take their jobs lightly or get mired in office politics and red tape associated with law enforcement in this country.

This must end. Laws to protect students from harassment and ragging on campus must be made simple and accessible as easily as through a phone call. There must be legislative and administrative oversight of the arrangement at the highest level. We do not send our children to campuses to pour kerosene on themselves and set themselves on fire. **AR/S**

{ OUR TAKE }

A wake-up call from Odisha

The college student's suicide underlines the importance of empathy and a quick response

The death of a college student in Odisha after she set herself on fire — over alleged sexual harassment by her professor and the inaction of the college administration — puts sexual violence on campuses in the spotlight yet again. Higher education regulator UGC has announced a probe, and the Opposition in the state has called for a *bandh* on Thursday. Having failed to act promptly, the state government and the college administration must now ensure that the probe is completed quickly with due rigour and accountability fixed for violations and lapses established by the probe.

The tragic end to the young woman's life offers at least two takeaways for the government, college authorities, and society at large, on curbing sexual violence. One, complaints about harassment must be heard with empathy and responded to immediately — more so in places of learning that are viewed as laboratories of societal change. The tendency is often for the authorities to back the faculty/staff member facing allegations — from caste-related complaints to sexual harassment — and silence the complainant. A thorough probe can ascertain or refute guilt, but the complaint should be acted upon immediately, and necessary counsel provided to the complainant. The process has been laid out in several legal provisions on sexual harassment, including the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, but their implementation is often tardy — deliberate or otherwise — and sometimes the response is even hostile. Timely intervention can save lives, as the Odisha incident shows — the young woman's act was undoubtedly one of untold despair when relief didn't seem forthcoming.

Second, the trust between the student and the teacher is fraying for a host of reasons. There is a certain power dynamic embedded in this relationship, as underlined by the MeToo list some years ago. Hence, clear red lines must be drawn so that people at one end are aware of their rights and those at the other, of their responsibilities. Most college students are fresh out of their teens, staying away from home, and emotionally vulnerable; guardrails are necessary so that this situation is not exploited by faculty and other staff at educational institutions. A bigger challenge is to ensure that the trust between the faculty and the student community on campuses is restored.



SARTHAK BAGCHI

APPOINTMENT BY CHANCE

Assigning principals through a lottery will not reform Bihar's education system

THIS NEWSPAPER HAS welcomed the use of the lottery system for the appointment of five college principals in Patna University ('Drawing Lots', IE, July 7). I disagree with its argument that in a "system corroded by nepotism, caste and political patronage, randomisation may be an impartial arbiter". The lottery system is, in fact, an arbitrary solution to a longstanding problem of maintaining quality checks in teachers' recruitment in Bihar. It is akin to fixing a broken bone with an ordinary band-aid.

The irregularities in teachers' appointments, coupled with delays in recruitment, have dented the credibility of Bihar's already crumbling higher education system. Education and migration are key routes to escape the poverty trap in the state. The deterioration of higher educational institutions, therefore, has repercussions on the state's development trajectory. Institutions in Bihar seem to be completely under the sway of the *labharthi* system. Students are no longer expected to demand and expect good quality education as a matter of right. What Bihar needs is transparency and structural changes. The editorial is right in pointing out that for decades, "government appointments in Bihar, including in its university system, have been hostage to cronyism". But it is misplaced in asserting that an arbitrary lottery is the "necessary first step" towards reform.

DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A column in which readers tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

The system has led to bizarre appointments like a chemistry professor being posted to head the arts and history-oriented Patna College, a history professor being made the head of the Patna Science College, and a male history professor appointed the principal of the Magadh Mahila College.

The system has led to bizarre appointments like a chemistry professor being posted to head the arts and history-oriented Patna College, a history professor being made the head of the Patna Science College, and a male history professor appointed the principal of the Magadh Mahila College. Such mismatched appointments come at a time when the state government has shown itself incapable of meeting the aspirations of the youth, especially those related to higher education. Most estimates place the teacher-to-student ratio in the state's institutes of higher education at around 1:50. In several postgraduate departments in state-run colleges, there is one teacher for 200-350 students.

The dilapidated state of higher education departments in state-run institutes like the BN Mandal University in Madhepura, where several departments from the social sciences and natural sciences streams reportedly share the same room, the delays in hiring teachers, the stopgap arrangement of mass recruitment drives and the overcrowded classrooms in coaching centres in Patna, where students from all over the state converge to learn ways of cracking entrance examinations, have pushed the state's youth to the brink. The state's two major mainstream political parties, the RJD and the JD(U), tend to milk this situation for political gains — recruitment in educational

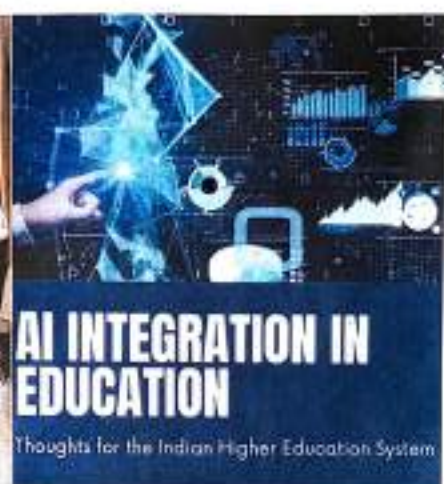
institutions, like government appointments, is a way of providing political patronage and exercises in favouritism. More than one investigation by this newspaper has shown — and the editorial also points out — that these processes are biased towards well-connected candidates. A lottery system, as the editorial points out, might introduce "an element of neutrality". But its rightful emphasis on fairness in recruitment procedures is considerably weakened by the editorial's endorsement of a system that's totally contingent on chance.

The Bihar government would do well to take a leaf out of the book of its counterparts in other states. Tamil Nadu, for example, has a Teacher Recruitment Board to appoint teachers to higher education institutes. Maharashtra is reportedly framing a policy that gives 80 per cent weightage to academic quality, research and teaching and 20 per cent weightage to on-camera interviews to bring more transparency to the recruitment process. The editorial underlines the need for "specialised selection panels, independent oversight bodies, public appointment records and rotational leadership" in future. Why not begin work on that immediately?

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Learning from AI

It is a fact that despite countless experiments with various teaching methods, no substitute approach has been able to completely replicate the experience of sitting in front of an actual teacher in a physical classroom. The close bond that develops between a teacher and a student during classroom teaching is the primary cause of this. This connection is frequently silent and conveyed solely by eye contact. No other technique has been able to reproduce this relationship



While reading a piece of news, I was suddenly reminded of my Class Five half-yearly examination. I was first in class, yet had scored only 58 in Mathematics. I was devastated. Our maths teacher, Murali Babu, comforted me saying, "You were in too much of a hurry. Made some silly mistakes. Don't lose heart. Maybe your score will flip in the annual exam." That reassurance worked like magic. It gave me strength. In the annual exam, I really scored 95 in Maths.

Another memory comes to mind. I was then a postgraduate student. I had written an answer on a short essay by Orwell and went to my teacher, professor Rama Kunda, to see if the answer was correct. While discussing the errors in my answer, she delved deep into the world of Orwell's writings - works I hadn't yet read. Our syllabus included only one essay by Orwell. But just by showing her one answer written on a question that might come in the exam from that essay, I ended up learning about novels like *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

Had I been taught by AI, would I ever have had such experiences? That's what I was wondering while reading the news that has expressed concern about college and university teachers soon becoming redundant because of AI. The apprehension has actually been expressed by Sanjeev Sanyal, an economist and a member of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. He has warned universities that artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to upend higher education itself.

In a recent podcast hosted by the Indian School of Business (ISB), Sanyal has said that AI would replace traditional undergraduate lectures by providing high-quality, individualised education at scale, frequently for free. "You could just as easily learn from AI instead of spending four years in college," Sanyal has maintained. He has further said, "AI is capable of giving lectures, responding to inquiries, translating information into any

language, and even certifying you." The majority of undergraduate and many graduate programmes rely on standardised content, which AI can now manage efficiently, according to Sanyal. He has said: "The traditional lecture format is obsolete. AI doesn't just teach - it engages, tests, and certifies. In many cases, it does all of this better than humans."

Sanyal has emphasised that universities need to reinvent themselves in order to remain relevant in the present context. He has admitted that some professions, like medicine, will continue to need practical, hands-on training. "You can't use AI to cut a cadaver." However, AI has the potential to significantly increase the affordability and accessibility of post-secondary education for the majority of theoretical fields. He thinks that

this change will significantly close the gap between regional colleges and prestigious universities. Additionally, students could be given the flexibility to create multidisciplinary courses and study at their own speed, which is something that traditional universities frequently find difficult to provide.

It is true that AI can now easily teach the core subjects taught in graduate courses all over the world. From one perspective, this is a stark caution to colleges/universities as well as teachers to change themselves immediately. In countries such as India, for example, university curricula are rarely updated, and when they are, undergraduate courses hardly ever include new subjects. Teachers frequently have a great deal of discretion over what they decide to teach in the classroom. They often teach those areas that they are comfortable with. University curricula here, that's why, often fall short of meeting the demands of the job market.

It is true that AI can assist a student in quickly and efficiently gaining the exact knowledge required for employment. That does not, however, imply that AI will soon be able to completely replace undergraduate teachers.

For example, many were concerned that human anchors would soon become outdated when a few Indian TV channels began presenting news with AI-generated anchors. That has not happened. Similarly, different YouTube channels have long been providing a range of undergraduate courses; however, despite their widespread use, YouTube educational channels have not usurped the place of formal education.

They continue to be a supplement to, rather than a replacement of the mainstream. Even the once-popular online tutoring apps have lost some of their appeal in recent years. It is a fact that despite countless experiments with various teaching methods, no substitute approach has been able to completely replicate the experience of sitting in front of an actual teacher in a physical classroom. The close bond that develops between a teacher and a student during class-

room teaching is the primary cause of this. This connection is frequently silent and conveyed solely by eye contact. No other technique has been able to reproduce this relationship.

An undergraduate student might be able to gain the required academic knowledge from AI. AI can take tests, provide prompt answers, and clarify the doubts of the students. However, many students find that the amount of concentration and focus needed to spend hours studying from AI is just too much. While AI also is able to teach topics unasked for as did my teacher professor Rama Kunda!

AI, again, is no match to a teacher's congratulatory gesture when a student completes an exam successfully or correctly answers a question. It can praise the achievements of a student but the warmth and passion of a human voice will be absent in a machine's praise. Because of their emotional impact, a teacher's brief words of encouragement can sometimes transform a student's life. AI just can't do this. AI can never be my class-five math teacher Murali Babu.

There is another, more profound factor to take into account. A teacher and a student have a living, breathing relationship. Teachers frequently get involved in their students' personal lives.

In times of crisis, they provide direction, occasionally even assuming the role of a psychologist/counselor. AI is incapable of doing this. Let me give the example of one student of mine who tried talking to AI on a regular basis to cope with her depression.

However, she discovered that AI repeatedly used different words to express the same concern. In the end, she decided to tell her teacher the causes of her depression. We should not forget that transferring knowledge and skills is only one aspect of the college/university education system. Above all, it is a human process.

Thus, despite Sanyal's insistence, AI will never be able to fully replace teachers at the undergraduate level. However, it would be a serious mistake for teachers to use this as an excuse to become complacent and think that they don't need to change or adapt to the times.

We, in our country, now badly need curricula that are much more inquiry-driven, interdisciplinary and focussed on employment than they currently are. Teaching strategies must also evolve. If using AI is necessary to make classrooms more engaging, then so be it. In fact, that is the main challenge that college and university teachers in a country like ours will face in the near future. *—Sudha*



ANANDHARAN NAIR

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Quotas now a tool that discriminate differently

SHIVANSHU K SRIVASTAVA

Any Dalit or OBC could have been sent in place of Shukla J. This careless statement by Congress leader Udit Raj, made in response to Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla's selection for the Asom-4 space mission, is more than just an insult to scientific achievement. It reflects a growing trend in public life where merit, preparation and professional excellence are seen as less important than identity. When space missions, among the highest examples of human competence and discipline, are reduced to caste politics, it becomes clear that we have lost perspective on what reservation was supposed to achieve.

Unfortunately, this is not just rhetoric. I say this from experience. In the UGC-NET December 2024 examination in the Law subject, I secured 99.45 percentile, yet I was not awarded the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) under the general category. Meanwhile, more than 70 candidates from the caste-based reserved categories (OBC, SC, ST, EWS) were awarded the JRF at scores lower than mine only because they belonged to certain caste-based reserved groups. This is not a matter of personal frustration, but a reflection of how our system functions; a system where even meritorious performance can be ignored if you are not born into what I call the "now privileged" category.

When reservations were introduced after Independence, they were meant as temporary support to help those who had faced historical injustices. The Constitution itself reflected this intent. Article 334 had fixed a 10-year limit on caste-based representation in legislatures. Articles 15(4) and 16(4), which only allow (not mandate) the State to make special provisions for backward classes and reservations in public employment, were designed to uplift, not to permanently divide. Yet today, more

than seventy years later, the policy has become permanent. Not only has it been extended indefinitely, but every attempt to review or rationalise it is met with political hostility.

The situation has become worse because reservation today no longer serves the weakest. The benefits are often captured by the most politically powerful or economically secure among the reserved categories. For OBCs, the creamy layer rule exists but is weakly enforced. For SCs and STs, there is no economic filter at all. On the other hand, candidates from general category backgrounds are left to compete at considerably much higher cut-offs.

This raises a basic question of fairness. If the purpose is to uplift, then why must it involve pushing someone else down? If seats or posts are to be reserved for certain categories, then the total number of seats should be increased. Let the reserved candidates be accommodated through additional capacity rather than by cutting into the existing general pool. There is no reason why a deserving general category student should be denied simply to make space for someone else. The Constitution does not say that upliftment must come by displacement. The government can and should create more opportunities rather than reduce competition to a zero-sum game.

What is even more troubling is that, instead of reviewing the system after decades of implementation, political parties are competing to expand it further. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has openly demanded 85 per cent reservation. Rahul Gandhi has called for reservations to be extended into private sector jobs. If, even after so many years of reservation, these leaders believe the problem remains unresolved, then is it not proof that the current policy is not working? Yet no one asks why. The answer lies in vote-bank politics. Caste has become a political asset, not a social problem to be solved.



Even leaders who claim to be educated and reformist, such as Arvind Kejriwal, do not touch the subject of reservation reform. When he campaigned in Punjab, he declared that a Dalit would be made Deputy Chief Minister; not based on competence or vision, but simply on caste. This shows how caste identity has become a major tool to attract votes rather than a factor for real empowerment. No major political party, whether in power or in opposition, has the courage to even raise a discussion on whether the reservation system needs reform. They fear losing caste-based vote banks more than they care about fairness.

Meanwhile, institutions suffer. In IITs and AIIMS, large differences in entrance scores have created serious academic pressure on some reserved category students, leading to high dropout rates and stress. In government jobs, promotion

through reservation often results in juniors overtaking more experienced seniors, damaging morale and performance. In competitive exams like UPSC and UGC-NET, general category candidates work for years, yet still face artificial ceilings due to their birth identity. This does not build equality. It builds resentment, confusion and silence.

This is not a call to end all affirmative action. Support must exist for those who truly need it. But support should not become a permanent entitlement passed down through generations. We need to move towards a system that considers both social and economic disadvantage, strictly applies the creamy layer across all groups, sets reasonable cut-offs even for reserved seats, and creates additional seats wherever possible. Most importantly, we must be willing to periodically review whether the objectives of reservation are being achieved or not.

When merit is ignored and identity becomes the only qualification, the very idea of justice loses its meaning. What began as a noble policy to remove discrimination has now become a political tool that discriminates differently. If this continues, we will not only lose the confidence of the youth but also the quality of our institutions. Talent will either leave the system or fall silent. India cannot afford either.

The time has come to speak clearly. Social justice should not mean permanent inequality. Uplifting one section must not involve downgrading another. And no democracy should reward identity more than it rewards effort. The longer we avoid reforming this system, the more damage it will cause, not just to individuals but to the entire country.

Ethical neutrality in science

MAINA SARMA

Scientific power now permeates every sphere of life; without ethical vigilance, its gifts can become instruments of harm.

The distinguishing mark of the latter part of the 19th century to the present has been substantial scientific progress. The marvels that charmed Francis Bacon's imagination have been far surpassed by those that are now commonplace to the present-day child. Here we may ask – are the ethical implications of contemporary science different from those in Bacon's mind? So far as scientific procedure is concerned, its chief merit is that it protects the investigator from subjective influences. It is designed to lay bare the truth. The scientist has, and is expected to have, one ideal – theoretical rationality or scientific progress – and one loyalty: fidelity to scientific method.

However, conditions have changed greatly now. A significant characteristic of recent scientific development is the speed with which discoveries are put to practical use. Further, scientists now work on public projects in sophisticated and well-equipped laboratories with enormous financial outlays that interest politicians and industrialists for their own reasons. Science and technology have now become key factors in power struggles between special-interest groups nationally and between power blocs internationally. Scientists are now deeply involved in economic competition, social planning, every field of engineering – including genetic engineering – artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and military affairs. The power of science and technology to change the world has increased immensely. Ethical considerations, human rights, and the public image of science are,

therefore, causes of increasing concern. There is a greater need to uphold core values and keep in mind social objectives, humanitarian perspectives, and higher purposes, while keeping the noble urge for cognitive purity intact. Ethical neutrality across the whole range of science may have been harmless in Bacon's time, but it is no longer so. It is widely realised that scientists can no longer stand aside from the social and political questions involved. The means now placed in man's hands by scientific discoveries, if employed without ethical concern, may pose a threat to human civilisation as a whole. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the scientist to ensure that, as science and technology progress, their power is tempered by restraint and wisdom so as to enrich human life.

In the contemporary world, in which theoretical science has reshaped humanity's conception of the world and of human destiny, applied science has become even more influential. It is recognised as a possible instrument of incalculable evil. This possibility has received a great deal of attention, especially since the application of science to warfare has reached its present diabolical efficiency. Thus, the president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Sir Jossiah Stamp, once remarked, in his presidential address, on the results of scientific research: "These scientific infants, duly born and left on society, get taken in and variously cared for, but on no known principle, and with no directions from the progenitors... These things just happen generally under the profit, and of consumer's desire, in free competition, re-

gardless of the worthiness of the new desires against old, or of the shift of production and therefore employment, with their social consequences". It would perhaps not be improper to turn our attention to Einstein's 1939 letter to Roosevelt, which provides historical evidence of how both the scientist and scientific work have deep socio-political and ethical implications. An important passage from the letter reads as follows: "The element uranium may be turned into an important source of energy in the immediate future. Certain aspects of the situation seem to call for watchfulness, and, if necessary, quick action on the part of the administration. I believe, therefore, that it is my duty to bring to your attention the following facts and recommendation..."

The impact of the letter was so powerful that, on receiving it on October 11, 1939, Roosevelt immediately sent a brief note on October 19, stating – "I have found this data of such importance that I have convened a board consisting of the head of the Bureau of Standards and a chosen representative of the Army and Navy to thoroughly investigate the possibilities of your suggestion regarding the element of uranium." Soon afterwards, an advisory committee was formed; Einstein also had informal contact with the committee, though he was not a member. Einstein, however, was not personally involved in any research requiring the use of uranium, which finally led to the invention of the atom bomb. However, he was shocked to hear the news that an atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima and underwent mental agony, as it was he who had first suggested the matter to Roosevelt.

A complete divorce of science from ethical concern is also not possible from a psychological point of view. It is a basic fact of experience that a man of science and a so-called man of the commonplace are not two separate entities. Those who consider themselves scientists regularly apply moral and spiritual values in their family, social and civic life. However, when people cannot find harmony between the different roles they play, they tend to compartmentalise their lives into mutually exclusive sections. The habit of compartmentalising our consciousness in this way is dangerous because a person can use it to justify a lack of values in other areas of life as well. Thus, though ethical neutrality may be an indispensable aim for scientific researchers, for the whole person, it is unnatural.

The socio-ethical problems resulting from the wide dissemination of scientific knowledge are peculiarly difficult. What humanity will do with the enormous powers science has put into its hands is probably one of the most vital and alarming problems of the present time. Humanity sometimes seems incapable of using some of science's best gifts wisely, just as a child is incapable of using a sharp knife.

Under such circumstances, robust ethical frameworks are essential, and it must be emphasised that science is, after all, a tool; scientists and society at large have a responsibility to guide the wise application of scientific knowledge, ensuring that it aligns with societal values and promotes human well-being.

(The author is a retired Associate Professor, Dept of Philosophy, B Baroda College)

NT 1/2/14

Mother tongue matters

SA RA SUDARSHANA

The moment I say, "Mother tongue must be the medium of instruction in schools," my fellow Kannada activists respond, "That's a closed chapter. Let us move on." Their stance is based on a Supreme Court of India ruling, which held that the medium of instruction for a child is the right of the parent(s).

While this debate has continued right from the time of independence, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced under the Modi government, has reignited interest in the issue.

On May 22, 2025, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) issued a circular directing all affiliated schools to implement the mother tongue as the medium of instruction for all children aged three to eight—that is, from preschool up to Class 2, the so-called foundational stage. The board specified that the medium of instruction must be the home language, mother tongue, or the language familiar to the child in its environment in all schools.

This directive is grounded in sound pedagogical principles: children acquire new knowledge, develop phonological awareness, and build basic number sense best in a language they already understand. The medium of instruction in schools must be the language a child knows and understands, which implies it must be the mother tongue. The NEP 2020 also insists that this must continue until the child becomes literate or proficient in the other language.

This appears to be a daunting task in a country like India, where a single classroom can have children with multiple mother tongues. In such situations the policy suggests that the most familiar language or the regional language or the state language shall be the medium of instruction. It clearly says English is not the mother tongue or the state language for any Indian.

A few years ago, when some people argued that English was their mother tongue, the Supreme Court ruled that—except for Anglo-Indians—no Indian can claim English as their mother tongue.

Several organisations have called the CBSE's move regressive. They question its feasibility, asking, "Is it even possible to run a school with multiple mediums of instruction, given the diversity of mother tongues?" They condemn the circular as impractical

and insist that an "English Medium" is the way forward.

However, Anurag Behar, CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation, has supported the CBSE directive, calling it an educationally sound step in his column in *Mint* recently. He argues that critics of the move have either not read the policy carefully or have failed to understand it in the right spirit.

This, he says, is because English is an alien language for most Indian children. He concludes by saying it is "unscientific" to replace the mother tongue with English as the medium of instruction on the pretext of a multilingual situation at schools. He also says that it may not be practically feasible to provide mother tongue instruction in all languages for each child; however, the solution is provided within the guidelines of the CBSE directive. The language of the state where the school is situated is the best language as the medium of instruction. This is not only a commercially viable solution but is also educationally sound. He explains that while the state language may not be as familiar as the mother tongue, it is more familiar than English for any child in India.

The CBSE circular directing all its affiliated schools to implement mother tongue as medium of instruction is grounded in sound pedagogical principles

Hence, CBSE's move provides a way forward to move away from meaningless rote learning to meaningful learning for children in Indian classrooms. This provides a foundation for learning in the primary years of schooling while students prepare for future learning in English.

NCERT had published textbooks in Hindi and Urdu prior to CBSE's circular and had made these textbooks available online in 22 other regional languages on their website.

Most children struggle to read or write in English; when you visit any English-medium school across the country, they fail to make meaning of anything, and it renders schooling as a lifeless endeavour. Is this what we desire for our children through the English medium? I will let you answer it.

(The writer is retired deputy director, Prasanga, Mysuru University) *SN/16/19*

Flames of protest sing the system

After a 20-year-old student set herself ablaze on a college campus in Odisha due to alleged denial of justice in a sexual harassment complaint filed against her teacher, the State machinery swung into action. The President visited the hospital when the woman was on ventilator, students protested, and top doctors paid close attention to her. **Satyasundar Barik** reports on her death, her family's shock, and the political panic that followed

In a matter of days, Saba's (name changed to protect privacy) quiet world has unravelled. A meeting with President Droupadi Murmu. A phone call from Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. Reuniting puts on the back from Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Mahanta. A parade of AIMS Bhubaneswar doctors, whose appointments are hard to come by, offering him full attention. His worn face splashed across newspapers, TV screens, and social media feeds. Calls from concerned relatives he hadn't spoken to for a while. Strangers arriving at his village on the border between Odisha and West Bengal.

A hundred hours have passed, yet Saba, 23, still can't make sense of it. Why had his only daughter, a bright, determined woman of 20 years, died?

Sakanya (name changed), a B.Ed. student, had set herself ablaze on July 12 on the premises of the Fakir Mohan (Autonomous) College in Balasore, Odisha, according to eyewitnesses. She had been staging a protest against the college's alleged inaction on her formal complaint of sexual harassment by the head of the Department of Teacher Education, Sanjiva Kumar Sahu. She succumbed to her injuries two days later while undergoing treatment at AIMS Bhubaneswar.

Thousands of people who did not know her attended the cremation in her village, a gesture usually reserved for the rich and famous. Her death sparked widespread outrage, raising questions about the system's efficacy to effectively address complaints of sexual harassment.

Death in a hospital

Seated on a chair in the front yard of his home, surrounded by familiar and unfamiliar faces, a day after his daughter's cremation, Saba can't say much. "She is gone. What is the point of speech?"

He remembers that around noon on July 12, his mobile phone rang. He was in college, where he works as a clerk. He was informed that his daughter had just set herself ablaze outside the office of the principal, Saby Ghosh, and was being rushed to hospital. "Before wild thoughts crossed my mind about what had happened, I gathered my family and we rushed there," he says. From the district-level hospital, Sakanya was referred to AIMS Bhubaneswar.

Over the next few hours, many family members would travel 200 km from the village to see her. By then, the State government, worried about the political fallout, deployed an eight-member medical team to attend to the student, who had suffered 90% burns. She was put on a ventilator. The Chief Minister arrived at the Biju Patnaik International Airport from Delhi and proceeded directly to the hospital. State Congress president Bhupen Chatterjee then also visited the hospital to show his support.

"I couldn't even bear the sight of my daughter

She felt she was being singled out. Her complaint to the ICC was leaked and she had become the butt of jokes on social media. Victims speak

hanging for her life. Her entire body was wrapped in bandages," Saba says.

On July 14, the President delivered the convocation speech at AIMS Bhubaneswar, where the 65th batch of students was graduating. However, the conversation was more about the allegation of sexual harassment and the critical condition of the woman than the institute's journey.

After concluding her speech, the President requested to visit the Burn Centre at the hospital. She was accompanied by Governor Hari Kaba Kumbhampal, the CM, and Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Hours after the President's departure, the hospital issued a bulletin announcing the student's death.

Complaints and answers

According to her family, Sakanya was a hard-working student and secured admission in the college in 2023-24 based on her Class 12 marks. "My sister was multi-talented. She had taken training in martial arts to become a master trainer in self-defence in college. She was designated as an Asst. Miss (disaster response volunteer as part of a government programme) and even acted on stage," says her brother.

According to the family, Sakanya was a member of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyaarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh, and participated in its activities since her higher secondary school days.

On June 30, supported by ABVP members, she filed a complaint at the Subaltern Studies police station alleging sexual harassment by Sahu. The police, along with her brother and ABVP members, then met Ghosh. She also approached local mediators and said she had been harassed.



In a row of the student's friends lighting candles in front of her portrait at the Fakir Mohan (Autonomous) College in Balasore, Odisha. ANSHUMAN SINGH

The details of the meeting with Ghosh were documented in the police station diary, a record of all complaints before an FIR is registered. According to the police, they did not proceed with lodging an FIR as the principal had assured them that action would be taken within five days.

The following day, Sakanya wrote a formal complaint to the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), a body that every organisation in India is mandated to have by law. She told mediators that she had submitted the complaint to the principal on July 1.

As per the complaint, she had met Sahu on a lawn in the college six months earlier and explained her academic struggles. He allegedly offered to help, but asked for a "favour" in return. Unsettled by the word, she asked what it meant. The teacher had, as per the complaint, said she was not a child and old enough to understand it.

Sakanya accused the teacher of sexual harassment and mental torture, demanding action. She said he had once threatened to ruin her academic career if she didn't comply with his demands.

On the same day, she spoke to the media, detailing her allegations. She also took to X, tagging the CM, the Union Education Minister, the State Higher Education Minister, and the MP, MLAs, and District Magistrate of Balasore, to bring attention to her allegations.

According to Anshu Sanjay Nayak, an ABVP member, Sakanya's name was not on the list of students eligible to sit for the end-semester exam released on June 29. She had been training class, he says, citing different reasons: the self-defence programme she ran in college, her sports surgery, and the death of her grandparents. A member of the ICC said, on condition of anonymity, that Sakanya's attendance did not go beyond 40%, falling short of the 75% needed to sit for the exam.

However, Nayak claims that eight other students, who did not meet the attendance cut-off, were included on the list. He says despite Ghosh offering Sakanya a chance to appear for the exam, she chose to pursue her complaint formally.

"She felt she was being singled out. Her complaint to the ICC was leaked and she had become the butt of jokes on social media," Sakanya's brother says.

Ghosh was suspended and a new principal appointed. The college did not respond to requests for comment on the matter.

Internal turmoil

Under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) (POSH) Act, 2013, and the University Grants Commission (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2015, every institution needs to constitute an ICC.

The Fakir Mohan (Autonomous) College's website listed an ICC with the mandatory teaching and non-teaching staff, but did not list a student representative and an external independent member, both essential under the guidelines.

As per a notification from the college on July 1, it had appointed a social activist as the external member and three student representatives.

The following day, the notification was revised, with the name of a student representative replaced. Over the next five working days, the committee members spoke to the woman, her father, teachers, and classmates, and submitted a report on July 6.

During this period, Sakanya, with other ABVP members, met Balasore Lok Sabha member Prap Sadangi and sought his intervention. The MP later told mediators that he had spoken to the police and the principal.

"After examining numerous stakeholders, we concluded that there was a lack of conclusive evi-

dence to suggest that the teacher had sought favours from the woman. There was no one to corroborate the allegation," says Gopabandha Mahapatra, an independent ICC member.

One of the controversies surrounding the student's death is the power wielded by Heads of Departments (HoDs) in autonomous colleges. Here, HoDs play a dominant role: they design courses, finalise the list of examiners, set question papers, and decide who evaluates the answer scripts.

Sakanya's brother and Nayak say that it was because of this power that her 80 classmates signed a petition certifying Saba's character a day after she had filed the complaint. They then submitted the petition to Ghosh.

Minal Jha, a teacher in the English Department and member of the ICC, says, "The conclusion had suggested changing the HoD and making the post rotational, but that was not accepted by all. The accused teacher remained in his place."

Sakanya's classmates also point out that Sahu would punish students for disciplinary issues by making them stand outside the classroom and perform yoga poses like Ardhanarishana (standing with hands outstretched over the head). An ICC member says one of the committee's recommendations was that Sahu reform this behaviour.

The committee itself was constituted overnight, say members. The names on the website and those part of the final committee differ. Members say they did not have any understanding of the POSH Act and received no orientation on its provisions or guidelines.

On July 14, the Higher Education Department asked all colleges to form ICCs in accordance with the POSH guidelines within 24 hours. The committees had to be functional, with provisions to display names and phone numbers on noticeboards of colleges.

Ghosh later told the media that he had revealed to Sakanya that the ICC's findings had gone against her and that she should let the matter be or face rustication. She became enraged and set herself on fire despite his attempts to calm her down, he said.

In the aftermath

Saba was arrested. Ghosh was taken into custody, a high-level committee was formed under the Higher Education Department, and a probe by the Crime Branch was ordered. The National Commission for Women took suo motu cognisance of the case and the National Human Rights Commission sought a response from the State government. The Odisha government announced an ex-gratia of ₹20 lakh for Sakanya's family.

Both the Opposition Congress and Biju Janata Dal observed State-wide bandhs. Farmer Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said on X, "She did not lose her life solely to physical trauma, but to the indifference of a government that abandoned her in her fight. This is institutional betrayal — a planned injustice."

Before consulting Sakanya's father over the phone, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha accused the BJP government of pushing her to the brink. "This is not suicide; it is murder orchestrated by the system," he asserted on X.

Outside the college, students now hold candlelight marches to mourn Sakanya's death. Whether the intent to take her life or not is difficult to say, but it will be entered into the records as death by suicide.

In response to a recent question in the Odisha Assembly, the CM said 72 students had taken their own lives in government and private schools and colleges from 2020 to February 2025. Some of the reasons attributed for taking the step were mental pressure, harassment, and mental health struggles.

If you are in distress, please reach out to the 24x7 helpline: AISAAN 1800-099-0009.

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Mind the gap: India's learning woes

Two recent reports about school education in India present a bleak picture and show that investments made in the sector are not adequate to achieve the country's stated objectives. The Ministry of Education's PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan, which surveyed 21,15,022 children of classes 3, 6, and 9 across 74,229 private and government schools in 36 states and Union Territories, reported poor outcomes across categories. The performance of students in class 3 was better than the others. But even in the best class, only 55% of the students could arrange numbers upwards to 99 and downwards again, and only 58% could do addition and subtraction of two-digit numbers. In class 6, 54% of the students could not compare whole numbers and read large numbers. As many as 43% did not understand the meaning of the texts they read, and more than half of them did not have a simple knowledge of mountains and rivers.

The 2025 UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals-4 report has also said that there are critical gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy, teacher training, and financing in India. It says that 21% of children in the 15-17 age group are out of school, and found that 60% of the children were below the benchmark in any subject. There is a rural-urban divide and a persisting gender gap. None of these findings are new, and every year, various surveys and studies point to the subpar standards of our schools. The PARAKH report says the performance varies from state to state. Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Kerala are the best performers. While Karnataka has done well to adopt modern teaching methods, there are gaps in outcomes and equity. The report says the state should impart better training to teachers, address learning gaps more effectively, and expand infrastructure and staffing.

Inadequate spending remains the biggest hurdle for education in India. The country allocates just above 4% of its GDP to education, though the New Education Policy (NEP) had set a goal of 6%. The absence of trained teachers in schools is a major problem. Sufficient educational infrastructure is available only in a few pockets. There are large variations in performance across the states, while poverty and backwardness stall reform in many parts of the country. The PARAKH survey had a very large base, and its findings reflect the poor state of education in the country. They reveal a distinct, worrying possibility of India continuing to be home to a massive half-literate and unskilled population – stronger interventions are imperative. 24/19/8

Reports underline poor schooling outcomes; investment, infrastructure remain problem areas

'We will nurture excellence'

IT-Ropar director Professor Rajeev Ahuja is one of the most highly cited researchers as well as one of the top materials scientists in Sweden and India. He is a Professor of Computational Materials Science primarily researching batteries, hydrogen storage and production, sensors, and high-pressure physics. He previously worked as Professor at Uppsala University in Sweden for more than 30 years. He also has more than 1,000 scientific publications in high-ranking international journals accumulating more than 41,000 citations.

Professor Ahuja talks about the growth trajectory of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), the societal pressure faced by engineering students as well as his interesting research projects in an interaction with Pansinder Sandhu of The Statesman.

Q. Since your appointment as Director in April 2021, what have been your key priorities in steering IIT Ropar's growth?

A: My focus has been on transforming the institute into a globally recognized center for excellence in education, research, and innovation. We have strengthened our research ecosystem with major initiatives like ANNAM.AI and the PAIR grant, expanded industry linkages through collaborations with defence bodies and regulatory agencies, and launched forward-looking programmes such as a universal AI minor and new undergraduate degrees in Digital Agriculture and IC Technology.

These efforts are backed by a strong commitment to inclusivity, global engagement, and societal impact - reflected in our rise in international rankings and our initiatives in sustainability, community outreach, and regional development. Our journey has been one of purposeful growth, with education and research at its heart, serving both national needs and global challenges.

Q. How do you envision IIT Ropar's role in India's evolving higher education landscape, especially among the newer IITs?

A: IIT Ropar sees itself as more than just an institute and we want

to become a transformative force in changing India's higher education scenario. Even though we are striving towards improving our infrastructure and rankings, we are equally committed to innovation, inclusivity, and bringing a meaningful social impact.

Based in Punjab, we have an edge to address regional challenges pertaining to agriculture, defence, and water management. Initiatives like ANNAM.AI reflect this mission. As a young IIT, we do not see or present ourselves as competitors. Instead, we focus on building bonds through collaboration with other institutions, industry, and society at large.

IIT Ropar intends to be a light-house institution that influences not just academic results but also national progress. This is being done through the creation of a model of interdisciplinary learning which empowers students from all backgrounds.

Q. Can you share insights into the interdisciplinary research areas that IIT Ropar is focusing on such as renewable energy and artificial intelligence?

A: Our vision focuses on using interdisciplinary research to tackle real-world problems, whether they are global issues or local challenges. We bring together engineering, science, and social relevance to drive innovation, emphasizing fields like artificial intelligence, clean energy, and rural development.

IIT Ropar has a dedicated School of AI and Data Engineering that advances research in areas like deep learning and interpretable AI. We also have the Indo-Taiwan Joint Research Centre to boost global collaboration. In clean energy, our teams are developing next-generation technologies such as hydrogen storage and battery innovation, supported by top-tier research in materials science.

Our work in agriculture and water connects closely with the region. We use AI and IoT to address stubble burning, evaluate water quality, and promote smart farming. In healthcare too, we collaborate with institutions like PGIMER and IIT Mandi to create affordable technologies that cater to country-specific needs.

We are also establishing a new Centre for Micro and Nano Fabrication to aid innovative research in sensors and devices. Our efforts are supported by our Central Research Facility, which gathers experts from various fields.

Q. Could you elaborate on the significance of the DST Technology Innovation Hub at IIT Ropar and its impact on agriculture and water technologies?

A: The Department of Science and Technology-supported Technology Innovation Hub at IIT Ropar, AWAaH (Agriculture and Water Technology Development Hub), demonstrates our strong conviction that deep-tech innovation can transform lives, particularly in agriculture and water management, two areas that have a direct impact on millions of people around the globe.

Established under the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems, AWAaH brings modern tools like AI and IoT to farmers and rural communities, improving agriculture by making it more efficient, sustainable, and data-driven.

We have developed over 70 breakthrough technologies, from smart irrigation systems to nano-bubble oxygenation, and many have already been commercialized in various states. But AWAaH is more than a research hub. It has nurtured over 150 startups, offering incubation, mentorship, and funding. More than 3,000 professionals have been trained in cyber-physical systems, and the hub has contributed to over 8000 job opportunities. This showcases how innovation can truly empower people from the ground up.

Our work also covers water quality, stubble management, and soil health, key areas in the field of agriculture today. At IIT Ropar, we create solutions that have both environmental and social benefits. It has generated over 150 publications, 20+ patents, and 9 industrial designs. AWAaH has laid the groundwork for our new AI Centre of Excellence.

Q. In recent discussions, you have highlighted the societal pressures faced by students. What initia-

tives has IIT Ropar undertaken to support student mental health and well-being?

A: At IIT Ropar, student mental health and well-being are treated as foundational pillars of our academic ecosystem - not as an afterthought. Recognizing the societal pressures and emotional challenges students face, we have implemented a multi-layered support system that is proactive, compassionate, and inclusive.

Through the Suchita Wellbeing Cell, students, faculty, and staff can access confidential counseling from trained psychologists, along with a peer buddy system. We emphasize early detection, with faculty and mentors watching for signs of distress. We are also developing digital platforms to ensure 24/7 access to help.

We hold regular workshops on emotional resilience and mental health awareness, aimed at students, faculty, and caretakers, to promote a campus culture built on empathy. We are working with organizations like NIMHANS and AJIMS to strengthen our approach with evidence-based practices.

Our initiatives are designed to assure students that IIT Ropar is not just an academic institution—it is a community that genuinely cares for their well-being, growth, and happiness.

Q. How does IIT Ropar integrate practical learning and industry exposure into its curriculum to prepare students for real-world challenges?

A: At IIT Ropar, practical learning and industry exposure are seamlessly woven into the academic fabric to ensure students are equipped for real-world challenges. Our curriculum is designed not just to impart theoretical knowledge, but to cultivate hands-on skills, entrepreneurial thinking, and professional readiness.

Hands-on learning is at the heart of our academic approach. Every programme integrates lab work, design projects, and capstone experiences that reflect real-world problem-solving and industry practices. We offer industry-certified courses with partners like NIELIT and TCS ION in areas such as AI and cybersecurity, ensuring students gain practical skills through live projects and mentorship.



Structured internships with organizations like DRDO, CSIR, and leading startups expose students to cutting-edge technologies and professional settings. Through our incubators—TBI and iHub-AWAaH—students tackle real-world issues in agriculture and sustainability, with many turning ideas into startups.

Q. What are your strategic goals for IIT Ropar in the next five years, particularly concerning research output and global rankings?

A: Over the next five years, our strategic goals are anchored in elevating research output, enhancing global rankings, and deepening our societal impact. These goals reflect our commitment to becoming a globally recognized institution that leads with innovation, industry, and excellence.

We aim to double our annual research publications, with a strong emphasis on high-impact journals and interdisciplinary collaborations. Our focus will be on frontier areas such as quantum technologies, hydrogen energy, AI for social good, and sustainable agriculture.

Building on our recent ascent to the 12th position in the IIRF 2025 rankings, we plan to further improve our standing in global indices. Our five-year roadmap is not just about numbers - it's about nurturing a culture of excellence, curiosity, and impact. IIT Ropar will continue to be a light-house institution, illuminating pathways for transformative education and research.

Shashi K. J.

GET, SET, PLAY

The playing field in India is set to change. This month, the Union cabinet approved the National Sports Policy 2025, which lays out an ambitious 'five-pillar plan' to embed sport at the heart of national development. It has signalled a shift from simply chasing medals to a broader, more holistic, vision. Where the erstwhile 2001 policy focused on talent scouting and podium finishes, the new framework expands sport's role to five objectives: excellence on the global stage, economic growth, social development, education, and mass participation. The ambition is clear — positioning sport as a public good in a nation where one in every two individuals has lifestyle disorders owing to sedentary lives. That shift is both necessary and long overdue. In fact, a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that countries that have taken sport seriously as a part of education, public health, urban planning, and employment — Finland, Japan, Australia, and the Netherlands are examples — report better civic and developmental outcomes.

The policy also views sport as an economic engine. It points to the potential of job creation in coaching, sports science, broadcasting, apparel, event management and so on. Globally, the sports economy generates over \$600 billion annually. In India, it earns a mere 0.1-0.2% of the gross domestic product. Even moderate progress could unlock thousands of crores in value. The policy encourages start-ups, domestic manufacturing, CSR funding, and public-private partnerships and lays out, at least in theory, the groundwork for a sporting ecosys-

tem that is modern, inclusive and strategic. The NSP 2025 also recognises that sport can serve as diplomatic soft power — Qatar spent billions on the 2022 World Cup not just to entertain football fans but to rebrand the country's international image. India's bid to host the 2036 Olympics hinges on whether the country can create an ecosystem where sport can thrive socially and economically.

And yet, for all its promise, the NSP 2025 stumbles in familiar places. It fails to turn inclusion into law — mention of women, persons with disabilities, tribal communities, and underrepresented groups runs through the document but there are no enforceable quotas, mandated bench-

marks, or mechanisms for accountability. Most glaring is the total absence of any mention of transgender and non-binary athletes. There is also the issue of governance. India's national sports federations — bureaucratic quagmires — remain riddled with conflict of interest, age fraud, dop-

The new National Sports Policy seeks to transform sport into a public good. But does it have what is needed to implement this vision?

ing, opaque selections, and entrenched power structures. The policy offers little by way of structural reform. Drafts of a National Sports Governance Bill 2024 and a National Code for Good Governance in Sports 2017 have existed for a while and the NSP 2025 would have done well to push for these to be passed. Despite its vaulted ambitions, there are no clear targets, no timelines, and no independent body to assess progress. As usual, the gap between vision and implementation is where India's grand plan on sport may falter. The question is no longer whether India is ready to play. It is whether India is ready to do the work that playing well demands. 10

भ्रम पैदा करती भाषा नीति



डॉक्टर कृष्ण

आज भारत में हिंदी ऐसी पटरानी है, जिससे अन्य सभी रनियाँ छार खाती हैं और रोज नती-कटी सुनाती हैं। पटरानी असाहय यह सब झेलने को लावार है

भारतीय बौद्धिक किसी भी मुद्दे पर लड़ते-उलझते रहने में मशगूल रहते हैं, उसके सामाधान को चिंता से निलंबित। कई मुद्दों पर ज़ीत तर्क-वितर्क दशकों से सुने जाते हैं, पर मुद्दे की स्थिति जिस को तस व बिगड़ती जाती है। भाषा नीति इसका उदाहरण है। अभी अधिकांश विवाद ठाकरे बंधुओं की निंदा पर केंद्रित है। कुछ समय पहले तमिल नेता स्टालिन की फजीहत करने में ही प्यास ऊर्जा खर्च हुई थी, जबकि भारत को भाषा नीति विगत आठ दशकों में क्या बनी और क्या हुई, इस पर उदासीनता ही रही है। ठाकरे बंधु झल में राजनीतिक मंच पर आए। उनका मात्र एक प्रवेश में थोड़ा प्रभाव है, किंतु इससे पहले क्या था? सच तो यह है कि स्वतंत्र भारत को भाषा नीति शुरू से बिन पलवार की नाब है। औपचारिक रूप से हिंदी 'राजभाषा' है, पर व्यवहार में हर क्षेत्र में तिरके अंग्रेजी का स्थान बढ़ता गया। यह उन नीतियों का परिणाम है, जिन्हें किसी

अहिंदी नेता ने नहीं बनाया। अंग्रेजी द्वारा हिंदी समेत सभी भारतीय भाषाओं का क्रमशः विस्थापन किसी तमिल या मराठी राजनीति की देन नहीं है, लेकिन इस पर कोई विचार नहीं कर रहा है।

संविधान बनने के समय से ही उत्तर भारतीय, मुख्यतः हिंदी-भाषी नेताओं के निर्देशन में ही बहुत कुछ तय होना रहा है, पर उनके द्वारा बनी भाषा-नीति के नतीजों की कभी समीक्षा नहीं हुई कि वह किस उद्देश्य से बनी और परिणाम क्या हुए? भाषा नीति का ठोस किसी एक नेता या दल को देना ज़रूरी है। संपूर्ण भारतीय नेतृत्व और बौद्धिक वर्ग भाषा नीति पर धन का कारण और शिकार, दोनों रहा। इसका निष्कर्षण करने में असमर्थ और अनिच्छुक थे। आज देश के छोटे-छोटे कस्बों में भी देखा जा सकता है कि अग्रगामी शिक्षा, रोजगार और व्यापार की भाषा अंग्रेजी है। अंग्रेजी न जानने वाले भी कामकाजी और व्यवस्थापक हो सकते हैं, पर सीमित स्तर तक। जिसे अपनी बौद्धिक और रचनात्मक क्षमता बढ़ाने की इच्छा है, जो सहज मानवीय आकांक्षा है, वह बिना अंग्रेजी प्रयोग का विकास रहेगा। यदि कोई भारतीय केवल अंग्रेजी जानता हो और किसी भारतीय भाषा में एक शब्द भी लिख न सके तो वह भी उसे आगे बढ़ने में कठिनाई नहीं होगी। ऐसा दुनिया के किसी अन्य महापुरुष देश में नहीं है।

भारत में असली राजभाषा अंग्रेजी है। हिंदी को राजनीतिक कारणों से 'राजभाषा' बख़तर प्रपंच चलवा जा रहा है। यही मराठी, तमिल या अन्य क्षेत्रीय नेताओं द्वारा हिंदी पर 'घोट' करते रहने का भी कारण है। हिंदी का नाटक



अखंड राजपूत

देहरा अपमान होता है। इसकी तुलना में ब्रिटिश राज में भाषा-नीति अपेक्षाकृत पारदर्शी और वचार्थपूर्ण थी। शासन की भाषा अंग्रेजी थी, पर केवल अपने लिए। देश के वृहत शिक्षा-संस्कृति क्षेत्र स्वतंत्र थे। उसमें सासकीय दस्तावेजों नहीं थे। हर विषय के विद्वान ही उसके शिक्षण-प्रशिक्षण की सामग्री और विधान तय करते थे। ब्रिटिश राज में साहित्यिक, सांस्कृतिक क्रियाकलापों का विकास सधमुच समान का काम था, सरकार का नहीं। स्वतंत्र भारत में उस क्रियाकलाप का इस अरंभ हो गया। वह इस स्वतंत्र भारत की अपनी नीतियों से हुआ।

आज भारत में हिंदी ऐसी पटरानी है, जिससे अन्य सभी रनियाँ छार खाती हैं और रोज जली-कटी सुनाती हैं। पटरानी असाहय यह सब झेलने को लाचार है। हिंदी को झूठे राजत्व की होरी प्रवंचन से मुक्ति देना अच्छा होगा। तब कार्यक्रम में वह अपना सही स्थान पा लेगी। तब उसे अन्य भारतीय भाषाओं के नेताओं, बौद्धिकों की नाटक कटुक्रिया से छुटकारा मिलेगा। फिर

उसे पहले जैसा सद्भाव मिल जाएगा। ब्रिटिश जमाने में हिंदी को राष्ट्रीय सम्मेलन की भाषा बनाने के सभी प्रयास अहिंदी नेताओं, जिनमें ने किए थे। गांधीजी, राजगोपालचारी, केएम मुखर्जी, टैगोर आदि महापुरुषों ने हिंदी की समतल और भूमिका पहचानो थी, किंतु वह तब था, जब देश में हिंदी नैसी ही एक भाषा थी, जैसी तमिल या तेलुगु थी। आज प्रशासन, शिक्षा और उद्योग व्यापार में अंग्रेजी की महत्ता नैसी भी अब्बा बढ़ रही है। शंभू जी तो 1963 और 1976 के राजभाषा कानून और नियम की तुलना करते देखें। फिर उसमें 1986, 2007 और 2011 में किए गए संशोधन थे। सभी दिखाते हैं कि स्वतंत्र भारत के सात दशक में अंग्रेजी और हिंदी में कंप और नीच की खाई लगातार बढ़ती गई है।

आज हर कर्मचारी या छात्र जानता है कि किसी नियम, दस्तावेज, पुस्तक आदि को सही-सही जानना हो तो भूल अंग्रेजी वाली ही पढ़ना ठीक है। वरना ऊटपटांग या गड़बड़ अनुबाद से कुछ भी समझने, करने में ज़रूर झमेला उठाना पड़ता है। सभी संकेत बताते हैं कि सारे

अकादमिक कार्य, प्रकाशन, मोघ आदि अंग्रेजी में होते हैं। चाहे उनका स्तर कामचलाक या लज्जाजनक क्यों न हो। हिंदी में अब कोई साहित्यिक पत्रिका तक नहीं, जिसे पूरे देश में जाना जाता हो। ऐसा पहले न था। ब्रिटिश काल और बाद में भी पूर्ववर्ति के जल पर एक पौड़ी तक राष्ट्रीय महत्व और प्रसार रखने वाले अनेकानेक हिंदी पत्रिकाएँ थीं। अब सब बंद हो चुकी हैं। जबकि हिंदी भाषी जनसंख्या अधिक है, शिक्षितों की संख्या और उनकी आय, सबमें भारी वृद्धि हुई है। वह व्यापार-वाजार का सौधा सिद्धांत है: जिस चीज की मांग ख़ाम, उसका उत्पादन-व्यवसाय भी ख़ाम हो जाता है। अच्छा होगा कि केंद्र की राजभाषा नीति में 'आल्सो इंग्लिश' को बदल कर 'ओनली इंग्लिश' कर दिया जाए। इसके साथ ही सभी राज्य अपनी-अपनी भाषा में ही कार्य करने के लिए स्वतंत्र रहें। अन्य राज्यों तथा केंद्र से उनका व्यवहार भी स्पेच्छ और आपसी सुविधा से हो, किसी केंद्रीय नीति से नहीं। यह सब करना केवल उठाना ही कष्टकर होगा, जितना किसी भाषा को शल्य-चिकित्सा के समय होता है। ऐसी को थोड़े समय कष्ट होता है, पर वह अंततः निरोध हो जाता है। इसे प्रखर यदि भारतीय भाषाओं की सच्ची चिंता है तो सभी राज्यों में अपने-अपनी भाषा में काम करने का निश्चय करवा होगा। इससे भाषा के नाम पर राजनीति और द्वेष ख़ाम होगा। तब सभी भाषाओं के प्रति सभी देशवासियों में समान अपनापन का भाव होगा। सही उपायों सांस्कृतिक एकता और सच्चा संघवाद भी होगा।

(लेखक राजनीतिशास्त्र के प्रोफ़ेसर हैं)

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नॉलेज और स्किल के बीच संतुलन बनाने की है जरूरत सिर्फ ज्ञान से नहीं चलेगा काम



विनय पांडा

आजादी के समय सोचा गया था कि उच्च शिक्षण संस्थान देश की तरक्की में अहम भूमिका निभाएंगे, खासकर विज्ञान और तकनीक के क्षेत्र में। इन संस्थानों का मकसद था - Practical Skills डिवेलप करना, ज्ञान बढ़ाना और अच्छे संस्कार देना। अब करीब 8 दशक बाद हमें शिक्षा यानी ज्ञान और ट्रेनिंग यानी स्किल के बीच संतुलन बनाने की जरूरत है।

कौशल जरूरी। सिर्फ किताबी ज्ञान पर्याप्त नहीं हो सकता, नौकरी पाने के लिए व्यावहारिक कौशल भी जरूरी है। लेकिन तकनीकी संस्थानों को छोड़ दीजिए तो क्या देश के किसी उच्च शिक्षण संस्थान में कोई ऐसी स्किल सिखाई जाती है, जिससे नौकरी मिल सके?

इनोवेशन और इमेजिनेशन। हालांकि यह सोचना गलत है कि आज के कॉलेज या यूनिवर्सिटी का काम स्टूडेंट्स को सिर्फ प्रैक्टिकल स्किल्स सिखाना है। यह तो किसी एक्सपर्ट के साथ काम करके भी सीखा जा सकता है। असल में उच्च शैक्षणिक संस्थानों को स्टूडेंट्स के भीतर कल्पना करने और इनोवेशन के बीज रोपने की जरूरत है। उन्हें यह सिखाना चाहिए कि रिसर्च के जरिए नई तकनीक कैसे बनाई जाती है और फिर बड़े पैमाने पर उसका इस्तेमाल कैसे होता है। एक मॉडर्न यूनिवर्सिटी को नए विचार और स्किल के बीच तालमेल सिखाना आना चाहिए।

चीन की सीख। चीन ने पूरी दुनिया को दिखा दिया कि अगर प्रैक्टिकल स्किल्स को बड़े पैमाने पर इस्तेमाल किया जाए, तो हाई-स्पीड रेल के 45 हजार किमी से ज्यादा काम को 20 साल से कम वक्त में पूरा किया जा सकता है। स्किल ही नौकरी दिलाती है। जब इस बड़े स्तर पर आजमाया जाए तो कोई भी देश तेजी से तरक्की कर सकता है। लेकिन, हमारे देश में जो नॉन-टेक्निकल विषय पढ़ाए जाते हैं, उनमें फोकस सिर्फ ज्ञान देने पर होता है और केवल ज्ञान से बहुत कम नौकरियां मिलती हैं।

स्पेशल कॉलेज। कोई भी उच्च शिक्षण संस्थान तमाम तरह के कौशल एक ही पाठ्यक्रम में नहीं सिखा सकता। यह बात सही है कि कॉलेज का अनुभव कुछ लोगों के लिए फायदेमंद हो सकता है, लेकिन क्या यह नौकरी पाने का सबसे अच्छा और प्रभावी तरीका है?



बदलाव चाहिए

■ अभी की पढ़ाई में व्यावहारिक कौशल का पहलू नहीं

■ ज्यादातर कोर्स का असल जीवन में प्रयोग नहीं होता

■ स्पेशल ट्रेनिंग सेंटर्स में तैयार किए जाएं हुनरमंद युवा

क्या यह बेहतर नहीं होगा कि भविष्य के प्रशासनिक अधिकारी और ट्रैफिक इन्स्पेक्टरों को स्कूल के बाद ही चुन लिया जाए और उन्हें कुछ समय किसी स्पेशल कॉलेज में रखा जाए, जैसे नेशनल डिफेंस अकैडमी?

संसाधनों की बर्बादी। भारत में ग्रेजुएशन कोर्स में लगभग 3.4 करोड़ स्टूडेंट्स ने दाखिला लिया है। इनमें से करीब 60% को आगे चलकर ऐसे काम करने पड़ सकते हैं, जिनका उनकी पढ़ाई से कोई वास्ता नहीं। इसका मतलब कि करीब दो करोड़ स्टूडेंट्स जो पढ़ रहे हैं, वह उनके भविष्य से मेल नहीं खाता।

क्या यह देश के संसाधनों की बर्बादी नहीं है? सवाल है कि कितने उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों को व्यावहारिक कौशल सिखाने पर ध्यान देना चाहिए और कितनों को नया ज्ञान तैयार करने पर? याद रखिए, कौशल और ज्ञान के साथ अच्छा चरित्र भी जरूरी है। हर संस्थान में इस पर भी ध्यान दिया जाए।

सही आकलन हो। ज्ञान पर काम करने वाले संस्थान विचारकों को जन्म देते हैं। उनका आकलन इस आधार पर नहीं होना चाहिए कि वहां से कितनों को नौकरी मिली। सही संतुलन पाने का तरीका है कि उन संस्थानों

और स्टूडेंट्स की संख्या कम की जाए, जो उन विषयों में पढ़ और पढ़ा रहे हैं, जिनका स्किल व काम से ताल्लुक नहीं।

नई नौकरियां। भारत को अपनी आर्थिक तरक्की को बनाए रखने के लिए नई नौकरियां पैदा करनी होंगी। प्रशिक्षण केंद्रों और कॉलेज में एक से चार साल के कोर्स हों। युवाओं को इलेक्ट्रीशियन, प्लंबर, कंस्ट्रक्शन टेक्निशियन जैसे कोर्स कराए जाएं।

पिरामिड मॉडल। अमेरिकी अर्थशास्त्री Bryan Caplan ने अपनी किताब 'The Case Against Education: Why the Education System is a Waste of Time and Money' में तर्क दिया है कि उच्च शिक्षा का मानव संसाधन को बेहतर बनाने पर बहुत कम असर पड़ता है। आज की शिक्षा की तुलना बरसों की ट्रेनिंग से नहीं की जा सकती। उच्च शैक्षणिक संस्थानों की संरचना पिरामिड जैसी होनी चाहिए। नीचे के स्तर पर कौशल आधारित ट्रेनिंग देने वाले संस्थान हों। इनकी संख्या सबसे अधिक होनी चाहिए। पिरामिड के बीच में ज्ञान बांटने वाले संस्थान हरखे जाएं लेकिन सबसे ऊपर रिसर्च यूनिवर्सिटीज की जगह होनी चाहिए।

(लेखक JNU में प्रोफेसर हैं)

KK Handiqui: Scholar extraordinaire

DEBA PRASAD MISRA

The extraordinary contributions of Professor Krishna Kanta Handiqui as an Indologist, Sanskrit scholar, and visionary educator continue to resonate across generations. As the founding Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University and the founding Principal of Jagannath Barooah College, Jorhat, Professor Handiqui shaped Assam's academic landscape through his disciplined pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and unwavering dedication.

He was the eldest son of Danbir Radha Kanta Handiqui, a reputed tea planter and philanthropist of Assam. His mother, Narayani Handiqui, was the sister of one of Assam's illustrious sons, Padmanath Gohain Barua, the first president of the Asom Sahitya Sabha. Handiqui received his early education at Jorhat Government High School and then at Cotton College, Guwahati. He obtained his BA with first-class honours from Sanskrit College in 1917 at the age of 19. In 1919, Handiqui received his MA in Sanskrit from Calcutta University with special papers on Vedic literature. He then proceeded to England in 1920 and earned an MA with honours in Modern History from Oxford University in 1923.

During his seven-year stay in Europe, Handiqui spent four years in France and Germany. He studied and mastered many languages, including Latin, Greek, French, German, Russian, Italian, and Spanish. While in Europe, he occasionally contributed significant articles in Assamese to journals like *Banhi* and *Chetana*. In 1927, Handiqui returned to Assam with a large collection of books purchased during his time abroad. He then briefly managed the family's tea estate located at Tirual near Jorhat.

From 1930 to 1948, Handiqui served as the founding Principal of JB College, Jorhat - the first non-government college in the State. From 1948 to 1957, he was the founding Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University, the oldest university in the North East. In 1952, he was elected President of the Inter-University Board of India and also presided over the Vice Chancellors' Conference at Madras University. This illustrious son of Assam was one of the world's greatest Indologists and Sanskrit scholars. He was also a noted philanthropist and polyglot. Three of his monumental works earned him global recognition. The first was his English translation of the Sanskrit mahakavya *Naisadhacharita* by Sriharsa, published in 1934 - marking the first-ever translation of this epic - which

Professor Handiqui embodied an era of sacrifice and devotion to high principles.

brought Professor Handiqui international fame. *Yasatilaka and Indian Culture*, his second monumental work, earned him even greater prominence, while his translation of Pravarasena's *Setubandha*, published by the Prakrit Text Society, is considered one of the finest global achievements in the epic genre.

Professor Handiqui's life epitomised an era defined by sacrifice, diligence, and devotion to high principles. Addressing young graduates at the first convocation of Gauhati University, he said, "I need not remind them of the nascent

responsibilities and the great tradition they have to carry forward as worthy citizens of India. They must remember that it is not degrees but character and purity of the heart that will entitle them to the dignity of man. In a world full of temptations, they have to keep their balance and resist the forces of evil."

Justice SK Dutta, an educationist of repute and close associate of Handiqui, aptly remarked, "Handiqui was on one hand a Sanskrit pandit, and on the other an Oxford don. There was a beautiful blend of oriental and occidental culture in him."

He was elected President of the Asom Sahitya Sabha in 1937 at the age of 39, and later, President of the Classical Oriental Conference in Lucknow in 1951. In 1961, he was elected General President of its Srinagar session. He was awarded an honorary fellowship of Deccan College, Pune, in 1968. He received honorary D Litt degrees from Gauhati University in 1968 and Dibrugarh University in 1972. In 1984, the Sahitya Akademi Award was conferred on Professor Handiqui posthumously. He was also the first Sadashya Mahiyan of the Asom Sahitya Sabha - a rare honour bestowed on scholars of exceptional merit.

Professor Handiqui always stressed the importance of moral excellence. His legacy may be best summed up with a quote from *Setubandha*: "Rare are the honest persons who silently achieve their tasks. Few also are the trees that yield fruit without their flowering being noticed."

This internationally acclaimed scholar passed away on June 7, 1982. The timeless works of this extraordinary and illustrious son of Assam will continue to inspire scholars and readers worldwide.

(Published on the occasion of Professor Handiqui's 127th birth anniversary.)



Are our language rows leading to soft sedition?

RAMANAND SHARMA AND
SANDEEP KUMAR

A shopkeeper was attacked by Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) workers for not speaking Marathi. And this episode is not isolated as similar attacks have been reported across Maharashtra and India. In Bengaluru, destruction of signage written in Hindi is becoming a norm and in Tamil Nadu, anti-Hindi campaigns have a long history, which often resurface in response to perceived threats to the Tamil language. Even in our capital city Delhi, sneers and subtle exclusions follow those who speak with a southern accent or hail from the Northeast. Indians are being targeted simply for speaking a different language or merely looking different outside their home states.

These are not isolated instances of regional prejudice, but illustrative of an emerging trend of linguistic vigilantism that is increasingly spreading across the nation. Any pretext of regional pride shrouds an odious belief system. It may not aspire to secession, yet it dramatically undermines national integration. This constitutes a new type of "soft sedition" in India. It represents a kind of regional hegemony that does not use violence of arms, but instead lives by cultural bullying, verbal violence, and everyday discrimination.

The underlying causes of this crisis resurfaced with the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, especially its three-language equation. NEP 2020 aims to develop multilingualism and enhance national integration, but its implementation requires students to be taught three languages including at least two Indian languages. On paper, it allows states to choose the languages to be taught. However, in many parts of non-Hindi India, it was seen as a surreptitious advance of Hindi erasing a reasonable sense of backsliding, fears of cultural dilution and threats to local languages.

Politicians at all levels, from all sides and regions, used this opportunity for political gain, turning language pride into language extremism.

As usual, they started to play on people's fears. They started muddying the waters with ideas of Hindi imposition justifying overt threats and violence against Hindi speakers and migrants from Northern regions. What may have started as a reform with good intent is now a tool that creates division between communities and states.

State leaders irrespective of party have either turned a blind eye or openly endorsed this brand of rising chauvinism. Even our national parties are hesitant to address this, lest their regional partners take umbrage. Silence in such a situation is not neutrality. It is complicity and sets a bad precedent with an idea of appeasing certain sections for cheap politics.

The ramifications of this crisis are serious and need us to look again at the philosophical and constitutional basis of the Indian republic. Article 1 of the Constitution declares, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States." The specific choice of words reflects a conscious rejection of the idea that Indian states are sovereign, cultural or political entities. Unlike a federation that unites countries through treaties, India is a civilizational polity where states derive their legitimacy from the Union, rather than the other way around. The 1956 linguistic reorganization was intended to accommodate diversity through better administration, rather than an invitation to weaken national identity along linguistic lines.

Language in India has a strong sense of identity and belonging, but it needs to be framed as a common resource, not a right of the state. Language is, in essence, the oldest and most effective way for humanity to connect with one another. Language is the means through which we connect minds, share minds and create communities. Therefore, our rich diversity of language should not be a reason for division, but a means by which we understand and are understood.

In the same way, our Constitution gives every Indian citizen freedom through Articles 14, 19 and 21. Every Indian has the right to not only speak their language but also to work and reside throughout the country. A Bihari living in Bengaluru or a

Manipuri living in Mumbai is not an outsider; they are co-equal citizens of the nation. This is not just a cultural sensitivity issue, but constitutional morality that Azevedo warned against when speaking of majoritarian tyranny. Any attempt by political or local actors to create linguistic conformity is a direct violation of the Constitution. Yet, in recent years, we have observed a dangerous rise of regional chauvinism in the states.

Such linguistic violence impinges on more than constitutional rights. It impacts internal migration, essential for India's economy, by making workers fear discrimination in unfamiliar states. Socially, linguistic chauvinism exacerbates mistrust between linguistic tribes, as it undermines the social fabric that holds India together. This anxiety proliferates into educational contexts, job interviews, housing preferences, shrinking the ambit of what it means to be Indian. Psychologically, it creates fearfulness and exclusion, particularly among migrants and students. Cultural majoritarianism does not simply become political, as Ashis Nandy warned, but alters how people see themselves, and their social location.

This leads us to an incredibly pivotal legal moment and the phrase "Soft Sedition". The Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita (BNS), 2023, updates how we interpret threats against the nation. This law replaces the colonial Section 124A of the IPC with a broader provision against acts that threaten the "sovereignty, unity or integrity of India". Section 152 of BNS acknowledges that threats to the nation state do not always take the form of rebellion, insurrection, or armed revolt, as its predecessor did. And divisive violent acts of language-based exclusion, violence, and campaigning align well with this expanded interpretation.

They are not just "cultural assertions". They are deliberate attempts to redraw the invisible map of India, cutting out zones of exclusion to the constitutional social contract. This ideological subversion of identity politics must be addressed as a potential national security threat and assault against authority on "the unity and integrity of India".



Supporters of regional identities have consistently stated that linguistic pride is essential to the federal character of India. There is, to some extent, truth in this. India's strength has always been its ability to bind together many languages, cultures and traditions. But diversity should never be confused with division. Love for one's mother tongue does not condone hostility towards another. It is one thing to assert one's cultural confidence, it is another to express exclusionary aggression, and that boundary is now being crossed far too often for anyone to ignore.

And thus, our executive must act quickly and decisively. Clear directions should be sent by the Central government instructing law enforcement agencies to identify, monitor, report and prosecute language-based hate crimes under the new BNS provisions. Political parties disseminating linguistic hatred must be held accountable under the law.

The judiciary cannot afford to be passive either. Inaction by them would be a failure of judicial activism. High Courts, and the Supreme Court, must take suo moto cognizance where public or viral statements incite hatred based on language or region. There should be zero institutional tolerance for such violations. As the final protector and guardian of the constitution, Supreme Court must act now.

In addition to a legal process, the Union government should consider launching a National Linguistic Har-

mony Mission, preferably in coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Ministry of Culture, to actively monitor interstate animosity, promote mutual respect through media usage and education, and create outlets where citizens can interact and interact across language divisions. The Home Ministry should issue public advisories clarifying that verbal abuse and online troll attacks based on language will be considered a crime under the BNS. Linguistic extremism can no longer be treated as merely a cultural concern. It must be identified as a genuine threat to national security and public order.

Let it be clear that in the Republic of India, no one is a second-class citizen. Not because of caste, not because of gender, and never because of the language they speak. India's strength has never come from forcing sameness, but from embracing difference. From Kalidasa and Tagore to Bharati and Premchand, our greatest voices came from different corners, yet spoke to the same soul. India does not need a lingua franca; it needs a lingua familia, where each language is celebrated without any hierarchy. This is not just a call to protect words or languages. It is a call to protect who we are as a people. If we fail to act now, we risk losing not just our harmony, but the very idea of India itself.

(The writers are respectively Assistant Professor, Anandarama College, University of Delhi and an Advocate, Delhi High Court.)

College Cruelties

*Another student suicide, another post-mortem.
Systemic deafness to student complaints lives on*

On the heels of the terrible self-immolation by a 20-year-old college student in Odisha, has come the alleged suicide of a 21-year-old medical student in Greater Noida. Among the common factors in the two cases, the parents say their child had been put under extreme stress through targeted harassment by faculty. Complaints to other faculty hadn't brought any relief. There are also letters. In the Odisha case, it seems fellow students were mobilised to support the faculty member and isolate the complainant. In the Greater Noida case, there is reportedly a suicide note naming professors for harassment and humiliation. Structurally, higher ed provides faculty with enormous power over students – from shaping ideas to careers. But the corresponding safety mechanism that's critical to maintaining the health of such a system, looks broken.

In March, when the Supreme Court set up a national task force to address students' mental health concerns and prevent suicides in



higher ed institutions, it noted how student suicides have gone past farmers killing themselves due to agrarian distress. A lot of blame is put on toxic competitiveness and this issue too requires greater responsiveness from college administrators. But cases of harassment belong to a different category. It is an abuse of power by specific faculty members. It can be explicitly sexual

in certain cases. In other cases it can take the form of verbal crudities, including those referencing a student's body or caste slurs. There can be unfair attendance, grading and assignment of coursework. How are students to be protected from such persecution?

In the Greater Noida case, both her family and fellows report the student being repeatedly derided in the classroom. Her parents took up the matter with college authorities, but nothing changed. In the Odisha case, the student went to police and to the college's internal complaints committee. Here, instead of relief she seems to have found a cruel stonewalling that drove her to despair. Is UGC unaware that many ICCs are less than rigorous in giving a proper hearing to the complaints they receive? Even in metro cities, principals, senior professors, college boards and sundry others are known to put the spanner in various inquiries. Think too how IIT-Kharagpur alone has seen four 'unnatural' student deaths in seven months. Every such suicide follows our elitest institutes admitting to 'lapses'. But at least when students complain, the system should spring into action, to hear them and save them. 20/7/16

शिक्षा संस्थानों में संभावनाओं की मौत

देश के उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों में हाल के दिनों में कई चिंताजनक घटनाएं सामने आई हैं। पहले जहां छात्रों द्वारा आत्महत्या के मामले चर्चा में थे, वहीं अब छात्रों के साथ दुष्कर्म की घटनाएं भी बढ़ती जा रही हैं। गत दिनों ओडिशा के बालासोर में एक छात्र ने यौन उत्पीड़न की शिकायत के बाद आत्मदाह कर लिया। बेंगलुरु में दो शिक्षकों ने एक छात्र के साथ दुष्कर्म किया। आईआईएम, कोलकाता में भी एक मनोविज्ञानी महिला परामर्शदाता के साथ इसी तरह की घटना हुई। नोएडा के शारदा विश्वविद्यालय में दंत चिकित्सा की एक छात्रा ने छात्रावास में आत्महत्या कर ली। आत्महत्या से पहले उसने एक पत्र लिखा, जिसमें विश्वविद्यालय के डीन और कुछ प्राध्यापकों पर प्रताड़ना का आरोप लगाया। इस मामले में पुलिस ने दो प्राध्यापकों को गिरफ्तार किया है और कुछ को निलंबित किया गया है। ये घटनाएं उच्च शिक्षा परिदृश्य को शर्मसार करने वाली हैं।

यह चिंता की बात है कि भारत सरकार देश में विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों के कैंपस खोलने की अनुमति दे रही है। यदि हम विदेशी शिक्षा पद्धति और संस्थानों को प्राथमिकता देंगे, तो हमारे छात्र और अभिभावक अपने देश के संस्थानों को कमतर मानने लगेंगे। होना तो यह चाहिए कि सरकार देश के शिक्षण संस्थानों में ही बुनियादी सुधार करती। वैसे भी विदेश में पढ़ाई के बढ़ते चलन के चलते प्रतिभाओं के पलायन का बड़ा संकट खड़ा हो रहा है। ऊपर से शिक्षकों द्वारा दुष्कर्म और प्रताड़ना के बढ़ते मामले इस समस्या को और गंभीर ही बनाएंगे। ये घटनाएं बताती हैं कि हमारे कुछ शिक्षक छात्रों में उम्मीदों की उड़ान पैदा करने के बजाय निराशा, कुंठा और अवसाद पैदा कर रहे हैं। ऐसा लगता है कि राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति का ऐसे शिक्षकों पर कोई सकारात्मक प्रभाव नहीं पड़ा है, अन्यथा शिक्षण संस्थानों में ऐसी शर्मनाक घटनाएं नहीं होतीं। शिक्षा के जरिये विद्यार्थी उपलब्धि के शिखर पर पहुंचने की आकांक्षा रखते हैं। यदि शिक्षण संस्थानों में ही यह संभावना दम तोड़ने लगे तो यह शिक्षा का अत्यंत दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण पहलू माना जाएगा।

ज्ञान की महत्ता ने इस भ्रम को तोड़ दिया



प्रमोद नारायण



न्याय की गुहार लगाते मृतक छात्र के परिजन • ञ्झल

है कि शिक्षा केवल कुछ वर्गों का अधिकार है। भारतीय मनीषियों ने हजारों साल पहले ज्ञान की इस शक्ति को पहचाना था। 21वीं सदी को ज्ञान की सदी कहा गया है। आज दुनिया शिक्षा और अनुसंधान के माध्यम से एक ऐसे तकनीकी संसार का निर्माण कर रही है, जिसमें सुविधाएं हर किसी की मुट्ठी में हैं। अब तो मनुष्य अंतरिक्ष में बसने-बसाने की संभावनाएं तलाश रहा है। शिक्षा के माध्यम से गरीब और वंचित वर्ग के लिए सरकारी और निजी क्षेत्रों में अनेक अवसर उपलब्ध हुए हैं। ऐसे में जब शिक्षण संस्थानों में प्रताड़ना, दुष्कर्म और आत्महत्या के मामले सामने आ रहे हैं, तो सरकारों के लिए यह एक गंभीर विषय होना चाहिए। शिक्षा परिसरों में छात्रों की आत्महत्या की घटनाएं इसका संकेत करती हैं कि हमारी शिक्षा प्रणाली में कुछ गंभीर समस्याएं हैं। यदि उत्पीड़न और आत्महत्या का यह सिलसिला जारी रहा, तो देश के भविष्य पर इसका नकारात्मक प्रभाव पड़ेगा। इन मौतों का कारण अध्ययन और अध्यापन से जुड़ी समस्याएं हैं, लेकिन राजनीतिक दलों के नेता इन मौतों को केवल राजनीतिक दृष्टिकोण से देख रहे हैं,

शिक्षा परिसरों में छात्रों की आत्महत्याएं यही संकेत करती हैं कि हमारी शिक्षा प्रणाली में कुछ गंभीर समस्याएं हैं

जिससे समाधान की दिशा में कोई ठोस कदम नहीं उठाए जा रहे हैं। यदि आने वाले समय में आत्महत्या के मामलों को शिक्षा की व्यापक समझ के परिप्रेक्ष्य में नहीं देखा गया, तो इन मौतों पर विराम लगाना मुश्किल होगा।

देखा जाए तो देश में प्राथमिक शिक्षा से लेकर उच्च और तकनीकी शिक्षा तक शिक्षण पद्धति में भ्रम और विरोधाभास की स्थिति बनी हुई है। शिक्षा के निजीकरण, अंग्रेजीकरण और विदेशीकरण पर अधिक ध्यान केंद्रित किया जा रहा है। वैसे इसमें सुधार के लिए तमाम आयोगों का गठन किया गया, उनकी रिपोर्ट भी आई, लेकिन उन पर अमल नहीं हुआ। इसके चलते शिक्षा प्रणाली में आदर्श और समावेशी शिक्षा के बुनियादी तत्वों को शामिल करने में हम पिछड़ गए हैं। इससे शिक्षा में निजीकरण को बढ़ावा मिल रहा है। यह हमारी शिक्षा को केवल अंग्रेजीकरण की ओर ले जा रहा है, जिससे शिक्षा का उद्देश्य केवल पैसा कमाना रह गया है। कोटा के कोचिंग संस्थानों में पढ़ रहे छात्रों द्वारा की जा रही आत्महत्या के मामलों की जांच से पता चलता है कि अभिभावक अपने बच्चों पर अपनी इच्छाएं थोपने लगे हुए हैं। केरल के एक छात्र ने आत्महत्या से पहले लिखा था, 'सारी मम्मी-पापा, आपने मुझे जीवन दिया, लेकिन मैंने इसकी कद्र नहीं की।' यह एक दुखद बयान है, जो उस किशोर का है, जो आईआईटी की तैयारी कर रहा था। ये संस्थान प्रतिभाओं को निखारने का दावा करते हैं, लेकिन युवाओं को महान बनाने का सपना दिखाने वाला यह उद्योग कितना खोखला है, यह बढ़ती आत्महत्याओं से स्पष्ट होता है। शिक्षा का यह कोचिंग उद्योग अब देशव्यापी समस्या बन चुका है और इसकी जकड़न में अन्य प्रदेशों के बड़े नगर भी आ रहे हैं।

इससे स्पष्ट होता है कि शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में सुधार की महती आवश्यकता है। हमें अपने संस्थानों में बुनियादी बदलाव लाने की दिशा में ठोस कदम उठाने होंगे। यदि हम इस दिशा में आगे नहीं बढ़ते, तो शिक्षा का यह संकट और भी गहरा सकता है।

(लेखक वरिष्ठ पत्रकार हैं)

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25/7/25

Education becoming expensive in India

SHAHRIK AHMED
MAZUMDAR

Rising education costs are putting enormous pressure on families, demanding urgent reforms to balance quality and affordability.

The progress of any society depends on the progress of education in that society.

— Dr BR Ambedkar

Education alters people's thinking capabilities and perceptions. It can completely transform one's life. The purpose of education is to help people think more critically and create a viewpoint on life. It provides individuals with knowledge and skills that lead to better career prospects, more earning potential, and a better quality of life. An educated person can respond to questions such as why, what, and how to solve any situation.

However, rising educational costs in India have caused significant concern. Parents across India are struggling with the high cost of education for their children, as private schools and colleges raise tuition fees and other levies year after year. The increase is ascribed to a variety of factors, including growing private institution fees, infrastructure development, rising inflation, and advances in technology.

People face an increased burden as tuition rates rise and government financing declines. Students in India are also under significant financial burden as exam and entrance fees are rising. Increasing expenses pose a considerable impediment to upward mobility, particularly for middle- and low-income families. While most parents see education as a means to a better future, many are increasingly concerned about the cost. In addition to tuition expenses, parents must pay for transportation, uniforms, textbooks, and extracurricular activities.

The 2021 Annual Status of Education Report showed a rise in rural dropout rates, which was attributed in part to increased educational expenses. Despite rising educational costs, people's incomes have remained stagnant.

Even though private institutions play an important role in addressing the need for quality education, their unregulated fee hikes are turning a public good into a privilege. Critics say that these justifications are not always credible.

Many schools fail to disclose detailed breakdowns of how fees are spent, prompting concerns about profiteering. The absence of effective government regulation exacerbates the problem. To strike a balance between the need for modern facilities and cost, schools, regulators, and parents must collaborate. Without genuine reform, the aim of education as a great equaliser will slip further out of reach, trapping families in a cycle of sacrifice and depriving students of their potential. Parents are saving early, taking loans, and even selling property to send their children to costly private universities, hoping that the investment will pay off later in their children's lives. Often, parents have no choice. They must enrol their children in private universities and pay lakhs of rupees because the number of seats at government-funded universities with minimal fee structures is limited. Seats in engineering and medical fields are limited, as are those in the humanities. Delhi University has just about 70,000 undergraduate seats across 91 colleges as of 2024, yet at least 3,00,000 candidates registered for those seats, and ap-

proximately 1,00,000 students gave up their preferences for colleges and courses that year. With thousands of students failing to get into a government university, private universities provide an alternative option. Private institutions are not subject to stringent regulation, which allows them to determine their own costs, often leading to exorbitant charges.

According to a LocalCircles study, 44 percent of parents claimed that their children's school tuition fee had risen by 50-80 percent in the previous three years, with 8 percent reporting that the hike had exceeded 80 percent. Private universities and colleges must establish transparent pricing and reduce tuition fees. Educational institutions strive to reach global standards, which leads to increased operational costs that are frequently passed on to students. Parents with higher salaries can afford to spend more on their children's education than those with lower incomes. Access to education is crucial in reducing inequality. To meet the country's educational demands, the government at the provincial and national levels must provide resources such as manpower, facilities, and funds, as well as additional grants and subsidies for public schools and universities. Inadequate government funding for public education can lead to increased reliance on private institutions and greater fees.

The education sector received Rs 1.28 trillion in the Union Budget 2025-26, an increase of 6.5% over the previous year. However, despite calls to increase education funding to 6 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), little progress has been made. Over the past ten years, In-

dia's education spending has fluctuated between 3 and 4 percent of GDP, depending on government priorities and economic conditions. In 2023, the United States spent 6% of its GDP on education, according to data from the World Bank. At the same time, China made a slightly larger investment in education, allocating 6.13 percent of its GDP to this sector. According to a 2020 National Sample Survey Office estimate, average education spending had almost doubled in the preceding ten years. Between 2008 and 2018, the annual cost per student in rural areas increased from Rs 5,856 to Rs 12,345; in urban areas, it increased from Rs 12,000 to Rs 28,000. The 2020-21 All India Survey on Higher Education also revealed that during the past ten years, private institution tuition costs for engineering programs have risen by more than 50%. According to data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), from April to September 2024, the outstanding balance of education loans increased from Rs 65,336 crore in 2020 to Rs 129,116 crore.

Following protests and outcry over private schools' arbitrary fee increases, the Delhi government recently approved the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Rates) Ordinance, 2025, which regulates private school fees. A major focus on inclusive, affordable education is essential if India is to become Viksit Bharat by 2047. It is unlikely to be achieved in the absence of comprehensive and urgent reforms. Policy measures are obviously necessary to meet the Sustainable Development Goals of reducing inequality and ensuring quality education.

22/7/25

Boys continue to outnumber girls in private schools

In the northern and western States, the share of girls enrolled in any school is lower than India's average of 48.1%

DATA POINT

Devyanshi Bihani
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Over the past decade, the share of private schools and the proportion of boys and girls enrolled in them have both increased across India, likely reinforcing each other. However, the share of girls attending private schools remains considerably lower than that of boys. In other words, while parents increasingly prefer private schooling, a considerable share of them still shows a slight preference for enrolling their sons over their daughters. Also, a relatively low number of girls are enrolled compared to boys in schools across northern and western India.

Chart 1 shows the share of government, government-aided, private, and other schools in 2012-13 and 2023-24. The share of government schools has fallen from 74.2% to 69.1%, whereas the share of private schools has increased from 17.2% to 22.5%.

Chart 2 shows the share of students enrolled in government, government-aided, private, and other schools in 2012-13 and 2023-24. The share of children enrolled in government schools has fallen from 57.3% to 51.4%, whereas the share of private schools has increased from 28.2% to 36.3%.

Chart 3 shows the gender-wise share of students enrolled in government and private schools in 2012-13 and 2023-24. For instance, in 2023-24, 54% of girls studied in government schools and 33% in private schools, while 49% of all boys studied in government schools and 39% in private schools.

Chart 4 shows the State-wise and gender-wise share of students enrolled in any school. In the northern and western States, the share of girls enrolled in any school is lower than India's average of 48.1%.

Gender divide persists

Data for the charts were sourced from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) database.



Chart 1: The share of government, government-aided, private, and other schools in 2012-13 and 2023-24. Figures in %



Chart 2: The share of students enrolled in government, government-aided, private, and other schools in 2012-13 and 2023-24. Figures in %

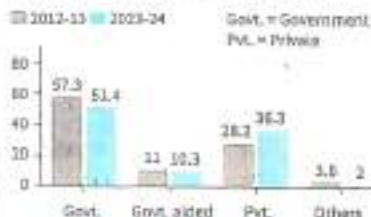


Chart 3: The gender-wise share of students enrolled in government and private schools in 2012-13 and 2023-24. Figures in %

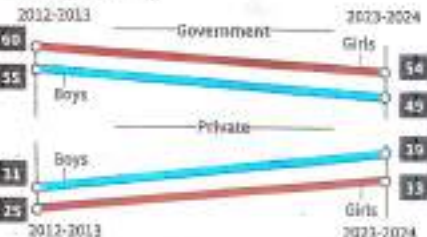


Chart 4: The State-wise and gender-wise share of students enrolled in any school in 2023-24

● Northern ● Western ● Southern ● Eastern ● Northeastern
● Central ○ India average

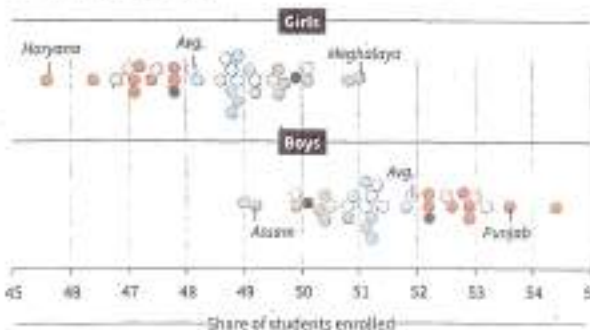
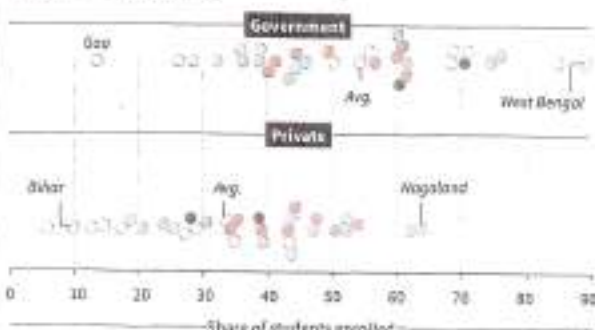


Chart 5: The State-wise and gender-wise share of girls enrolled in government and private schools in 2023-24

● Northern ● Western ● Southern ● Eastern ● Northeastern
● Central ○ India average



What have courts ruled with respect to AI and copyright?

Can AI models be trained on datasets which contain both copyrighted and public domain content?

S.S. Rajan

The story so far:

Whether the intellectual material produced by various generative AI models infringes copyright laws has been a controversial question posed around the globe. Three recent rulings in the U.S. — *Thorelli v. OpenAI* (2025), *Barry v. Anthropic* (2025), and *Kodrey v. Meta* (2025) — have brought considerable clarity to the issue. The decisions confirm that transformative making on legitimately acquired text can qualify for 'fair use', though key limits remain on pirated content and unclear market impacts. However, the issue remains unresolved from a legal perspective.

Do AI models violate copyright law?

Generative AI models can occasionally

produce content that closely resembles or even duplicates specific works from their training datasets, raising concerns about ethics and law. Legal outcomes often depend on whether training AI on original works and its subsequent output undermines the original works' market by replacing them, or whether the AI-generated content adds value and is considered transformative rather than a substitute. The legality of training AI with copyrighted data remains unsettled at the global level. Training generative AI models involves feeding them large datasets, often scraped from the internet, that include both copyrighted and public domain content, which raises legal issues regarding reproduction rights under copyright law. The primary concern is whether copying originals for training constitutes infringement or qualifies as fair use (in the U.S.) or as a text and data mining exception (in the EU and UK).

What about databases?

The general principles of liability in

determining the usage of databases and published works in the training of generative AI models are grounded in Intellectual Property (IP) law, contractual obligations, and privacy regulations. Generative AI has many IP uncertainties. There is legal ambiguity in determining whether the training of AI using IP-protected data, and the generated outputs constitute IP infringements. Some nations provide IP law exceptions, on the basis of it being for fair use, text and data mining, and temporary copying that may apply in cases involving generative AI. However, the absence of global harmonisation and the actual application of generative AI exceptions has not yet been tested, throwing up further legal uncertainty. Additionally, the ownership of IP rights of the output of generative AI is legally uncertain.

Presently, there is no explicit or harmonised global regulation that addresses the intellectual property implications of generative AI. The intellectual property laws of most nations

were developed long before the advent of AI, leading to legal uncertainty over whether IP rights can subsist in AI-generated outputs and, if so, who would own them. This uncertainty is most pronounced in the area of copyright, where authorship traditionally requires human creativity.

What did the U.S. judgments state?

The two landmark U.S. court judgments, one in favour of Anthropic and the other Meta, deduce that the use of copyrighted material for training AI systems could qualify as fair use. However, these rulings do not close the debate regarding the legality of scraping training data from pirated repositories.

In the Anthropic case, Judge William Alsup of the District Court in the Northern District of California ruled that using copyrighted data for training AI software was transformative, comparing the model's training to a writer borrowing from prior works. However, the judge held that Anthropic must face trial over its use of pirated copies to develop its library of material.

In the Meta case, Judge Vince Chhabria of the Northern District of California ruled in Meta's favour, concluding that the plaintiffs had not established that the company's use of their works would result in market dilution by generating AI outputs like the originals. Meta's actions were considered to be covered under the 'fair use' provision. But the judge said that tech companies making money off the AI

boom ought to figure out ways to share the wealth with companies that hold copyrights. In both rulings, the judges adopted a broad view of the concept of 'fair use' when applied to AI training, and provided tech firms with legal protection from copyright liability. But the concerns of unauthorised data harvesting, or of future market damage, have not been dealt with. Courts have signalled that privacy is still a liability and that compensation systems for creators are long overdue.

What are the implications for India?

The ANI versus OpenAI lawsuit is significant in clarifying how India's existing IP framework applies to generative AI. Under the Copyright Act, 1957, copyright owners enjoy exclusive economic rights including reproduction, adaptation, and translation, which require permissions for commercial use unless an exception under Section 52 (fair dealing) applies. While some argue that India's IP laws lack provisions specific to AI, the official position holds that the current legal framework is sufficient to address AI-related issues. India, as a member of major international IP treaties, recognises works created by legal persons and provides mechanisms to enforce rights through both civil and criminal remedies, including measures against digital circumvention.

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DINSHAW PARDIWALA

How to create champions

National Sports Policy 2025 will empower athletes through science, innovation

AS SOMEONE WHO has spent decades in the field of sports medicine, closely observing the physical and psychological toll elite sport takes on athletes, I am both encouraged and excited by the emphasis placed on sports science and technology in the upcoming National Sports Policy 2025. This is not just a policy — it's a paradigm shift.

For the first time in our nation's sporting journey, we are embedding science, technology, and evidence-based medicine at the heart of athlete development. From injury prevention and biomechanics to mental conditioning and recovery, the policy envisions a system where performance is supported, not just expected.

India has made great strides in global sports. But to compete consistently at the highest level, performance needs to be sustained by systems that are smart, adaptable, and medically sound. The National Sports Policy 2025 acknowledges this and integrates sports science, sports medicine, and cutting-edge technology as foundational pillars for the next decade of Indian sports.

It gives me immense satisfaction as a medical practitioner to note that the new

policy focuses on: injury surveillance, prevention, and early intervention, which remain essential for athlete longevity; biomechanics and performance analytics to refine training and technique; nutrition and recovery science — areas where marginal gains often make the difference between podium finishes and missed opportunities; and mental health and cognitive conditioning, which, in today's high-pressure environment, are non-negotiable.

The policy outlines that facilities for sports science and sports medicine will be established and upgraded at major training centres across the country. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) has already begun enhancing sports science facilities and installing world-class recovery equipment at its regional centres and National Centres of Excellence, in partnership with the National Centre for Sports Science & Research.

The SAI regional centre in Bengaluru, where our Olympic medal prospects under the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) train, has got one of the best sports science facilities in the entire country. Another Return to Sports division was recently es-

tablished at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi. These are multi-disciplinary hubs where coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, orthopaedic surgeons and data scientists work together to support athletes.

In a significant step, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports had constituted a 30-member medical panel in association with the Indian Olympic Association last year, including myself, to be stationed in Paris during the Olympic Games. For the first time, India had a dedicated medical team on-ground to manage injuries, monitor recovery, and make real-time decisions for our athletes' health and safety.

The policy also rightly champions technology as a tool for governance and performance monitoring. Platforms will be upgraded and restructured to improve the transparency and efficiency of various schemes. From AI-driven performance analysis to real-time dashboards, monitoring training loads and recovery metrics, technology will be harnessed not just to track, but to intervene early, predict outcomes, and course-correct when necessary.

What excites me even more is that we

are not stopping at application — we are fostering sports innovation by leveraging technology for data-driven monitoring and implementation of sports programmes. With the proposed sports innovation task force and research grants, educational and research institutions will be encouraged to explore interdisciplinary solutions, creating a pipeline of ideas, tools, and technologies that are India-specific.

In a nutshell, the National Sports Policy 2025 is not just forward-thinking — it is vital. By embedding sports science and technology into the fabric of our sporting ecosystem, we are moving toward certainty — from passion alone to passion empowered by precision.

As someone who has treated hundreds of India's top athletes, I know that talent and training are never enough. Support, science, and systems are what create champions. With this policy, we are finally building those systems.

The writer is a sports orthopaedic surgeon. He was head of a medical panel constituted by the sports ministry to support Indian athletes at the Paris 2024 Olympics

Political questions, textbook answers

NCERT history books and their revisions frame a challenge: To reckon with violence in medieval ages, nudge people to see it in context



KAUSHIK DAS GUPTA

REVISION OF SOCIAL science textbooks, especially history readers, has become par for the course. Most times, this exercise is not guided by the scholarly imperative to mirror developments in knowledge. Instead, it seems to bear the ideological hallmarks of those in power. Textbooks have long borne this burden. However, there's a difference in today's restructuring of reading material compared to schoolbook reworking exercises of the past.

In the last five years, parts of history textbooks have been either excised or modified, and the changes have been ascribed to a variety of factors — from rationalising content to reducing the burden on students. These exercises claim to be motivated by a desire to ensure student "well-being", but carry imprints of the ruling regime's anxiety to flatten social complexities.

Introduced last week, the latest changes, dotted with references to the "brutality" of medieval Muslim kings, carry a disclaimer, *Notes on Some Darker Periods of History*. It says: "No one should be held responsible today for events of the past. The emphasis is on an honest approach to history with a view to drawing important lessons for a better future." Historians have rightly underlined that the account is not as "honest" as it claims. The selective references to the destruction of places of worship by Muslim kings have not gone unnoticed. Scholars have rightly pointed out that such violence was not uncommon across a variety of regimes in ancient and medieval times.

There are significant interventions. Yet, there is a broader challenge for historians: To underline the fundamental differences between the social and moral universe of pre-modern times and today's norms. Kings and sultans were not accountable for their actions, statecraft had very different objectives and wars were often critical to empire-building. All this is historical common sense. However, it's yet to become general common sense. Narratives of the pre-modern era continue to be framed around heroes and villains. The search for a proto-nationalist in Ashoka, Alauddin Khalji or Tipu Sultan — depending on ideological inclination — and describing a Mahmud of Ghazni or Alauddin Khalji or Aurangzeb as evil might seem somewhat different endeavours. But both obscure an understanding of epochs, much removed in time — Mahmud of Ghazni lived in the 10th-11th centuries, the Khaljis in the 13th and 14th centuries, and the last great Mughal ruled from 1658 to 1707. That the latest revisions in textbooks bracket a more than 500-year period under the shibboleth of "Dark Age" shows that even a section of historians, affiliated to the ruling regime, carry such blinkers.

The challenge, in large measure, has to do with a historiographical deficit, plugging which remains a work in progress. Indian historians have produced groundbreaking studies on the extractive nature of medieval kingdoms, the ebbs and flows of commerce, the caste system and the rise

of kingdoms far away from sultanates in Delhi. Yet, an understanding of violence in pre-modern times is a relatively recent historiographical pursuit. Charges of destruction of places of worship continue to be countered by narratives that stress the political impulses behind such violence — as opposed to religious motives. The standard response is also that instances of destruction of places of worship by sultans and badshahs were far fewer compared to the grants they give to temples and monasteries. A historian should, of course, be judged by her fealty to facts. Viewed from that perspective, there is nothing wrong with how most professional historians have responded to allegations of "brutality" levelled on Islamic kings.

However, today the challenge in classrooms — and beyond — is not just to provide a point-to-point counter. The internet, political propaganda, social media, films and TV make lives information-heavy. WhatsApp chats have precipitated the collapse of some of the traditional filters on information.

How can narratives that place violence in medieval times in their historical context help? Why do people need to understand the complexities of times when rulers could destroy some temples and give grants to many others? What purpose would it serve to depict Maghul and several other rulers as complex personalities who had the blood of their kin on their hands and yet presided over great cultural refinement? Why tell the stories of Shivaji's successors who struck terror in people in Bengal or frame Tipu Sultan's role in resisting the Britishers without underplaying the violence his forces meted out to some communities? Studies placing personalities in their times — and dissemination of such scholarship outside academia — are, of course, needed for purely epistemological purposes. History is at its most vigorous when it not only celebrates the resilience of societies but also tries to understand fault lines. The search for syncretism in medieval times was driven by a young nation's desire to place a salve on the wounds of Partition as well as to counter the colonial historian's charge that Indian history, before the arrival of the British, was nothing but an account of communal feuding. Histories of pre-modern violence, not prejudiced by colonial blinkers and innocent of sectarian agendas, have been few, and they have not gone beyond academia.

But why disturb the student's "well-being" by introducing such complexities in textbooks? The latest changes have been introduced in Class VIII textbooks — a time when youngsters step into their teens. They are introduced to complicated concepts in mathematics and science — cell division, for instance. Why not in the social sciences? A textbook is perhaps the only text of history that a large majority of people, who do not engage with the discipline for professional purposes, will encounter in their lives, while they would be inundated with myriad accounts of the past. Critics of the revisions are, therefore, right in underlining the importance of rigour in reading materials. The task is also to find ways to communicate the complexity that informs their scholarship outside select circles — a difficult yet necessary imperative for the historian, inside and outside academia.

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Unethical science

PARTHA P. MAJUMDER

Two of the cornerstones of scientific advancement are rigour in design and conduct of scientific research and the ability to reproduce research findings. Therefore, scientific results need to be robust, unbiased and valid across a broad set of situations. A precondition to attain these is that a scientific study should follow rigorous standards in design, methodology, data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of results.

In recent times, we have seen newspaper headlines pertaining to scientific papers containing manipulated images as well as research papers being repeatedly retracted. These developments indicate compromises with scientific rigour and ethics as many scientists are adopting dishonest means while publishing their results in research papers.

Scientific rigour and ethics are primarily practised by an individual scientist. However, the scientific community has also evolved ways of adopting appropriate, rigorous and ethical methods. For instance, before undertaking a scientific study involving humans or animals, the purpose and plan of the study have to be reviewed and approved by an Institutional Ethics Committee that not only comprises scientists but also lawyers, philosophers or ethicists, and lay persons. After the study is approved and carried out, the investigator submits the results in a written form (called a 'paper') and submits it for publication to a journal. The journal then sends the paper for 'peer review'. If the reviewers recommend publication of the paper, only then does the journal publish it. After it is published, the paper gets into the public domain so that other scientists and the public can learn about the study and its conclusions.

Yet, transgressions take place. A scientist can purposely engage in falsification. Sometimes, a scientist deliberately compromises with rigour by analysing only such data that appear compatible with the proposed theory. Plagiarism, manipulation

of peer reviewers, not declaring conflicts of interest, misrepresentation of authorship, among other malpractices, are not uncommon.

Fortunately, the proverbial black sheep among scientists do get caught and the fraudulent publication is retracted. In 1998, Andrew Wakefield and his colleagues published a paper in *The Lancet* in which they claimed that children who were administered the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine had a higher predisposition towards autism. MMR vaccination rates dropped consequently. After a series of subsequent studies failed to find a link between the MMR vaccine and autism, and after a formal investigation by the General Medical Council, which is responsible for licensing doctors and supervising medical ethics in the United Kingdom, *The Lancet* retracted the paper. The GMC investigation revealed that Wakefield had engaged in various unethical acts, including financial conflict of interest, conducting the study without approval of an institutional ethics committee, and data manipulation.

Since 2013, there has been a steady rise in the number of retracted papers. However, the figure jumped to over 10,000 in 2023 from about 5,800 in 2022. This certainly is an indication of the compromising attitude of scientists towards rigour and ethics.

What may be incentives for scientists to engage in fraudulent acts? Faculty appointments and promotions are the most likely incentives. The National Institutional Ranking Framework also emphasises on the number of publications. The rise in predatory journals and their aggressive solicitation of papers make it easy for a scientist to increase the number of publications.

For Viksit Bharat to produce scientific excellence of high quality, not just quantity, it is important to provide punitive measures against violators of rigour and ethics in science.

THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON THE AUTHOR'S INAUGURAL LECTURE DELIVERED ON MAY 9, 2025 AT THE 62ND STATE CONFERENCE OF THE KERALA SASTHA SAMITHYA PARISHAD HELD IN PALAKKAD

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Realities behind the global experiment of 'remote work'

The quiet revolution of remote work, once hailed as the future of labour, has become far more complicated than anyone imagined. Millions of workers across the world dream of the freedom and the flexibility that come with working from home. However, in reality, far fewer actually enjoy it. This gap between aspiration and practice reflects a dense web of cultural expectations, managerial hesitation, infrastructural challenges, and the hidden costs of working outside the traditional office.

Survey findings, gender issues

The "Global Survey of Working Arrangements", conducted by the Ifo Institute and Stanford University, covering over 16,000 college-educated workers across 40 countries between 2024 and 2025, lays bare this paradox. No matter where they live, workers express a clear wish for more remote days. How this plays out on the ground varies widely. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, people average 1.6 remote workdays per week. In much of Asia, the figure is only 1.1 – a little more than half of what employees there say they ideally want. Africa and Latin America fall somewhere in between.

Why the lag in Asia? The reasons are unsurprising. In India, China, Japan, South Korea and elsewhere, physical presence in the office still signals loyalty, discipline and seriousness. The old culture of 'presenteeism' endures stubbornly. Compounding this are cramped living conditions, shared spaces and unreliable Internet, all of which make remote work unattractive or even unfeasible, for many urban dwellers.

But geography is only part of the story. Gender casts its own long shadow. In most countries, women, particularly mothers, tend to work from home more often than men – and desire it more strongly.

For them, remote work offers a partial answer to the long-standing struggle of balancing paid



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Once hailed as the future of labour, 'Work from Home' has become far more complicated than imagined

work with care-giving. Survey data show that mothers express the highest ideal number of remote days per week (2.66 days), closely followed by childless women (2.53). Fathers also want flexibility, but to a lesser extent. Curiously, it is only in Europe that men do report slightly more actual remote workdays than women.

These numbers reopen an old, unresolved question: is women's desire for remote work truly a sign of empowerment? Or is it merely a response to the continuing burden of unpaid care? For all the talk of gender equality, the division of household labour remains deeply unequal. For many mothers, the chance to work remotely may reflect not freedom of choice but hard necessity: the only practical way to manage two full-time roles (employee and caregiver) under the same roof.

The appetite for working from home points to cultural shifts among men, too. Many men without children say they prefer remote work not because of family obligations but because they value freedom: there is time for health, hobbies, creativity, or simply relief from the daily grind of office life. The COVID-19 pandemic years proved that productivity could survive, perhaps even thrive, without office cubicles. Having tasted this autonomy, many are reluctant to surrender it.

Still, the most striking revelation is the widening gap between what workers want and what they get. The global average for 'ideal' remote days is now 2.6 days per week. The reality? Just 1.27 days in 2024, a drop from 1.33 days the year before, and sharply down from 1.61 days in 2022.

The unease of employers, health concerns

What explains this retreat? Many employers remain uneasy. They worry about falling team spirit, lost oversight, and declining innovation. Some industries lack the tools or the systems for remote success. And the ingrained habits of office life continue to exert a powerful influence.

That is only half the picture. The risks of working from home, especially to health, are

becoming clearer. Data from Statista Consumer Insights (2023) reveal that remote workers are more prone to physical ailments: backaches, headaches, eye strain and joint pains, more so than their factory- or office-bound counterparts. The mental toll is significant as well. Isolation, blurred boundaries and constant digital connection all exact a price.

Most homes, after all, are not designed for ergonomic safety or sustained mental focus. These hidden costs may explain why some companies are quietly pulling back on remote options. However, to abandon the model completely would overlook its real advantages: greater autonomy, better work-life balance, less commuting stress, and higher job satisfaction.

Possible alternatives

So, where does this leave workers, employers and policymakers? In need of imagination and honesty. Hybrid work, a carefully designed mix of home and office time offers the best path for most jobs. However, hybrid models alone will not suffice. Companies must invest in making home offices safer and more productive, support healthy routines and breaks, and create clear digital boundaries to prevent burnout.

Governments, too, must catch up. Remote work demands fresh protections: universal broadband access, stipends for home-office upgrades, and enforceable health standards. These are especially critical in developing economies, where infrastructure lags behind.

Furthermore, beneath all this lies a deeper social reckoning. If women remain saddled with the bulk of care-giving even when working from home, can we really speak of progress toward gender equality? If men now seek remote work more for freedom than family, what does that say about changing male identities in the workplace? The global experiment in working from home is not just about technology or convenience. It is a mirror, reflecting the unresolved tensions between freedom and control, trust and suspicion, autonomy and loneliness. ✎

Universities everywhere are in crisis

On July 21, a federal judge challenged the U.S. administration's reasons for slashing billions of dollars in federal funding to Harvard University. The funding threats and cuts reflect a larger worldwide trend of right-wing governments forcing higher education institutions with their ideological agendas. Across the world, universities, once imagined as havens of free inquiry, are now being transformed into sites of political control.

Weaponised budgets

This pressure is particularly evident in the U.S., where Ivy League universities have become the centre of a cultural conflict. Portraying these institutions as havens for "anti-Americanism", Mr. Trump tightened visas for overseas students and threatened funding cuts to colleges that defied his definition of 'free speech'. The U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 ruling ending affirmative action in college admissions gave right-wing activists even more confidence and spurred calls for broad changes in admissions rules. While Columbia University was pushed into adopting a strict definition of antisemitism, a measure critics say silences legitimate debate about Israel and Palestine, the 2024 congressional campaign forced Harvard's president, Claudine Gay, to resign. Major donors withdrew millions in funding from institutions that resisted these pressures, leaving faculty fearful that discussions on race, gender, or foreign policy might provoke similar reprisals.

The effects are felt globally. In Australia, using the nebulous concept of 'national interest', ministers have vetoed peer-reviewed humanities research proposals covering topics such as climate activism and Indigenous politics. Law faculties have faced criticism for deviating from 'black letter law' and incorporating decolonisation into their courses. Universities are also under pressure to pass anti-foreign



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Across the world, universities, once imagined as havens of free inquiry, are now being transformed into sites of political control

interference audits to protect rich international student enrolment and engage in persuasive self-censorship on sensitive subjects, such as China, Palestine, and Australia's colonial past.

In India, populist leaders see public universities as elitist strongholds. Police visit campuses to quell dissent; budgets are cut; and vice-chancellors replaced. Jawaharlal Nehru University, once a hub of open debate, now frequently faces the label of 'anti-national'. In 2023, the University Grants Commission mandated compulsory courses in 'Indian knowledge systems'; this is seen as advancing Hindu nationalist narratives. The South Asian University, established by SAARC as an international institution, pressured a faculty member to leave after his PhD student cited Noam Chomsky's criticism of the Modi government.

From Budapest to Bahrain, the pattern is clear. Viktor Orbán forced Central European University out of Hungary. Turkey dismissed thousands of academics who supported a peace petition. Brazil and the Philippines drastically cut social sciences' funding, silencing studies on inequality. Gulf states impose tight restrictions on conversations about religion, gender, and labour rights. Independent research is now seen across continents as a threat to national security.

Along with these direct attacks is a quieter but equally destructive force: the neoliberal makeover of higher education. Rankings, patent creation, and the pursuit of student 'employability' are transforming universities into corporate entities. People discount feminist studies, sociology, history and other subjects which explore power dynamics as unnecessary extravagances. Students become paying customers, faculty members turn into disposable service providers, and trustees prioritise brand management above intellectual exploration. The far right exploits this

market-driven logic, portraying universities as taxpayer-funded breeding grounds for sedition, while simultaneously cutting public funding essential for maintaining intellectual diversity.

Defending the commons

According to the Academic Freedom Index, produced by V-Dem and partner organisations, academic freedom declined in 34 countries between 2014 and 2024, not only in autocracies but in democracies as well. Indicators measuring institutional autonomy, freedom of research, and campus integrity dropped to their lowest levels since the early 1980s. Every erosion of academic freedom limits society's ability to tackle pressing global challenges such as climate change, the impacts of AI, and democratic deterioration.

Despite these challenges, hope remains. Networks of academics, students, and civil society groups around the world are resisting ideological pressure. Faculty groups and student coalitions in the U.S. actively promote inclusive education, which forces some colleges to rethink too rigid definitions of antisemitism. Legal collectives and independent academic platforms still guard areas for critical inquiry in India.

However, survival alone is insufficient. Universities must recover their public agenda. Governing boards should shield hiring, promotions, and funding decisions from political interference. Donors must support uncomfortable inquiry rather than dictate it. Alumni can fund independent academic chairs or legal defence efforts. Faculty members must engage in university governance instead of leaving it to bureaucrats, while students should remember that campuses are democratic commons, not merely credential factories. If fear, profit motives, or majoritarian arrogance dictate what can be taught or expressed, we risk inheriting not just weakened universities but diminished democracies. *—RP*

A nation is only as skilled as the people on its margins

For Pratibha Kalita, a 45-year-old artisan from a small village in Assam, weaving was integral to life, but only as a household skill and a means to clothe her family. With hands-on training – from refining her techniques and expanding her product range to learning brand building and business management, she transformed this generational craft into a thriving enterprise.

Today, Pratibha is a successful entrepreneur who, having secured her family's future, creates livelihood opportunities for other women while continuing to remain a proud custodian of her heritage. Her journey is a testament to how skilling is more than just a pipeline to employment – at its best, it is also a vehicle to unlock agency, dignity, and freedom. As the late APJ Abdul Kalam so powerfully put it, "Real education enhances the dignity of a human being and increases his or her self-respect."

Skilling in India is often viewed through a narrow, purely economic lens – a vocational training course, a certificate, a job placement. Traditional approaches to skilling may ask, "How many youth did we train? How many jobs did we create?" While important, these risk overlooking the soul of the matter. We need to understand what opportunities skilling unlocks for individuals.

Consider the scenario of handing someone a smartphone, but offering no network access, electricity to charge it, or digital literacy to understand and make use of its features. Nor is there freedom from social norms and cultural restrictions, especially those linked to gender. Merely owning a smartphone does not expand opportunities. True skilling, in this light, is not just about imparting quality resources and abilities, but also about ensuring that people can meaningfully use those abilities to shape their future. This underscores a simple truth: We must reimagine and expand our definition of skilling to be dignity-first and human-centred, which lends itself to greater confidence, resilience, income, and upward mobility.

The challenge is not just to train people, but to nurture diverse forms of value creation that exist across society today. How do we create skilling systems that not just teach, but listen, learn, and adapt? We should not only prepare individuals for roles within existing structures, but also enable them to create new ones. This can be driven by democratising

institutions that inspire ideas and incubate talent and innovation to find solutions for societal challenges, but must also, notably, go beyond curriculum and the classroom to meet people where they are; through decentralised, community-based models that reflect local realities and the often invisible ecosystems that surround them.

With the informal sector forming a significant segment of India's workforce, employing roughly over 90% of the workforce, such interventions are essential to catalyse real impact. When we invest in new tools and resources, digital platforms, and access to fair markets, while also embedding both technical and soft skills, including problem-solving and entrepreneurial thinking, across skilling programmes, we see transformation.

India's youth are not waiting for permission to build. They simply require an ecosystem that recognises their drive and equips them with the skills to lead. Philanthropies have a unique, instrumental role to play in this equation. They can build enabling ecosystems, amplify grassroots voices, spearhead vital partnerships to scale technical, capacity building, or mentoring support, and invest in local innovation and sustainable models that may not promise instant scale, but have the potential to deliver deep, meaningful, enduring impact.

A handloom artisan turned business-owner developing contemporary designs and leveraging technology for scalability while carrying forward centuries of tradition; a sports coach mentoring underserved youth, instilling them with discipline, shaping community spirit, and improving school attendance and healthy lifestyle practices; an Asha worker encouraging behaviour change and strengthening rural healthcare delivery; a self-help group entrepreneur mobilising savings and livelihoods – they are what present day India needs. They are the fabric and face of a vibrant, skilled India, and indicators of what is possible when skilling is purpose-led and empowers and sparks ambition.

There are millions like Pratibha across India. We must build skilling ecosystems for them that go beyond the classroom – inspiring individuals to re-write their stories and shape their journey. Our task is twofold: To skill them, but also to see and nurture them.



Siddharth Sharma

Siddharth Sharma is CEO, Tata Trusts.

The views expressed are personal.

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Science at the final frontier

Shubhanshu Shukla's experiments in space are a launching pad



MILA MITRA

THE AXIOM MISSION 4 (Ax-4), which returned to Earth on July 15, marked a pivotal moment in India's space exploration journey. Launched on June 25, this international collaboration carried astronauts from the US, India, Hungary and Poland, marking a return to space for the latter three after decades. Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the mission pilot, became the first Indian astronaut to live and work on the International Space Station (ISS), and the second Indian in space since Rakesh Sharma's 1984 mission. The mission generated a lot of excitement in the country, but was not merely inspirational. It was also invaluable for India's aspirations as India gained real human spaceflight experience, validated crucial experiments in space, strengthened global partnerships and advanced commercial space collaboration.

While at the ISS, Shukla and the astronauts worked on 60 experiments, seven of which were proposed by India and ISRO. What makes the ISS a unique space lab? It is placed at an altitude of 400 km, in Low Earth Orbit. Its proximity makes it habitable as crews and supplies can be easily ferried. It is an ideal space laboratory as it operates in "microgravity" and has trained astronauts — this enables research not possible on Earth. It helps simulate deeper space conditions, without going that far.

Pictures of astronauts floating around in space wrongly suggest there is no gravity on

the ISS. At this altitude, gravity decreases but still exists. "Microgravity" conditions are achieved because the astronauts and everything within the ISS travel with the space station at the same speed, leading to a "free fall". It's like falling in an elevator if the cables snap — you and the elevator are falling together and accelerating downward at the same rate, so you feel weightless.

Experiments in microgravity yield important results as the effects of gravity are removed so one can see the effects of other forces that are hard to reveal on Earth. Matter behaves differently than on Earth. For example, fluids do not display buoyancy (floating) and sedimentation. Microgravity research spans several fields, including the study of fluids, materials science, combustion, biology — the lack of gravity and change in fluid behaviour affect cell growth, gene expression, and plant development. Human physiology and how the body adapts to microgravity, as well as possible solutions, are also studied.

Notably, India has contributed to seven out of the 60 microgravity experiments on Axion-4. The results will contribute to long-term space exploration. Additionally, the Indian human-crewed mission Gaganyaan may also take these experiments forward.

The Indian experiments included studying the effects of space exposure on microalgae and cyanobacteria, which are being explored as sustainable food sources for long-duration missions, while germination

and the genetic yield of crops like mung and fenugreek, among others, will be evaluated to understand the effects of space exposure on plants. Studying the behaviour of tardigrades, tiny microorganisms that can withstand extreme conditions on Earth, will help understand extreme resilience in space. Metabolic supplements to combat muscle atrophy have been studied for astronaut health and can also suggest therapies for Earth-based muscle deterioration. Interestingly, one of the experiments involved cognitive performance in space. Studying how microgravity affects gaze, eye movement and stress when astronauts use screens in space may influence ergonomic spacecraft systems design, reducing stress for future crews.

Shukla carried back experiment samples to Earth where scientists will further explore the effects of space exposure. He also participated in outreach and connected to students at his own school in Lucknow. He found a favourite perch on an ISS cupola and talked about the beautiful view of Earth from space. This kind of interaction can inspire the next generation.

What does this successful and widely followed mission mean for India's space aspirations?

India has lofty plans for space exploration. The Gaganyaan Mission, slated for 2027, plans to send a manned mission to the Low Earth Orbit of 400 km with a crew of three

members and bring them back to Earth. As announced by the Prime Minister, India's own space station, Bharatiya Antariksh Station, is also planned for 2035.

Shukla and his backup, Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, both selected as astronauts for Gaganyaan, have now completed astronaut training. Shukla, as the mission pilot, has gained hands-on experience in spacecraft navigation, docking and crew coordination aboard the ISS. His insights can help refine mission planning for Gaganyaan. ISS operations will also serve as a template for India's space station plans. The experience gained will suggest strategies for future Moon and deep space exploration missions.

The Ax-4 mission, a multinational collaboration between NASA, Axiom Space, SpaceX, European Space Agency and ISRO, reinforced India-US-Europe relations in the space sector, opening doors for future joint missions and collaborations. "As space becomes a key arena for commercial and scientific efforts," said Matt Ondler, president of Axiom Space, "India, with its rich history in space exploration and clear leadership in technology and entrepreneurship, will be crucial in shaping the domain and advancing humanity's presence in space."

The Ax-4 mission was not merely symbolic; it was a strategic launchpad for India's continued success in space.

The writer is co-founder, STEM & Space

NOVELTY
JUNCTIONHARSHA BHARGAVI
PANDIRITHE WRITER
IS A CREATIVE
ECONOMY EXPERT

The primary export of developing countries is creative goods, while developed countries dominate creative services exports.

Artpreneurs on the Rise

India's performing arts stand at the interface of tradition and innovation, and are actively empowering enterprises that are centred on creativity and expression

The performing arts encompass dance, theatre, music, puppetry, and folk expression. From the Vedic era, Bharat has experienced a dynamic mode of communication that was more than mere entertainment. These were instruments of education, social change, political expression, and cultural continuity. Today, these traditional forms are finding new relevance within the framework of the creative economy, integrating with technology and innovation to open up expansive opportunities for enterprise.

What is the Creative Economy?

The creative economy has carved out a niche space in the new economics, covering interdisciplinary sectors of culture, creativity, and knowledge-based intellectual capital. According to UNCTAD's *Creative Economy Outlook 2024*, there are varied economic contributions of the creative economy across different countries, ranging from 0.5 per cent to 7.3 per cent of GDP and employing between 0.5 per cent to 13.5 per cent of the workforce. Creative services exports marked a 29 per cent increase from 2017, surging to USD 1.4 trillion in 2022.

It is interesting to note that over the past decade (from 2002), the share of creative goods exports has remained steady at around 3 per cent, while the creative services share has risen from 12 per cent to 19 per cent. Through the export of creative goods reached USD 713 billion with a 19 per cent increase, the analysis is captivating. The primary export of developing countries is creative goods, while developed countries dominate creative services exports. However, developing countries have significantly increased their share—from 10 per cent in 2010 to 20 per cent in 2022.

The analysis indicates that the creative economy is driving growth and employment. It includes arts, media, design, film, publishing, fashion, advertising, heritage, and digital innovation. The performing arts sit at the heart of this ecosystem, bridging tradition with technology, emotion with storytelling, and heritage with innovation.

Communication Tool: From Ancient Times to Airlines

The performing arts have been a powerful mode of mass communication. From temple dancers narrating epics through *thirattam* or *Kathak* to the use of *Nautanki* and *Lata* in rural areas, campaigns, performing arts have served as living newspapers, educators, and catalysts for collective consciousness.

A brilliant contemporary example is the Indian Airlines safety videos choreographed in the classical *thirattam*



Performing arts are gaining policy support as a tool for job creation and cultural diplomacy

style. This innovative step not only communicated safety protocols effectively but also celebrated Bharatiya culture in a modern context by demonstrating how performing arts can be meaningfully woven into even the most unexpected sectors.

Education and Skill Development

Modern pedagogy is increasingly embracing performing arts to enhance comprehension, empathy, and creativity. Concepts in subjects like history, science, language, and even mathematics can be internalised effectively through performance-based learning. For instance:

- Puppetry has been used to teach environmental conservation and sanitation in schools.

- Street theatre (*Nukkad Natak*) is used in public health campaigns for behaviour change.

- Role-play and improvisation are effective in soft skills training, language acquisition, and even corporate leadership modules.

This creates scope for enterprising individuals by building a niche market with high demand for experiential learning solutions, workshops, and educational content that blend performance with curriculum.

Performing Arts in Enterprise

Performing arts in the digital age are evolving with new entrepreneurial ave-

nues, particularly when integrated with technology, design, and digital tools. For instance, classical dance helps develop logical thinking and improves time management by synchronising with rhythm. **Digital Content & Streaming**

Artists now use platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and OTT services to create folk-based web series, host virtual performances, and engage audiences through tutorials and storytelling. For instance, Raja Kumari blends Indian classical dance with hip-hop for global reach.

VR & AR Integration

Immersive technologies enable virtual performances. AR-based dance tutorials, and interactive theatre. Start-ups can recreate classics like *Shakuntala* or *Ramleela* using VR for global audiences.

Edutainment & Curriculum Integration

Ed-tech ventures are using performing arts to develop school modules, train teachers, and build apps/games rooted in traditional forms. Example, *Kahani Reo* amplifies learning through theatre.

Cultural Tourism & Event Curation

Entrepreneurs curate festivals, community theatre, and cultural cities to offer immersive cultural experiences.

Therapeutic & Wellness Applications

Performing arts are used in mental health therapy, support for neurodivergent children, and wellness programs combining dance, music, and yoga.

Reviving Traditional Forms with Innovation

Indigenous arts like *Bharat Natyam*, *Yakshagana*, and *Thekkali* are being revived through digitisation, AI, animation, and online courses. Youth can become cultural entrepreneurs by fusing tradition with technology and storytelling for global appeal.

Performing arts are gaining policy support as a tool for job creation and cultural diplomacy. Schemes like *Startup India* and UNESCO's Creative Cities offer funding, while institutions can scale arts education. Challenges like digital access and market gaps need public-private partnerships, mentorship, and targeted skill development to unlock their full potential.

Many artists in the country—especially women—who have dedicated years of energy to learning the art should reimagine themselves as Creators, Educators and Innovators. Repurposing performing arts with innovation and technology empowers artists, drives the creative economy, and strengthens Bharat's cultural and economic identity.

P-19

Views expressed are personal

MISSION
VISIONFR. JOHN FELIX RAJ &
PRABHAT KUMAR DATTA

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A Concerning Conundrum

The re-emergence of India's language debate, primarily sparked by resistance to the NEP's three-language formula, has exposed deep federal tensions and cultural anxieties alongside challenging national integration

The language issue, dormant for years, has resurfaced following the Tamil Nadu government's refusal to join the PM SHREE initiative to set up model schools under the three-language formula of the National Education Policy (NEP). The state government perceives this as an attempt to impose Hindi, fearing it will eventually decimate English as a pan-Indian official language. The Centre has reportedly withheld Rs 575 crore in response. This move has sparked a heated debate, highlighting the complexities of language politics in India.

Federalism at Stake

This retaliatory action raises questions about cooperative federalism in India. Given the strong emotional dimension of language and the state government's closeness to its people, this issue should have been left to the state's discretion. The national government should have restricted itself to providing necessary funds and advice. In a decentralised governance system, this approach would have yielded better development outcomes. The Centre's actions have instead created a sense of mistrust, potentially damaging the federal structure of our country.

Maharashtra's Decision Sparks Debate

The Maharashtra government's decision to include Hindi as a third language in state-run primary schools has triggered a political debate. The state's political history is intertwined with Marathi identity assertion, and demographic shifts due to migration from Hindi-speaking states have rekindled linguistic identity. The Ashmita issue gains momentum in many states during elections, strengthening linguistic identity. Notably, erstwhile adversaries in Maharashtra have joined hands to oppose this initiative, highlighting the complexities of language politics in the state.

The Congress government's decision in Maharashtra to follow Tamil Nadu's footsteps and refuse to implement the three-language formula has added fuel to the fire. This move demonstrates the deep-seated concerns about linguistic identity and the fear of Hindi imposition. The debate surrounding language policy has become increasingly politicised, making it challenging to find a consensus-driven



There is an urgent need to reconcile India's diversity with national unity, and language could be a crucial link in this direction

REPRESENTATIVE FILE

solution.

Constitutional Roots

India is a polyglottic country with a rich linguistic tapestry. Jawaharlal Nehru reminded the Constituent Assembly that language unites. The Assembly's debates reveal irreconcilable differences between North and South on the national language issue. The Constitution makers ingeniously provided for the Eighth Schedule to embody linguistic diversity. Hindi in Devanagari script was made the official language of the Union (Article 343(1)), leaving the matter open for future consensus.

Scheduled Languages and Inclusivity

The original list of scheduled languages included 14 languages, and subsequent amendments added eight more. However, some argue that the Centre hasn't shown adequate interest in promoting inclusivity, excluding growing regional languages like Rajasthani, Ladakhi, Mizo, Garo, Khasi, and Sikkimese. The lack of representation for these languages has led to concerns about linguistic marginalisation and the erosion of cultural identities.

Nationalist Struggle and Linguistic Identity

During the independence struggle, leaders promised linguistic states in recognition of linguistic nationality. Linguis-

tic nationalism had grown in India but remained submerged in Indian nationalism. The Madras state witnessed a tragic linguistic state movement in the 1950s, prompting the Centre to reorganise the country. This reorganisation has had a lasting impact on India's linguistic landscape, shaping the country's identity and politics. **Linguistic Reorganisation and Its Impact**

The reorganisation of states on linguistic lines in the 1950s gave birth to nativist politics. Language is no longer just a means of communication but a cornerstone of selfhood. This shift has led to a renewed focus on linguistic identity, with many states asserting their unique cultural and linguistic heritage. The linguistic reorganisation of states has also created new challenges, such as managing linguistic diversity within states and promoting national integration.

NEP's Focus on Indian Languages

The National Education Policy aims to promote Indian languages, usage, and vibrancy. Teaching in mother tongues/regional languages can build an equitable education system and promote Indian arts and culture. However, the implementation of this policy has been met with resistance in some states, highlighting the complex-

ties of language policy in India.

Challenges to Weaker Languages

Reports indicate that the Lakshadweep administration has dropped Mahabharat and Arabic from school curricula, replacing them with Hindi. This attempt to bulldoze cultural diversity is concerning, especially when restoring the Indian knowledge system is a key NEP agenda. The erosion of linguistic diversity can have far-reaching consequences, including the loss of cultural heritage and identity.

Global Context and Emotional Dimension

Language issues have triggered violent agitations worldwide, such as the 1971 Bangladesh language movement. Many countries, like Spain and Nigeria, experience linguistic tensions. The emotional dimension of language is a potent force, capable of shaping identities and fueling conflicts. In India, the language issue has the potential to create deep-seated divisions, making it essential to address these concerns through dialogue and consensus-building. **The Crying Need of the Hour**

India's faster economic growth may face challenges if linguistic issues aren't addressed. Leaders must engage in open dialogues to prepare a grand consensus foundation through sympathy, cooperation, and mutual trust. In a globalised world, English is crucial for competing in the global market. Given India's multicultural traditions and global context, English can foster unity without hindering diversity. The need of the hour is to find a balance between promoting linguistic diversity and ensuring national integration.

In conclusion, the language issue in India is complex, with deep-seated emotional and cultural dimensions. Finding a consensus-driven solution requires dialogue, cooperation, and mutual trust. By acknowledging the diversity of languages and cultures in India, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society. The future of India's growth and development depends on our ability to navigate these complexities and find a solution that promotes linguistic diversity while fostering national integration.

Views expressed are personal

By acknowledging the diversity of languages and cultures in India, policymakers can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society



Beyond the brain drain

Countries exporting healthcare workers overlook domestic needs. They also need to intervene to increase bargaining power of doctors and nurses



SANDHYA
VENKATESWARAN AND
NADINE MONTEIRO

THE DEMAND AND supply of health workforce across countries continues to be a daunting problem, with most countries lacking adequate numbers of doctors and nurses and a projected global shortfall of 18 million health workers by 2030. Health workers migrate across countries, with the flow typically being from countries in the Global South to those in the North. The countries from which health professionals migrate are also those that face internal supply constraints. Sri Lanka, for instance, witnesses extensive outmigration, which is (partially) addressed by getting professionals from other countries. An estimated 10-12 per cent of foreign-trained doctors and nurses come from countries that are known to have a shortage of local healthcare workers. OECD data estimates suggest that between 2009 and 2019, 25 per cent to 32 per cent of doctors in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US were medical graduates from South Asia and Africa.

Indian doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals migrate to countries across the world — almost 75,000 Indian-trained doctors work in OECD countries, and an estimated 640,000 Indian nurses work abroad. The Philippines is another example — the country is renowned for its large-scale export of nurses and other health professionals. Over 193,000 Philippines-trained nurses work abroad, constituting about 85 per cent of all Filipino nurses worldwide.

Economics and geopolitics influence the extent and nature of such migration through a combination of push and pull factors. Limited career growth and lower wages are key economic push factors. Political instability and conflict in the source country are often political push factors. Trade agreements that encourage migration, health crises that pull health workers to some areas and international recruitment policies are all pull factors, which, in turn, contribute to shortages in source countries. Countries like the Philippines and India have formalised policies to encourage the export of health workers, viewing them as sources of remittances and economic benefit. Yet, both countries have an acute shortage of health professionals.

Despite potential gains in the form of remittances and skill development, the loss of workforce capacity in countries already facing shortages outweighs the gains. What is needed, therefore, is a balanced domestic and international policy response that focuses on the needs of the individual, the national health system and global equity.

Cross-country migration is often leveraged for diplomatic gains. India, already known as the pharmacy of the world, leverages such migration to foster international partnerships, promote economic gains

through remittances and investments, enhance its global influence in health sectors, and manage the challenges of the brain drain through policies encouraging circular migration and bilateral cooperation. It enhanced medical diplomacy during the Covid pandemic by deploying medical professionals to neighbouring and African countries. What is needed now is a greater focus on negotiating more comprehensive — and enforceable — bilateral agreements between source and destination countries, which can potentially include compensation mechanisms, targeted investments in medical education, health infrastructure, or technology transfer, to offset the loss of skilled workers. The WHO code is a starting point in rebuilding such agreements.

Ageing populations alongside declining birth rates are leading to growing demands and acute shortages of healthcare professionals in developed countries. India and other countries hold the potential to supply healthcare professionals. India could maximise gains through improved institutional mechanisms, such as establishing a centralised agency to manage workforce mobility. Kerala's experience with setting up agencies to coordinate overseas employment, address grievances, and support returnees can inform national approaches. So can the experiences of the Philippines' Department of Migrant Workers.

Diplomacy or economic gains cannot override the workforce agenda of individual countries or take priority over the strength of their health system. Countries exporting health workforce could benefit from greater attention to building a cadre of health professionals, developing the health workforce industry and addressing the need for retaining professionals. This will require expanding the health education infrastructure and increasing its economic viability, improving working conditions and providing incentives to retain talent and encourage circular migration, rather than permanent outflow, leveraging digital tools to enable Indian health professionals to provide services globally, where possible, without physical migration, ensuring accountability of international agreements and exploring regional approaches towards enhancing production capacity such as jointly developed and owned mechanisms of workforce production. Amplifying regional voices could potentially increase the bargaining power of workers from developing countries.

By combining investment in workforce capacity, strategic international agreements and policies that maximise economic, knowledge, and social gains, India and other southern countries can transform the migration of healthcare workers from a challenge into a multifaceted opportunity for national development. The rise of agencies in the Global South can mean that countries like the Philippines, Sri Lanka and India are active architects of workforce strategies that balance domestic needs and global engagement. They should be seen as not just exporters of workers or victims of the brain drain.

Venkateswaran is commissioner, Lancet Global Health Commission on Reimagining India's Health System and Monteiro is a member on Global Health

TIPPED SCALES

A recent newspaper report has revealed that the share of government schools in the country has fallen from 74.2% to 69.1% between 2012-13 and 2023-24, whereas the share of private schools has increased from 17.2% to 22.5%. The rise of private schooling is not without reason. There are simply not enough government schools, especially secondary and higher secondary ones, in the country. Those that do exist do not often provide quality education and lack infrastructure, trained staff, and accountability. The cause for concern does not end at such imbalances between public and private schools. There is an additional, serious anomaly pertaining to gender in both types of schools. In most states, particularly in the West and the North, the number of boys being sent to school — both public and private — exceeds the number of girls. If this is correlated with data from the Unified District Information System for Education and the All India Survey on Higher Education, a significant finding emerges. The gender gap between school-going children rises sharply after Class VIII, when the right to free education ends and many girls drop out. This means that families with limited resources prioritise boys when it comes to spending on education in the hope that this will earn future dividends. The mindset that girls will be married off and thus not contribute economically to the family is clearly still widespread. Parents have also told UDISE and AISHE that sending girls to schools that are far away from home is risky — one woman is raped every fifteen minutes in India — and that they would have enrolled their girl children if a school existed within one kilometre of their homes. Fewer parents send their girl children to schools that do not have female teachers.

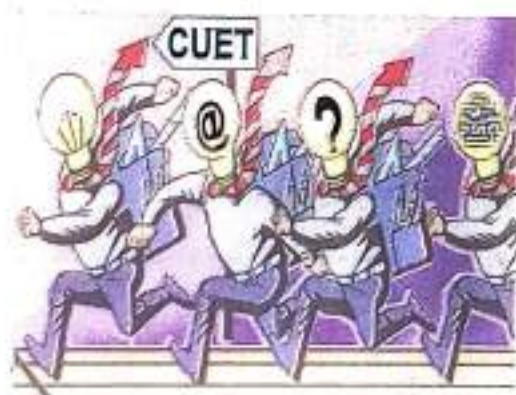
The rise in private schooling and the fall in girls' education are, ultimately, the result of State failure. Perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from a state that bucks both trends: West Bengal. Reports show that in Bengal 89.1% of girls attend State schools and 5.9% private schools and, according to the UDISE, only 5% students in Bengal attend private schools. This is not to suggest that Bengal's public schools are free of grave infrastructural and funding challenges. But government welfare schemes welded to education — Kanyashree, Shikshashree and Medhashree are examples — have the potential of making a difference. The resultant momentum in favour of education could also challenge embedded prejudices that inhibit girls' education in the first place. tel/25/10

Admission Impossible

Between CUET and procedures like those employed by DU, getting into college is stress test on steroids

India is in the middle of the annual harassment of students and parents – aka college admissions. Stressful in the best of education systems, in India the supply-demand mismatch between good colleges and good students makes it worse. And since 2022, CUET has added a cruel twist. It is the unified admission test for over 250 universities. But it remains a cure worse than the disease – this year, too, not only was there a shocking delay in publication of CUET results, the exam itself was marked by faulty answer keys and technical glitches, as well as venue choices that seemed to be aimed at punishing examinees. National Testing Agency, which conducts CUET-UG, should sit for an exam, and answer why even after four attempts, the end result is still a nightmare.

But this is only one part of the ordeal for students and parents.



The labyrinthian admission process – particularly at prestigious institutes like Delhi University – makes getting reasonable quality education a matter of luck and acute digital acumen. For example, DU's Common Seat Allocation System (CSAS) requires applicants to upload their details, navigate a complicated subject mapping exercise, input

their preferences based on course and college combinations, and then let an algorithm do the allocation of seats.

Naturally, professional coaching institutes have stepped in to “guide applicants”, for a fee. There's now a CSAS form-filing ecosystem. Clearly, the admission system is skewed against those who are not digitally savvy or who come from modest economic backgrounds. Considering that 2.39L applicants completed DU's second-phase admission process, getting the course you want is a game of gargantuan odds. No major country puts its young through such stress just when they are making one of the most consequential decisions of their life. And no one, of course, will be held accountable. *not/c*

The rot in medical education runs deep

Corruption in some medical colleges undermines integrity of the regulatory framework



DINESH C SHARMA
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

THE Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently took the lid off a large-scale scandal involving several private medical colleges. It has found collusion between government officials and private medical colleges to manipulate the regulatory process of the National Medical Commission (NMC) — the central body in charge of regulating medical education in the country.

The list of 34 persons named in the FIR is startling — eight officials of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a Joint Director of the National Health Agency (who earlier worked in the NMC), a former Chairman of the University Grants Commission, doctors deputed by the NMC to inspect medical colleges, a 'godman' with a large following in Chhattisgarh, and officials of colleges run by religious bodies in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Six persons, including NMC inspectors, were caught red-handed in Nava Raipur while transacting bribes worth Rs 55 lakh.

This is not a rare incident. Just a couple of months ago, the CBI caught an NMC inspector while he was accepting Rs 10 lakh in bribe from the management of a private medical college. The NMC selects senior professors from government medical colleges and assigns them to inspect medical colleges seeking to expand the number of undergraduate and postgraduate seats or get their licences renewed, as well as those

The modus operandi reported this time is similar to what has been used for decades. Private medical colleges collude with insiders in the health ministry



WORRISOME: The uneven distribution of medical colleges has resulted in skewed availability of doctors. FILE PHOTO

and the regulatory agency through middlemen to subvert regulatory norms relating to faculty requirements, hospital beds, etc. In the latest CBI case, health ministry officials gained access to information about the regulatory status of medical colleges, like inspection dates and names of inspectors assigned.

The information was then shared with middlemen who alerted the medical colleges concerned. The colleges being inspected deployed ghost faculty and admitted fake patients to artificially project compliance during inspections, and bribed assessors in order to secure favourable inspection reports.

The case has once again shown that the rot in medical education runs deep and pervades all stakeholders — private medical colleges, the regulatory body, the health ministry and faculty members of government colleges.

High hopes were pinned on the NMC when it was formed in 2020 to replace the Medical Council of India (MCI), which was a self-regulatory body with the medical associations and state medical councils controlled by doctors. The MCI came into limelight in 2001 when its president Ketan Desai was caught for bribery and

We need a comprehensive policy review with regard to privatisation of medical education and corporatisation of healthcare.

the Delhi High Court called the council 'a den of corruption.' The case dragged on for many years. After long-drawn discussions in parliamentary panels, expert committees, etc., it was decided to disband the MCI and replace it with a government-controlled NMC. The change was projected as a great reform, but barely five years down the road, we find that not much has changed on the ground.

After the government's privatisation of medical education and the system of capitation fee (college managements selling seats at astronomical prices). The trend started with private colleges

in Karnataka and Maharashtra in the 1990s, and is now a nationwide phenomenon. In the beginning, most colleges used to be owned or managed by politicians or trusts controlled by them. Then, the ambit expanded to include religious and spiritual organisations as well as local industrialists.

Overall, running a medical college became a highly lucrative affair despite a cap on 'management quota' of seats and norms about standard infrastructure like a mandatory teaching hospital. For instance, the annual fee in the Index Medical College (Indore) — one of the institutions named in the FIR — is Rs 16 lakh, compared to Rs 1 lakh in a government-run college, as per data compiled by the Department of Medical Education in Madhya Pradesh. The capitation fee charged at the time of admission is said to be between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 1 crore. Doctors churned out by such colleges directly feed the corporatised system of health delivery.

Private colleges are taking the equation of doctors. At present, the annual intake for MBBS seats is about 118,000. India has 13 lakh registered practitioners, which translates to the doctor-to-

population ratio of 1:1,363 as against the WHO norm of 1:1,000. Besides the overall shortage, a disproportionate number of doctors are in cities. In March, the government announced an addition of 10,000 medical seats during 2025 and set a target of adding a total of 75,000 seats over the next five years — without a clear roadmap.

The result is the hurried opening of private medical colleges and the expansion of the existing ones on the one hand, and pressure on the NMC to ease regulatory norms on the other. Unfortunately, the NMC has yielded to this pressure. For instance, it recently relaxed norms for the appointment of faculty to address the shortage and support the expansion of medical seats.

Instead of letting the NMC compromise on quality standards to meet government targets, the government should rethink the privatisation policy itself. Till every additional MBBS seat brings extra money for promoters of private colleges, corruption can't be eradicated. Among many suggestions made by expert committees in the past, the one made by the High-Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage in 2011 is highly relevant. It recommended functionally linking medical colleges to district hospitals and mandating a substantial proportion of local student enrolment. This would have helped overcome the highly uneven distribution of medical colleges that has resulted in skewed and unequal availability of doctors. This, however, can't be implemented with a centralised regulator and without involving state governments.

Corruption in medical colleges not only undermines the integrity of the regulatory framework but also jeopardises the quality of medical education and public health. We need a comprehensive policy review with regard to privatisation of medical education, over-centralisation of regulation and corporatisation of healthcare.

History writing must go beyond textbooks

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has released the long-awaited social sciences textbook for Class 8, for a captive readership from Ladakh to Pondicherry. Coming up with a textbook is a long haul. First, identify the author/authors. After a lot of "research", the book is drafted, approved, and published. Then, parents buy these and teachers select "important" sentences that the students commit to memory. At some stage, these will have to be regurgitated in the exams.

Why then so much discussion on the book, not by children, parents, or school teachers, but by university teachers and pub-

lic intellectuals? Because groups of the latter on either side of the debate believe such books are endowed with the power to leave an imprint on readers' minds. But, the power of a history textbook is not in the statistics relating to people killed in battles and buildings destroyed — it is in the manner in which change is conveyed. History is dauntingly difficult to write, unless you take refuge behind obscure abstractions.

I recall a conversation from decades ago, in 1986. I was talking to a gentleman, whom I had just informed that I taught history. We discovered we were the same age, and had been in Class IV in 1952. Suddenly, he got animated and asked me whether I remem-

bered the textbooks we had read. A competition of recollection followed. We had both enjoyed British history and been bored by Indian history — the texture of the books, the illustrations, the narrative. We were not a whit less patriotic for that. We both realised that the history of any country, like a play or a novel, can be conveyed either with beauty and even humour, or in a dull and lifeless manner. The NCERT textbooks of 2005 factored in anecdotes and cartoons, only to have the cartoons and illustrations ignored in the classroom and, later, deleted from the books.

Teaching history can be such fun if we let the children fully interact with the teacher on the subject. A public school teacher in England, on the first day of teaching 10-year-olds about the Norman conquest of England, asked them kindly if they had any questions. A little fellow stood up. "Please, sir, did the Anglo-Saxons wear gloves?" The Cambridge graduate did not know the answer.

In the last 20 years, there has been a wonderful revolution in India — a blossoming of books for children, many of the stories sita-

ated in the past. Can't the NCERT have the courage to open up textbooks to competition from young historiographers? One of my students, Subhadra Sengupta, cruelly felled by Covid, had a massive fan following. Her delightful historical novels were despite her lack of attentiveness in class!

There have been many writers who wrote history for children — Charles Dickens (*A Child's History of England*), Jawaharlal Nehru, while in prison (*Letters from a Father to a Daughter*).

The world knows EH Gombrich, the art historian, but it was only in 2005 that his first book, written in 1936 in German, was translated into English, as *A Little History of the World*. He had written it when he was 28, in six weeks, with energy, humour, and imagination. I am sure we have many *chhota* Gombriches in our country, who can relieve tired and solemn middle-aged writers of the burden of communicating with the young.

Narayani Gupta is a Delhi-based historian. The views expressed are personal.



Narayani Gupta

26/7/25

Art of Learning ~ I

Human history has ended up creating a system that honours and churns out excellent exam-takers, excellent clerks, excellent data collectors, excellent book-keepers, but there's literally no recognition and appreciation for creative talents and skills like art, music and dance. We, in India, are encumbered by an education system that's mired in an outdated colonial legacy wholly geared towards churning out excellent clerks



It was the usual school dispersal, and all the children were walking with their guardians who had come to pick them up, chattering away about their day's happenings.

I overheard one very short conversation between a mother and her daughter, who, I later learnt, was in class 3. The mother said, "So... what happened in school today?" ... and the daughter stammered excitedly, "You know in art..." at which the mother stopped her and asked with a tinge of irritation, "No... I meant... what happened in subjects?" The girl innocently looked at her mother and asked, "Is art not a subject?"

Is it? Well, probably not in the sense in which English, Maths, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geography, History and Computers are. And that is the fundamental flaw in our inherently burdensome education system which leaves absolutely no space for nurturing of creativity. Instead of letting our children grow into artistic creativity, it more often than not, stifles any spark of originality and creativity that children intrinsically possess.

Albert Einstein had said, "The inventive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is the faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift."

Indeed, how did we create such a society? Sir Ken Robinson, British author, speaker and international advisor on education, whose TED Talk "Do schools kill creativity?" was the most watched TED talk of all time, with 66.3 million views and was translated into 62 languages, argued as follows: "Our education system is predicated on the idea of academic ability. And there's a reason. Around the world, there were no public systems of education, really, before the 19th century. They all came into being to meet the needs of industrialism. So the

hierarchy is rooted on two ideas.

Number one, that the most useful subjects for work are at the top. So you were probably steered benignly away from things at school when you were a kid, things you liked, on the grounds that you would never get a job doing that. ... Don't do music, you're not going to be a musician; don't do art, you won't be an artist.

And the second is academic ability, which has really come to dominate our view of intelligence, because the universities designed the system in their image. If you think of it, the whole system of public education around the world is a protracted process of university entrance. And the consequence is that many highly-talented, brilliant, creative people think they're not, because the thing they were good at in school wasn't valued, or was actually stigmatised. And I think we can't afford to go on that way."

In terms of what Einstein rued and Sir Ken Robinson explained, human history has ended up creating a system that honours and churns out excellent exam-takers, excellent clerks, excellent data collectors, excellent book-keepers, but there's literally no recognition and appreciation for creative talents and skills like art, music and dance.

We, in India, are encumbered in an education system that's mired in an outdated colonial legacy wholly geared towards churning out excellent clerks (who would presumably help the British run revenue collection and administrative duties smoothly).

In a typical ICSE board

school, with higher classes and increasing academic pressure, most creative classes are dispensed with - (in my own experience at one of the schools) art period was discontinued from class 6, music class from class 7, and even the music room in the school has now been converted into an AI lab.

We indeed are stuck in a very wrong kind of society where people who are the least creative earn the most and have all the limelight, whereas writers and poets and artists languish away in poverty and deprivation. And basically the message we learn right from school is that - "If you do AI you have a bright future; but if you draw..."

The principal, of course, says she is helpless - they have to accommodate 11 subjects, with fixed number of periods for English, Maths, Bengali etc. And as Robinson says, no school in the world teaches dance every day of the week the way they teach maths. He asks, why not? Because children actually dance around quite a bit.

He goes on to give the example of Gillian Lynne who was an English ballerina, dancer, choreographer, actress, and theatre-television director, noted for her theatre choreography associated with two of the longest-running shows in Broadway history, *Cats* and *The Phantom of the Opera*.

When Gillian was at school in the 1930s she really underperformed, and the school wrote to her parents, "We think Gillian has a learning disorder." She couldn't concentrate; she was flitting. So her mother took her to a doctor. "In the end, the

doctor went and sat next to Gillian, and said, 'I've listened to all these things your mother's told me. I need to speak to her privately. Wait here. We'll be back; we won't be very long,' and they went and left her."

But as they went out of the room, he turned on the radio that was sitting on his desk. And when they got out, he said to her mother, "Just stand and watch her." And the minute they left the room, she was on her feet, moving to the music.

And they watched for a few minutes and he earned to her mother and said, "Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn't sick; she's a dancer. Take her to a dance school."

She was eventually auditioned for the Royal Ballet School; she became a soloist; she had a wonderful career at the Royal Ballet. She eventually graduated from the Royal Ballet School, founded the Gillian Lynne Dance Company. She's been responsible for some of the most successful musical theatre productions in history, she's given pleasure to millions, and she's a multi-millionaire. Somebody else might have put her on medication and told her to calm down." (Do Schools Kill Creativity? Ken Robinson)

How many dancers, especially in our country, would be as fortunate as Gillian? Let us think of our very own Tagore, for example. He was home schooled, and his account of his childhood days (tribhobayala) is strewn with references to his having for school (in the few years he attended it).

He in fact compares his hours in school to being imprisoned in cellular jail in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Instead, he spent all his time travelling to various places, meeting all kinds of people, reading and writing of course. Imagine what Tagore would have grown up into had he been in one of today's schools.

(To be concluded)



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School tragedy

Need to prioritise safety of students

IT wasn't an act of God that claimed the lives of seven children when a portion of a government school building collapsed in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district. It was criminal negligence on the part of the administration — no remedial action was taken even after local residents alerted the tehsildar and the sub-divisional magistrate that the building was unsafe. Ironically, the district authorities had recently told the education department to provide information about dilapidated school buildings, but this one did not figure on the list. Why not? Officials concerned — or rather, unconcerned — owe an explanation.

Regular inspection and maintenance of school buildings are critically important during the rainy season in particular. Identifying structures which require immediate repair ought to be a basic exercise; classes simply cannot be allowed as long as a classroom remains unfit for use. And a disaster is always waiting to happen whenever a fitness certificate is issued without due diligence.

It's a regrettable practice in India to close the stable door after the horse has bolted. Earlier this week, the Kerala government decided to conduct an emergency safety audit in state-run schools after a portion of a roof collapsed in a government school in Alappuzha and a 13-year-old boy died after suffering an electric shock on the campus in Kollam. Rajasthan is expected to follow in Kerala's footsteps; other states may also do likewise. Every state's audit must zero in on the school buildings which are in such bad shape that they need to be demolished urgently. Any delay or laxity on this count can cost more lives. The campus is ideally a place for children to learn and grow in myriad ways. Turning it into a death trap violates the spirit of the National Education Policy, which envisages a safe learning environment for every student. Hopefully, the Jhalawar tragedy will rouse stakeholders to prioritise safety on the campus. 26/8

जहां निर्माण, वहां भ्रष्टाचार

राजस्थान के झालावाड़ में एक सरकारी स्कूल का जर्जर भवन गिरने से कई बच्चों की मौत होना और अनेक का गंभीर रूप से घायल हो जाना यह बताता है कि अपने देश में सरकारी भवनों के निर्माण और उनकी देखरेख में कितनी अधिक लापरवाही बरती जाती है। इस तरह की घटनाएं देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों में रह-रहकर होती ही रहती हैं। जब किसी घटना में जनहानि होती है तो शोक जताने के साथ जांच, कठोर कार्रवाई करने की खूब बातें होती हैं, पर नतीजा ढाक के तीन पात वाला रहता है। चूंकि ऐसी ज्यादातर बातें दिखावटी होती हैं, इसलिए घटना-दुर्घटना की तह तक कभी नहीं जाया जाता और न ही जिम्मेदार लोगों को समय रहते ऐसा दंड दिया जाता है, जिससे अन्य सबक सीखें। झालावाड़ की घटना पर भी कहा जा रहा है कि स्कूल का भवन गिरने की घटना को बहुत गंभीरता से लिया गया है। खुद मुख्यमंत्री ने घटना का संज्ञान लिया है। शिक्षा विभाग ने आदेश जारी किया है कि जर्जर हो गए स्कूलों में बच्चों को न बैठाएं। क्या ऐसा आदेश जारी करने के लिए झालावाड़ की घटना का इंतजार किया जा रहा था? शिक्षा निदेशक ने प्रदेश भर के जर्जर स्कूली भवनों की रिपोर्ट मांग ली है। क्या उन्हें नहीं पता था कि राजस्थान में सरकारी स्कूलों की कई इमारतें जर्जर हैं और उनमें बच्चों का पढ़ना जानलेवा साबित हो सकता है? क्या ऐसे अधिकारियों के खिलाफ कड़ी कार्रवाई सुनिश्चित की जाएगी?

यदि यह सच है कि झालावाड़ के जर्जर स्कूली भवन की मरम्मत के लिए पैसा स्वीकृत हो गया था, लेकिन फाइल अटकी पड़ी थी तो यह भी एक तरह की आपराधिक लापरवाही है। बात केवल राजस्थान के झालावाड़ के खस्ताहाल स्कूली भवन की ही नहीं है। देश में न जाने कितने सरकारी भवन ऐसे हैं, जो जर्जर हैं। आए दिन सरकारी भवनों की खस्ताहाल स्थिति के साथ सड़कों के धंसने, पुलों के गिरने की खबरें आती ही रहती हैं। ऐसा इसलिए है कि जहां निर्माण, वहां भ्रष्टाचार भारत की एक कटु सच्चाई है। सरकारी निर्माण मानकों की अनदेखी करके किया जाता है। इसका मूल कारण भ्रष्टाचार है। हर तरह के सरकारी निर्माण में रिश्वत का बोलबाला है। नेता-नौकरशाह इसके बारे में सब जानते हैं। कई बार तो वे खुद कमीशनखोरी में शामिल रहते हैं। दुखद यह है कि कोई भी हालात बदलने के लिए तैयार नहीं। केवल निर्माण में ही भ्रष्टाचार नहीं है। इसके साथ-साथ इमारतों, सड़कों, पुलों आदि की देखरेख और उनकी मरम्मत में भी घोटाले होते हैं। सरकारी निर्माण में भ्रष्टाचार की बीमारी इतनी अधिक बढ़ गई है कि अब वह निजी क्षेत्र में भी घुस गई है। आम लोग भी मानकों की अनदेखी कर और कई बार तो भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों को पैसे देकर निर्माण कराते रहते हैं।

आवश्यक है भारत केंद्रित इतिहास लेखन

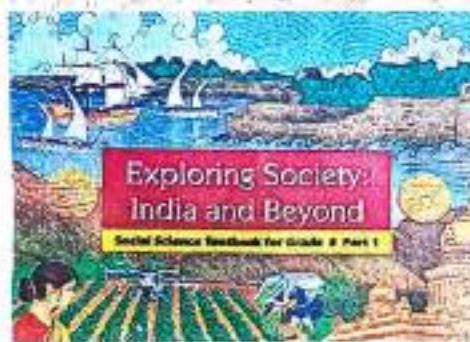
राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद (एनसीईआरटी) ने हाल में कक्षा-8 की सामाजिक विज्ञान की पाठ्यपुस्तक 'एक्सप्लोरिंग सोसायटी, इंडिया एंड बियांड' में कतिपय परिवर्तन किए हैं। इस पहल का मूल उद्देश्य इतिहास, भूगोल, आर्थिक जीवन और शासन-प्रणाली जैसे विषयों को एकीकृत करते हुए विद्यार्थियों के अंदर भारत के सामाजिक विकास की समग्र समझ विकसित करना है। वर्षों से जिस संतुलित इतिहास लेखन की मांग की जा रही थी, यह पुस्तक उसी दिशा में एक ठोस प्रयास प्रतीत होती है। इस पुस्तक में 13वीं से 17वीं शताब्दी के मध्यकालीन इतिहास को विस्तार से प्रस्तुत किया गया है, जिसमें दिल्ली सल्तनत के उत्थान और पतन, समकालीन प्रतिरोध, उस युग की राजनीतिक अस्थिरता, सैन्य अभियान, विजयनगर साम्राज्य, मुगलों एवं उनके प्रतिरोध, मराठों और सिखों के उदय आदि का विश्लेषण ऐतिहासिक साक्ष्यों के आलोक में किया गया है।

पाठ्यपुस्तकों को युगानुकूल और भारत-केंद्रित बनाना समय की मांग है। भारतीयों को गुलामी की मानसिकता से मुक्ति दिलाने के लिए यह आवश्यक है। दिल्ली सल्तनत एवं मुगलों के इतिहास को चयनात्मक दृष्टि से ही पाठ्यपुस्तकों में क्यों पढ़ाया जाना चाहिए? बाबर ने खानवा का युद्ध, चंदेरी का युद्ध, घाघरा का युद्ध एवं अन्य अनेक आक्रमणों के दौरान कल्लेआम और लूटमार को अंजाम दिया था। युद्धों के पश्चात मारे गए हिंदुओं की खोपड़ियों की मीनारें खड़ी करने की बातें उसका आत्मकथा 'बाबरनामा' में विस्तार से दर्ज हैं। अकबर की कथित महानता का भी हमारी पाठ्यपुस्तकों में इस प्रकार यशोगायन किया गया है कि उसके नाम के बाद 'महान' विशेषण न जुड़े तो कुछ छूट जाने का आभास होता है। जबकि सच्चाई यह है कि चित्तौड़ के किले की घेराबंदी के दौरान उसने 1568 में करीब 30,000 हिंदुओं का नरसंहार किया था, जिसमें स्त्रियां, बच्चे और किसान तक शामिल थे। स्वयं अकबर द्वारा नौ मार्च, 1568 को प्रकाशित फतेहनामा-ए-चित्तौड़ इन तथ्यों की गवाही देता है। इस फतेहनामे को 1598 में संकलित मुंशत-ए-नमकीन में भी सम्मिलित किया गया है। इसके



प्रणय कुमार

पाठ्यपुस्तकों को संतुलित बनाना भारतीयों को गुलामी की मानसिकता से मुक्ति दिलाने के लिए जरूरी है



एनसीईआरटी ने की जरूरी पहल • प्रवीणतामक

संकलनकर्ता अकबर के दरबारी मीर अब्दुल कासिम नमकीन थे। अकबर के समकालीन आरिफ मोहम्मद कंधारी ने अपनी पुस्तक तारीख-ए-अकबरी में भी इसका उल्लेख किया है।

अकबर के अन्य दरबारियों में प्रमुख अबुल फजल की पुस्तक 'आइने अकबरी' एवं 'अकबरनामा' तथा इमाम अब्दुल कादिर बदाउनी की पुस्तक 'मुंतखाव-उत-तवारीख' भी उसकी क्रूरता, मजहबी कट्टरता एवं कामुकता के अतिरंजित विवरणों से भरे हैं। उसे एक आदर्श नायक की तरह सिनेमा तथा इतिहास में प्रस्तुत किया गया, जबकि अबुल फजल के अनुसार 'अकबर के हरम में लगभग पांच हजार औरतें थीं और ये पांच हजार औरतें उसकी 36 पत्नियों से अलग थीं।' वह सुंदर स्त्रियों का बलात् अपहरण करने एवं उन्हें अपनी वासना का शिकार बनाने के लिए मीना बाजार लगवाता था। उसकी क्रूरता की यातनाप्रद प्रक्रिया से बचने तथा अपनी अस्मिता एवं स्वाभिमान की रक्षा के लिए हिंदू स्त्रियां जलती चिता में जलकर जौहर कर लेने को जीवन से अधिक सम्माननीय मानती थीं। चरित्र की दृष्टि से इतने दुर्बल एवं बर्बर शासक को

स्वतंत्रता के इतने वर्षों बाद तक किस मानसिकता से पाठ्यपुस्तकों में महान पढ़ाया जाता रहा और मातृभूमि, स्वराज, स्वधर्म एवं स्वत्व की रक्षा के लिए लड़ने वाले महाराणा प्रताप और छत्रपति शिवाजी जैसे योद्धाओं को जानबूझकर छोटा साबित किया गया? क्या एक भी ऐसा उदाहरण है, जब छत्रपति शिवाजी, महाराणा प्रताप या अन्य किसी सनातनी शासक ने धर्म या पूजा-पद्धति के आधार पर गैर सनातनी मतवालों/बियों से भेदभाव किया हो या उनका नरसंहार किया हो या उनके उपासना-स्थल तोड़े हों? फिर मजहब के आधार पर गैर मुसलमानों का कल्लेआम करने वाले मुगल कैसे महान हो गए?

यह सर्वमान्य तथ्य है कि औरंगजेब तलवार के बल पर हिंदुस्तान को दारुल हरम से दारुल इस्लाम में परिणत करना चाहता था। उसकी नजर में हर हिंदू केवल और केवल काफिर था, जिनका खून बहाना, जिनके मंदिर नष्ट करना, जिनकी आस्था को निर्दयतापूर्वक कुचलना वह अपना 'पाक और मजहबी फर्ज' समझता था। 12 अप्रैल, 1669 को उसने हिंदुओं पर जजिया कर लगाने का आदेश दिया। औरंगजेब ने हिंदू त्योहारों पर पाबंदी लगा दी थी और जब तक वह जिंदा रहा, तब तक हिंदू न खुलकर दीपावली मना पाए, न होली ही खेल सके। उसने अपने पूरे राज्य में हिंदुओं के मंदिरों, शिक्षा-केंद्रों और पवित्र स्थलों को तोड़ने के आदेश दिए थे। उसके आदेश पर काशी के विश्वनाथ मंदिर, मथुरा के श्रीकृष्ण जन्मभूमि मंदिर और पाटन के सोमनाथ मंदिर समेत हजारों मंदिर गिरा दिए गए थे। 1688 में उसने हिंदुओं के लिए पालकी, हाथी और घोड़े की सवारी पर पाबंदी लगा दी और अस्त्र-शस्त्र रखने को अपराध घोषित कर दिया। हिंदुओं पर किए गए औरंगजेब के बर्बर एवं पाशविक अत्याचार का विस्तृत विवरण उसके ही एक दरबारी मुहम्मद साकी मुस्तफ़िद खान की पुस्तक 'मआसिर-ए-आलमगीरी' में पढ़ने को मिलता है। समय आ गया है कि नरसंहार करने वालों का महिमामंडन बंद कर स्व, स्वत्व और भारत केंद्रित इतिहास का पुनर्लेखन किया जाना चाहिए।

(लेखक शिक्षाविद है)

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05/26/20

Can a Novel Seating Plan Really Kill Class Divide?

Frontbenchers, backbenchers - ready to get shuffled around in your benches?

DATA CRUNCHER



ATANU BISWAS

A photograph by Yuri Zhidukhin I came across while searching for images of Soviet classrooms of the post-Bolshevik Revolution period shows a teacher playing the flute to her students in a kindergarten class. The children in it are sitting in a single U-shaped row.

This type of seating arrangement, however, was not typical in schools in the Soviet Union. Other classroom photos show that the communist Soviets didn't abolish the backbench even in kindergartens and nurseries, which Lenin viewed as 'the sprouts of communism.'

A revolution seems to be occurring in Indian classrooms, inspired by a 2024 Malayalam movie, *Sthanarthi Sreekuttan* (Candidate Sreekuttan), recently released on a streaming platform. The film, set in a school in UP, questions the divide between front and backbenchers.

The plot centres around Sreekuttan, a backbencher, running against a frontbencher in school elections. He suggests a semicircular seating arrangement to bridge the gap between students. His idea is eventually adopted by

the school. Schools in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and West Bengal have adopted a U-shaped seating arrangement, which is regarded as a progressive change.

While backbenchers may be looked down upon in classrooms, in other settings, the situation may be different. Take parliament. Historically, backbenchers there have been crucial in formulating policy. Even in society at large, backbenchers are often perceived as more self-reliant, self-driven, capable of handling failure and setbacks, and able to collaborate well.

Even though these traits might not be universally true, being on the backbench is a significant aspect of being a student. Frontbenchers miss a 180-degree view of the class. Recently, Harsh Goenka shared his backbencher life in the classroom on social media, which he described as ideal for 'sneaking in a nap, doodling, or secretly enjoying a samosa.'

For many students, eliminating the backbench would undoubtedly snatch away some essential charms of school life. It would also deprive many proud frontbenchers of their 'badge of honour', as the idea of front benches in schools would simultaneously be eliminated.

Why are we so eager to eliminate back and front benches in classrooms? Have we truly built a

classless society? If not, why rush to give children the illusion that such a utopia exists? Better to let them confront reality from their first day in school.

Benches were first introduced in classrooms around 5th c. BCE in ancient Greece. It became more common in the 19th century, mainly as means to efficiently and affordably accommodate more students. Additionally, they gave teachers room to go around and engage with every student.

It's difficult to predict how teaching will evolve in this AI era. Advocates of U-shaped classroom seating think it fosters a more inclusive learning environment and enhances student-teacher interaction. With each student taking centre stage, it may promote equitable engagement and level the playing field. However, those with a soft spot for backbenchers feel that it may compromise quiet observation and creative flexibility often found in the back rows.

Again, understandably, a larger class cannot be accommodated by such a U-shaped setup. There's apprehension that it could cause eye strain and other problems for pupils who must swivel their heads to look at the blackboard. In society, there's a wide disparity in basic infrastructure - food, healthcare, transportation, and educational environments - among pupils. In an ideal society, we would strive to reduce that gap. But that's a daunting task, indeed. Nevertheless, there's a simpler solution: reorient classroom benches.

Instead, how about a 'recurring' seating arrangement that's kept fluid? My daughter treasured such a creative setup in her school days in Kolkata, where certain teachers would switch students their seating rows every day. The third row moved up to the second position the next day, then to the first, then to the last, and so on. This - or a variation of it - could be a better way to experience life, society, and its inevitable class structure. While also having an equal amount of fun at school.

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Frontbenchers miss a 180-degree view of the class



PERILS OF SITTING IN FRONT

Art of Learning~II

Stifling the space for creative passions to get nurtured and blossomed can have many ill effects on mental health in children. Sometimes they may need to draw, to think. Sometimes they may need to move, to think. So dancing and drawing may not just be the ends in themselves — they may also be the means to better academic performances. When children can happily pursue their creative passions, they are likely to be better performers in acquiring other cognitive skills as well



The British author, Sir Ken Robinson said, "My contention is that creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status." He cites the example of a little girl of six, who people thought had learning disabilities because she couldn't concentrate and pay attention, but was very keen on drawing.

So the teacher walked up to her and asked her, "What are you drawing?" And she answered, "I'm drawing god", to which the teacher said, "But no one knows how god looks...". To which the girl replied, "they will... in a minute".

He goes on to say, "Picasso once said this, he said that all children are born artists. The problem is to remain an artist as we grow up. I believe this passionately, that we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather, we get educated out of it."

I am reminded of a tragic incident of a young girl of thirteen committing suicide a few days back. News has it that she used to remain depressed and all she wrote in her note before jumping off the terrace was "I hate people. I want to die."

It was also reported that she used to love drawing, but all her parents were concerned with was how well she was doing in academics.

Is it possible that had she been encouraged with her artistic skills, she may not have taken such a drastic step? That drawing and painting could have vented out some of the angst that kept piling up inside her without any outlet?

Children may not be driven to taking such extreme steps, but it is likely that stifling the space for creative passions to get nurtured and blossomed can have many ill effects on mental health in children. Sometimes they may need to draw, to think.

Sometimes they may need to move, to think.

So dancing and drawing may not just be the ends in themselves — they may also be the means to better academic performances. When children can happily pursue their creative passions, they are likely to be better performers in acquiring other cognitive skills as well.

Our education system, in its present state, not only stifles all creative endeavor; it, in fact, chokes any kind of original thinking. Stuart Firestein, the chair of the Department of Biological Sciences at Columbia University, in his Ted Talk in February 2013, describes what scientific enquiry is like: "There is an ancient proverb that says it's very difficult to find a black cat in a dark room, especially when there is no cat. I find this a particularly apt description of science and how science works — bumping around in a dark room, bumping into things, trying to figure out what shape this might be, what that might be, there are reports of a cat somewhere around, they may not be reliable, they may be, and so forth and so on."

But this spirit of bumping around, making mistakes, stumbling and falling, is something that our education system smothers from the very beginning.

Firestein goes on to say, "We currently have an educational system which is very efficient but is very efficient at a rather bad thing. So in 2nd grade, all the kids are interested in science, the girls and the boys. They like to take stuff

apart. They have great curiosity. They like to investigate things. They go to science museums. They like to play around... But by 11th or 12th grade, fewer than 10 per cent of them have any interest in science whatsoever, let alone a desire to go into science as a career. So we have this remarkably efficient system for beating any interest in science out of everybody's head."

"Is this what we want? I think this comes from what a teacher colleague of mine calls 'the bulimic method of education.' We just jam a whole bunch of facts down their throats over here and then they puke it up on an exam over here and everybody goes home with no added intellectual left whatsoever."

Firestein explains that "evaluation really amounts to an opportunity for trial and error. It amounts to a chance to work over a longer period of time with this kind of feedback." Our exam system, on which our entire education system is based, is really nothing like this. So, Firestein goes on to say, "I'd say what we need is a test that says, 'What is x?' and the answers are 'I don't know, because no one does,' or 'Who's the question?' Even better."

Or, "You know what, I'll look it up, I'll ask someone, I'll phone someone. I'll find out. Because that's what we want people to do, and that's how you evaluate them."

We need to re-think, re-evaluate, and re-create our education system so that schools don't become gas chambers of creativity and originality but rather a garden where artistic

and original talents flower and nurture. Let's understand that dance is as important as maths, creativity just as important as literacy and numeracy, and originality just as important as rationality.

Sir Robinson batted for more individualistic learning within a broad curriculum, instead of a standardised curriculum, standardised testing and standardised evaluation methods.

Such an education system, based on command, control and compliance, only promotes rote learning, charming out stereotypes — pretty much like bricks in the wall, every child just like everyone else, crossing hurdles of the same exams and running towards the same end, line of competitive exams.

I'm sure there is a balance we can strike between the required amount of exams and much broader scope for encouraging creativity.

Children need to be engaged in academics, their curiosity needs to be kindled and stoked, but not at the cost of curtailing the breathing space for their artistic creativity.

William Butler Yeats said "Education is not about filling buckets; it is lighting fires."

So let's have our matches out, let's let them draw gods, and let's let them dance, let's let them make mistakes and ask questions, let's not create bricks in the wall.

In the words of Pink Floyd: We don't need no education We don't need no thought control No dark sarcasm in the classroom Teacher, leave them kids alone All in all, it's just another brick in the wall All in all, you're just another brick in the wall.

(Concluded)



Soumyantra Nigam
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Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandawde, who tabled the Bill, at a meeting of the Sports Authority of India, PTI



While the Centre insists that the draft legislation is athlete-centric, critics point to provisions that weaken autonomy of sports bodies and allow administrators to continue for as long as they wish

IS SPORTS BILL FOR REFORM OR CONTROL?

VIMALK PADMAKAR

WITH an eye on hosting the 2036 Olympics, the Narendra Modi government has tabled the National Sports Governance Bill, 2025, in Parliament to clear out the biggest obstacles it sees in enhancing athlete performance. So, this 'athlete-centric Bill' lacks at enforcing good governance principles in the national sports federations (NSFs), which the government views as the biggest stumbling block towards realising its ambitious plan to host one of the biggest sporting events in the summer of 2036.

To enforce professionalism, the government has identified a few problem areas that the Bill addresses — frequent litigation, lack of a dispute redressal forum,

when athlete representation, gender imbalance, no standard electoral process, poor governance, no legal recognition for a safe sports policy, and limited enforcement of the sports code.

The draft legislation seeks to set up a National Sports Board (NSB), a regulatory body that would have the power to grant recognition or suspend recognition of a national sports federation and its affiliate bodies. Even the mighty Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will have to attain proxy recognition from the NSB.

Another striking feature is that all the recognised sports bodies will now be considered as public authority under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

The Bill also talks of setting up a National Sports Tribunal to deal with all court cases that arise out of infighting within the

sports bodies. A senior official said the ministry is currently dealing with over 180 court cases, mainly due to election disputes. He added that persons who want to control federations get favourable verdicts from different high courts and that delays the resolution of disputes. Now, all such cases will be handled by the tribunal and appeals against the tribunal's verdicts will only be heard by the Supreme Court.

The Bill also mandates that all federations should include at least two sports persons of merit and two from its athletes commission to sit in the executive body. To enhance gender representation, all boards must have at least four women members as part of the executive body.

Further, to streamline the election process, the government will form National Sports Election Panel from among

retired Election Commission officers to conduct elections to all the federations.

The government has also given concessions to the federations by relaxing the age and tenure regulations. As per the sports code, no executive committee member can stay in office after 70 years of age.

Under the provisions of the Bill, the administrators can continue till they are 75. Further, the tenure restrictions are only for the offices of president, secretary general and treasurer — and not the entire executive committee.

These concessions have been openly celebrated by the federation chiefs, but they are silent on whether the proposals to set up a sports board or an election panel indicate total government control of sports bodies.

GOVT TAKEOVER?

The concessions mentioned in the draft legislation have angered lawyer-cum-activist Rahul Mehra, whose litigation had forced the government to include the age and tenure regulations.

In a series of tweets from his X handle, Mehra criticised the Bill as repressive and draconian. "A successful passage of the Sports Bill shall ensure a complete takeover by the Government of India of our sports and not a single voice from any of these NSFs is now being heard on the so-called infringement of their autonomy as they are elected at such a draconian Bill being passed," Mehra said on July 23, the day the Bill was introduced in Parliament.

Two days later, Mehra said that in effect, the government has done away with the age and tenure guidelines. "If you look at clause 24 of the Bill, it almost does away with the age and tenure guidelines. If you are elected to any international body, all you have to do is seek an exemption from the government. So, even if you are 180 years old, you can still continue as a member of any NSF body," he added.

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president PT Usha has already backed the Bill. The IOA joint secretary called it "government cooperation".

"The government has brought some guidelines and it is not to interfere. If there is any conflict with the international rules, the rules of the international body will prevail. The idea is not to create any confusion or confusion; the idea is to work together. It is not government intervention, but government cooperation. It will be based on a case-to-case basis," he said. Usha said all the clauses have been cleared in consultation with the international federations. "Everything is settled by international bodies and that's what it has been introduced in Parliament," she added.

PROXIES RULE

A number of present and past officials have privately said that the Bill will only consolidate government control.

"Can you fight this government? I can-

NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE BILL EXPLAINED

- Proposes to set up a National Sports Board, a regulatory body that would grant recognition or suspend recognition of a national sports federation and its affiliate bodies.
- Even the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will have to seek proxy recognition from National Sports Board.
- All the recognised national sports federations will be considered as public authority under the RTI Act, 2005.
- Bill seeks to set up a National Sports Tribunal to deal with all court cases. Appeals against the tribunal's judgments to be heard by the Supreme Court.
- The Bill makes it compulsory to include at least two sports persons of merit and two from its athletes commission to sit in the executive body.
- For gender parity, it states that all boards must have four women members as part of the executive board.
- The government will set up a National Sports Election Panel from among retired Election Commission officers to conduct the elections to all the federations.
- Age and tenure guidelines have been relaxed. Previously, executive committee members were barred from contesting after attaining the age of 70. Now they can contest till they are 75. Term restrictions are only for the offices of president, secretary general and treasurer and not for other executive committee members.

not, so I have to agree to the Bill. They already control the IOA and a few other federations through their chosen proxies, now everyone will have to fall in line because of the Bill," said an official on condition of anonymity.

He was hinting at how the government took over the IOA through the appointment of sports persons of merit. In November 2022, IOA elected its 16-member athletes commission headed by six-time World Champion MC Mary Kom. They then nominated eight sports persons of merit, including PT Usha, Yogeshwar Dutt, Dola Banerjee and Rohit Rajpal. Usha was then nominated and elected unopposed as president; Yogeshwar Dola and Rajpal were elected to the executive committee.

A former NSF president said the Bill is silent on many things, including the retirement age of officials. "There is no clarity on the retirement of executive members as there have been their continuance. I am sorry to say that provisions of the sports code and court directives due to Rahul Mehra's cases are far better than this Bill," he said. "I suspect the age and tenure concessions were brought in consultation with a few administrators who want to stay in office for as long as they want," he added.

2025/7/27



John J. Kennedy



India's institutes need reforms to tackle suicides, not Band-Aid fix

Some time ago, a student suicide in Vijayawada made the national headlines. Soon afterwards, news broke of the fourth such death in a year at IIT Kharagpur, one of the nation's top engineering institutes. The grief edged similar tragedies—a case in Odisha tied to sexual harassment, and the alarming frequency of suicide in Rajasthan's Kota, the country's coaching capital. In 2023 alone, Kota saw 26 student suicides, the highest in recent years.

According to the education ministry, 122 suicides at IITs, NITs and other Central Institutions died by suicide between 2014 and 2020, with 26 deaths in IITs in the last five years. These are not isolated incidents; they are symptoms of a deepening mental health crisis on our campuses. Each student tragedy brings public grief, which is followed by institutional reassurances. However, the real question remains: Do our institutions offer genuine support, or are we simply masking inaction with the illusion of care?

The "Campus Mothers" initiative at IIT Kharagpur highlights this issue. By assigning only female staff to support students emotionally, it relies on outdated stereotypes that women are by nature "nurturing." This not only reinforces gender roles but also burdens staff with unrecognized and untrained emotional labour. As sociologist Arlie Hochschild notes, emotional labour is real work, and expecting untrained or ill-trained staff to manage mental health crises is both ineffective and unfair. The WHO cautions that poorly managed interventions can worsen distress, placing such responsibility on staff

offers little safeguard for students in real need and sets up well-intentioned employees for guilt and burnout. Why wouldn't let "campus mothers" perform surgery: why abstract mental health care to disembodied volunteers?

More troubling still, these symbolic schemes distract from the deeper institutional rot. The environments in many Indian institutions are structurally stressful, rigidly competitive and emotionally unbeforgiving. A 2019 study in the *Indian Journal of Psychology* found that more than 65 per cent of Indian university students experience high or severe stress, primarily due to academic overload, poverty and the dread of failure. Students who once died and arrive at elite campuses only to find themselves in a relentless race for excellence, with minimal institutional support and pervasive stigma around mental health. Even high performers can feel isolated and unseen. In fact, a 2020 PLUO One study found that one in every four Indian college students shows symptoms of depression. However, the average student-to-counselor ratio on campuses is woefully inadequate. Often a single counsellor serves thousands of students; sometimes tens of thousands. Even when services exist, they remain hard to access, reduced to formalities. Instead of having psychologists and social workers, institutions implement ad hoc fixes like the "Campus Mothers" programme.

It is in this context that the Supreme Court's historic intervention assumes significance. Recognising a "legislative and regulatory vacuum", the Supreme

Court has issued a set of binding, 15-point guidelines, explicitly designed to overhaul how educational institutions respond to student mental health and suicide prevention. The court's measures strike at precisely the failings highlighted above, and show the path away from inaction.

These include a mandate that large educational institutions appoint qualified counsellors, psychologists, or social workers, trained specifically in child and adolescent mental health. Smaller institutions must formalise formal referral arrangements with external mental health experts. All staff must be specially trained by certified professionals in psychological first aid, identifying warning signs, and crisis response. Strict prohibitions on the public shaming of students, unrealistic academic targets and harsh segregation by performance address structural sources of distress. Written suicide prevention protocols, along with the prominent display of helpline numbers in all student areas, aim to make help-seeking visible, accessible, and stigma-free. The court even goes as far as to mandate changes in campus infrastructure, such as danger-proof cycling lanes, restricted access to high-rise areas and eliminating bullying and substance abuse in hostels.

Crucially, the Supreme Court's guidelines recognise the unique pressures of India's coaching hubs, instituting heightened protections, career counselling, and stress mitigation in these high-risk zones. Supervision is to be guaranteed by district-level monitoring committees, led by district magis-

trates, and states and Union Territories are ordered to implement the rules within two months.

Why does this intervention matter? These recommendations go beyond symptoms; they hold institutions accountable, prioritise professional intervention, and demand systemic safeguards. They take mental health out of the realm of "passively inflicting" or "passive sympathy" and root it firmly in professional, scientific practice.

If real laws are made, in hiring trained clinicians and creating safe, stigma-free spaces, the outcomes will improve. Evidence from across the globe shows that campuses that consent to such changes see earlier identification of at-risk students, greater uptake of support services and fewer tragedies. The Supreme Court's guidelines replace vague platitudes with enforceable norms. Counselling must be accessible, all staff must be trained adequately to recognise problems, bullying and segregation must end, and monitoring must be ongoing.

However, all these advances will fail without institutional will, sustained funding and a shift in campus culture. Deep-seated stigma, under-resourcing and bureaucratic inertia can still render the court's intentions. Monitoring and the law can enforce compliance; only commitment and leadership will guarantee dignity and safety.

The writer is retired professor and former dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Christ University in Bengaluru.

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Pay urgent attention to student suicides

The Supreme Court and other courts have in the past taken note of student suicides and issued orders and directives in many cases. The guidelines issued by the Supreme Court on Friday to governments are the most comprehensive of them all, and as the court has noted, should serve as an enforceable framework for suicide prevention in educational institutions and coaching centres. In recent years, student suicides have become a major social problem, calling for preventive and remedial action on the part of educational institutions, governments, student organisations, families and individual parents. There is an alarming increase in the number of student suicides in the last 10 years. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), suicides doubled in that period, with 2022 reporting over 13,000 cases, indicating an average of 35 suicides a day.

The guidelines rightly emphasise the need for prevention of suicides. The court has directed that all educational institutions with 100 or more enrolled students appoint at least one qualified counsellor, and those with fewer students establish linkages with mental health institutions. The institutions should also prioritise extracurricular activities, refrain from public shaming of students, and get their staff trained by mental health professionals. There are other guidelines as well. They will be binding on governments till legal and regulatory frameworks are enacted to deal with the problem. They will have the force of law and governments will have to enforce them and report compliance to the court.

Supreme Court has issued guidelines to address the problem

Suggestions and recommendations on the lines of the current guidelines have been made whenever student suicides have come up for discussion. Some institutions have implemented a few of the recommendations. Now that the court has issued directions, there should be no laxity. This needs to be emphasised because the statutory requirement of appointing grievance redressal committees to address crimes against women is not followed by many institutions. There may even be excuses such as the non-availability of counsellors. It is important to ensure that there is an ecosystem in all institutions that assists and promotes the mental health and wellbeing of students. A number of factors lead to student suicides—academic pressure, ragging, sexual harassment, financial difficulties, and discrimination based on caste, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. All these need to be taken seriously and that is why dealing with student suicides becomes a complex challenge. Parents also have an important role in ensuring that children do not come under pressure. Campuses should not become grounds for unhealthy competition. Instead, they should provide a kind, compassionate and healthy environment to students.

The scientific research ecosystem is expanding rapidly. According to a June 2023 article in *WordsRated*, over five million scholarly articles were published annually as of 2022. The number continues to rise driven by the global increase in research institutions and journals and, more critically, by the "publish or perish" culture that compels researchers to produce and publish findings quickly.

Publication pressure

Rising misconduct at the institutional level is closely tied to shifting academic priorities. Many institutions now focus heavily on increasing publication output, citation counts, and rankings, often at the expense of quality and ethical standards. Studies show that publication pressure is a strong predictor of research misconduct. Early-career academics, in particular, may resort to unethical behaviour under institutional pressure for high output. This overemphasis on metrics can undermine meaningful scientific contributions and compromise the integrity of research.

Traditional peer review, long regarded as the gold standard for quality control, is struggling to keep pace with the volume and sophistication of modern misconduct. Editorial staff and peer reviewers, often overburdened and under-

resourced, may lack the tools or time to detect refined forms of fraud or manipulation. This challenge is compounded by the rise of paper mills or organisations that mass-produce fake research for profit. These groups exploit vulnerabilities in the publish-

ing system, flooding journals with fabricated data, manipulated images, and illegitimate manuscripts.

Generative AI adds further complexity. While AI can support legitimate research, it also enables the creation of highly sophisticated fake studies,

making detection even more difficult. As a result, even top academic institutions are not immune to the growing wave of retractions and scandals.

In this high-pressure academic environment, retractions are increasing at an alarming rate. In

2023, India recorded 2,737 retractions, the third-highest total globally after China and the U.S. When adjusted for publication volume, India also ranks among the top five countries by retraction rate, highlighting the scale of the problem. According to

Keeping science credible

While AI can process vast datasets, it cannot fully interpret context, nuance, or intent. Hence human oversight of AI-generated warnings is essential in reviewing research papers.



Hybrid system

To detect fraud at scale, AI-powered tools are being adopted across the research ecosystem. These technologies can flag plagiarism, image manipulation, and potential paper-mill activity, providing real-time analysis that helps institutions catch compromised research early. AI's capacity to process vast datasets has significantly enhanced detection capabilities. However, AI cannot fully interpret context, nuance, or intent. Algorithms may flag false positives, miss subtle fraud, or struggle with complex scientific content. Hence, a hybrid approach, combining AI with human oversight, is emerging as the most effective solution.

A hybrid system that blends AI with human judgment offers the best defence against research fraud. AI excels at scanning large volumes of data and flagging potential issues. However, the true value of this system is realised when AI-generated alerts are assessed by human experts. Humans bring critical thinking, contextual insight, and interpret complex or ambig-

uous cases. This partnership ensures that AI-generated warnings are carefully evaluated, reducing the risk of errors and adapting to new patterns of misconduct as they arise. Human reviewers also provide a safeguard against algorithmic bias, ensuring systems evolve with changing fraud tactics. This synergy between machine efficiency and human expertise builds a more resilient, adaptive framework for maintaining research integrity.

It is critical for institutions and funding agencies to invest in ethics education and set clear guidelines for responsible research. Early-career researchers and Ph.D. students should receive training in transparency and accountability. Publishers, too, must invest in both advanced technologies and skilled editorial teams to ensure that only authentic research is published. As scientific publishing continues to grow, safeguarding research integrity requires greater vigilance and innovation.

A hybrid AI-human approach allows institutions to address misconduct more effectively, overcoming the limitations of AI alone. Ultimately, the credibility of science depends on our shared commitment to transparency, authenticity, and ethical conduct at every stage of research.

The author is Group CTO and CIO, Product and AI, Cosmos Communications.

'We have to acknowledge that Mughal period saw violence'

The head of the Curricular Area Group for social science textbooks, which works with NCERT, says previous attempts at writing textbooks have whitewashed such aspects unnecessarily, he says Britain has not recognised sufficiently the tremendous amount of suffering it inflicted not only on India but also on most of its colonies; textbook development team experienced zero political pressure, he says

INTERVIEW

Michel Danino

Mahir Paracha
NEW DELHI

Michel Danino, guest professor (archaeological sciences) at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar, and head of the Curricular Area Group for social science textbooks, which works in collaboration with the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), speaks about the process of designing new social science textbooks for middle school and the controversies surrounding the portrayal of the Mughals and the colonial era in the new Class 8 textbook. Edited excerpts

A debate has arisen about the portrayal of Mughals in the new

Class 8 NCERT textbook with their rule being called 'a blend of both brutality and tolerance'. Elaborate on an attempt to reframe portrayal of Delhi Sultanate and Mughals in the new textbook.

We did speak of brutality and tolerance, though we did not highlight these two words. They were caught by the media. It is a fact that this is a period which saw a lot of violence, and we have been pretty mild about it. If you look at Muslim rule like Babbarana or Akbarana, there is no doubt that these conquests were very violent. In the initial stages, this violence was not limited to India. The Turkic, Mughal, and Afghan powers warred against each other. In the Indian subcontinent as well as in Central Asia, sometimes in Persia and beyond. This has to be acknowledged as a fact of history. We feel that preced-

ing attempts (at writing textbooks) often have been whitewashing some of these aspects unnecessarily. We have tried to show the complexity of their personality (the Mughals).

What was the thought behind putting the note on 'History's Darker Periods' at the beginning of the history section. Also, there was an example of the Second World War and Nazi atrocities. Please explain.

It is more of a preparatory note for the student who suddenly would be exposed to unpleasant events of the past. This phase is in the so-called medieval period and the colonial era where there are famines, millions of deaths. The Second World War is the most striking example you can take where there were untold atrocities. And yet we find that a few years after the Second World War,



Germany is on good terms with most of the European powers, including those that Nazi Germany had mistreated. It is possible because the facts were faced and accepted, because there was no attempt to deny them. We are not trying to parallel this with anything in the Indian past, but it's only by looking honestly at history that you can find the key to healing, you know, the suffering. Because there is a government in place, in the U.S. too. And it is not unknown that there had been trillions of dollars of

drain of wealth that has also been very well documented, from British rule to Britain. I feel that Britain has not recognised sufficiently the tremendous amount of suffering that it inflicted not only on India but also on most of its colonies. I will not discuss the question of reparation, which is a separate question, but at least an honest admission of guilt, of the abuse, atrocities and economic plunder that took place during the colonial period, is something that we have not seen to a desired extent.

The new Class 8 social science textbook, unlike older versions, has no mention of Tipu Sultan or Haider Ali. On the other hand, there is an entire chapter dedicated to the rise of Marathas and Shivaji's exploits. What was the thought behind introducing a new chapter on Marathas?

For events like the Anglo-Mysore Wars you have to give the student enough context for that event to become meaningful. You can't just drop names like Tipu Sultan and Haider Ali. However, there are four more years after Class 8 where the working groups can take certain themes (which were missed out), and the gaps will be somewhat filled in the later years, hopefully.

It is very well known among historians that the division between Hindu, Muslim, and then the British period is absolutely not

valid. We wanted to show that this was not a straightforward story and there was a lot of resistance. We could only very briefly mention the case of the Ahoms in Assam and the Sikh Empire.

We selected the Marathas for bigger treatment because it is a fact that they were the ones who ultimately managed to build, though briefly, an empire which spread over a very large portion of India, since their influence extended to Delhi and even beyond to what is today's Pakistan.

They stymied multiple attempts by Mughals to conquer South India. Aurangzeb spent more than 25 years stuck in the Deccan. He was able to return to Delhi mostly because he was blocked by the Maratha campaigns.

I am just explaining the statement which we made in the textbook that was deliberately a little bit provocative - maybe the Brit-

ish conquered India more from the Marathas than from the Mughals.

There are rumours that there could be interference of the right wing in directing the trajectory of the new textbooks. Does the development of new textbooks mean that there is a reshaping of political ideology?

So the media loves these stories, and finding a political axe to grind is always very tempting. Our textbook development team has experienced zero political pressure from the government or from any right wing channel or personality whatsoever. We have been left free to work the way we thought we should work under the National Education Policy, 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework mandates.

Full interview is available at www.hindu.com/2025/07/28/

W/28/24

Lessons from the school tragedy in Rajasthan

The death of seven children during the collapse of a government school in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district should serve as a painful reminder of the decrepit infrastructure that often characterises government-run schools in many parts of India. The failure to release funds earmarked in the state budget for 2,710 schools identified by the education department as needing repairs makes this a crime of omission. Against this backdrop, state school education minister Madan Dilawar's remark that the money for repairs can't come from him is not merely insensitive but downright offensive.

A state where government school enrolment among 6-14-year-olds stands at close to 60% (according to Pratham's *Annual Status of Education Report 2024*) can ill-afford to overlook infrastructural needs. If students and their parents can't feel confident about the safety of a school building — a basic ask — and are unable to undertake out-of-pocket expenses for private schooling, it is a short path to rising dropout rates. The quality of school spaces, research indicates, is positively correlated with students' educational attainment.

The state government has ordered a high-level inquiry and announced compensation for the families of the children killed. It now needs to act on school repairs. The Centre has advised states and UTs to assess building safety, but also for evacuation/emergency readiness, and psychosocial care protocols of schools. While this is a welcome measure, states have to take a proactive role and not just scramble to do this after a Jhalawar-like incident.

The creativity curriculum

As we journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047, our greatest strength will be in our capacity to imagine, narrate, and innovate. Let's build an India where every child is a creator



SMRITI IRANI

IN MY JOURNEY across the television screen, the political trail, transformative classrooms, the rattling loom, among other evolving contexts, I've seen one truth hold steady — our power lies in our imagination, curiosity, creativity and innovation. India's creative economy is projected to reach \$80 billion by 2026, according to a report published recently. "Creative Economy" is not just a smart phrase but holds the potential for building creative-cultural assets. It can operate as a strategic lever of inclusive growth. I want to bring together two powerful perspectives — education and entrepreneurship, and classrooms and creators. Together, they present India's development frontier with strong, inclusive opportunities. The question, therefore, arises: How quickly can our institutions prepare young minds with the skills and confidence to help them participate in the creative economy?

A recent survey-backed report, 'Shaping Education to nurture the \$80 billion Creative Economy', by a leading Indian management consulting firm, states that only 9 per cent of students across 22 states demonstrate strong readiness in design thinking, research and real-world problem-solving. These are 21st-century skills and core competencies of the creative economy. In a world where AI can code but not create, these gaps matter.

The NEP 2020 calls for embedding 21st-century skills — critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication — into the curriculum. But we must go further. With the CBSE now mandating art-integrated learning from Grades I-X, and the Rs 400 crore Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (ICTT) launching in Mumbai, the blueprint is emerging.

Creativity cannot be part-time, and in that sense, it cannot be extracurricular. It is time to mainstream creative entrepreneurial mindset training — through maker spaces, startup labs, and design sprints. Let creativity be assessed not just in art rooms, but in business models, digital portfolios and social impact. Bring it midstream in the curriculum. The Report also highlights how international boards such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) are more successful in developing core competencies of the creative economy in school students compared to Indian boards.

India's creative force is exploding — not just in metros, but in village courtyards, small-town lanes, and local community centres. With affordable tech and deep cultural roots, over 100 million Indians — farmers, weavers and local experts — have become digital creators. The creator economy has now surpassed the \$500 million mark, powered not by polished panache but by raw authenticity! Its revolutionary power shatters barriers: In Rajasthan, women resurrect and champion vanishing oral histories through vibrant smartphone films. In Bihar, Bhopuri creators fill the education gaps left by tradi-

tional systems. They aren't just telling stories — they are telling "their" stories and fuelling a grassroots movement, rooted in language, identity and local pride.

We saw this raw, vernacular creative surge reshaping how India speaks, learns and leads in the recent launch of India's first public streaming platform, WAVES OTT, owned by Prasar Bharati. WAVES OTT accomplishes what commercial giants may not — by elevating daily creators. It is making local content and storytelling part of the national conversations. In today's India, the most powerful public messaging isn't top-down; it's created, uploaded, and amplified from the ground up. WAVES is not a passive pipeline of content; it is a democratic bridge. It confers institutional legitimacy on creators emerging from villages and towns and provides them with an equal opportunity to stream their content. Small-time films, established content producers, influencers, and student films can all showcase their content alongside each other.

In classrooms across India, teachers are turning into creators, and students into solopreneurs. Khan Sir from Patna — armed with chalk, wit, and a camera — educates millions through YouTube. Meanwhile, Bengaluru's Parikrma Foundation builds storytelling, theatre, and filmmaking into everyday learning. In Maharashtra, 17-year-old Shraddha Garad launched her own digital embroidery tutorial channel during the pandemic, is now selling patterns online and mentoring younger girls in her village — a student, a creator, and an entrepreneur rolled into one.

These aren't outliers — they are early signals of a systemic shift. Our policy must now respond with speed and scale. Imagine government-backed media labs and creator in-

India's creative force is exploding — not just in metros, but in village courtyards, small-town lanes, and local community centres. With affordable tech and deep cultural roots, over 100 million Indians — farmers, weavers, and local experts — have become digital creators. The creator economy has now surpassed the \$500 million mark, powered not by polished panache but by raw authenticity! Its revolutionary power shatters barriers.

cubators in every district — where students prototype campaigns, narrate local stories, and learn digital production as a life skill. But this transformation won't happen in silos. Ministries like MoE, MSDE and I&B must converge — blending skilling with storytelling, curriculum with creator capital. In a Viksit Bharat, literacy isn't just about reading and writing — it's about creating, pitching, and publishing.

Yet, the true power of the creative economy will be unlocked not only from scale but in its social resonance. In communities where institutions are slow or absent, creators are stepping in — bridging information gaps, shifting norms and activating public awareness in real time. In Odisha, tribal teenagers use Odia rap videos to teach climate-resilient farming — reaching over 5,00,000 farmers, where traditional extension systems have fallen short (UNICEF, 2024). In Kerala, ASHA workers produce short-form health content in Malayalam, doubling engagement on TB awareness compared to state-led clinic outreach. Vernacular influencers, across platforms, have driven more than 70 million views on subjects like menstrual health, child nutrition, and vaccinations — topics too often left out of mainstream media.

As we journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047, our greatest strength will not be in factories or code — but in our capacity to imagine, narrate, and innovate. In a world shaped by algorithms, India's currency is creativity — and its potential is limitless. Let's build an India where every child is a creator, and every creator is a force for economic, cultural, and social transformation. That is the India we must shape.

The writer is a former Union Minister

30/07/25



C.R. Sankumar

TALKING SHOP

Are We Creating Morons?

It is sad that today's generation is growing up in an age where technology is not being used as a supplement, but as a substitute for effort, struggle and learning

"Moore's Law means that more and more things can be done practically for free. If it only weren't for those who still want to get paid..."

— Jaron Lanier

When in doubt, blame those who are not around anymore to defend themselves. It happened to the Jews in the 14th Century, when they were accused of poisoning wells and causing the Black Death. It happened to John Lennon's wife Yoko Ono in 1970, when she was blamed for breaking up 'The Beatles'. It happened to Gabriel Dugas in the 1980s, when he was identified as 'Patient Zero' and blamed for the AIDS epidemic in the United States. It happened to Grigori Rasputin, when he was aligned with the Romanovs and blamed for the Russian Empire's misfortune. Closer home, it has happened to former politicians for decisions they took decades back in 'national disaster'. And it is happening in the tragic case of the Air-India Dreamliner takeoff-crash. Blaming those who cannot respond is a safe bet.

Having thus learnt from history's present and future, I blame Intel co-founder Gordon Moore for his prediction of 1965, when he said "the number of transistors on a microchip will double every two years, exponentially increasing computational power". His forecast—Moore's Law—has come true and ushered in a modern digital age, transforming our world from paper records and analog clocks to facial recognition, self-driving cars and Artificial Intelligence (AI) capable of writing essays, composing music and diagnosing disease. Mankind has ridden this wave, creating tools to help it think, create, procreate and navigate. All because of Moore, machines are smarter, faster and more intuitive. Also because of Moore, we face a burning question: Are humans getting dumber?

Face it. Today's generation is growing up in a world where technology is not just a supplement,



In daily life, children are becoming less capable of functioning without technological aid

but a substitute for effort, memory and learning. Ask teens to solve math problems and they reach for a calculator. Ask for a short story and they ring up ChatGPT interfaces. This dependency extends beyond academics, its extrapolation alarming... Technology promised us liberation, but what we are witnessing is subtle yet catastrophic mental regression, especially among the young.

Outsourcing Intellect

Technology was meant to empower us, removing the drudgery of repetitive labour and giving creativity the wings to fly and flourish. But the pendulum has swung alarmingly. We live in an era of intellectual outsourcing, with human thought often replaced by Artificial Intelligence. Look at the chilling instances below, which underscore the visible consequences in schools and universities worldwide. Students are relying on apps for the most basic of tasks, and their justification is startling: "Why should we struggle with thought when machines easily provide all the answers?"

Look at some new-age truths:

- In the US, studies show a surge in anxiety and depression among teenagers, correlated with increased screen-time and decreased real-world engagement. Teachers said over 70 per cent of their students were submitting AI-generated essays;

- In Mumbai, students not only used AI to finish their homework, but also needed it in school the next day to explain what they had written and why;

- In Canada, a 9-year-old addicted to video games suffered tremors and panic attacks when his tablet was confiscated, symptoms generally associated with addiction and withdrawal;

- In Japan, the hikikomori crisis—youth isolating themselves, surviving on virtual relationships—betrays a deeper loss. They are losing not just productivity, but purpose and real-world human connections as well, relying solely on online interactions; &

- In Columbia University, the term 'Google Effect' was coined by Betsy Sparrow. It showed that many were less likely to remember information they knew would be accessible online. The knowledge wasn't gone; it was simply never stored.

Till the 1990s, children spent hours outside their homes, playing games and solving life's problems on the fly. Today's pre-teens stare into screens for hours, engrossed in algorithm-curated entertainment. The digital world provides instant gratification by flooding the brain with dopamine, literally rewiring how children interact with reality.

Danger of Over-Convenience

A neuroscientist at Stanford University, Dr Anna Lembke says

high-dopamine environments created by video games and AI-powered apps make children seek constant stimulation, a "recalibrating of the brain's reward system". In the longer run, children and adolescents are left struggling with boredom, low tolerance to frustration and an inability to focus. At the neurological level, technology doesn't just change what we think; it changes how we think. Social media, streaming platforms and mobile games are programmed to flood our brains with dopamine, a chemical that leads to happiness. The result is a youth raised on gratification, where boredom is intolerable, patience is rare and focus near-extinct.

AI is not a passive tool. It is an architect of dependency. Apps are 'trained' to learn your habits, predict your behaviour and shape your decisions in ways that feel natural but are inherently manipulative. As we get comfortable letting algorithms decide what we watch, eat, read and buy, we lose the basic skill of decision-making.

AI's best friends insist that this is 'new literacy', that the Next Gen only needs to learn how to use tools efficiently. But if they delve deeper, the true cost may hit them. Learning is not about the speed of information retrieval; it is about the process of facing challenges, cultivating discipline and building mental strength. Short-circuited, all muscles atrophy. Tellingly, these muscles are in our brain.

This erosion is not limited to classrooms. In daily life, children are becoming less capable of functioning without technological aid. Even adults are filtering—some rely on GPS to drive familiar routes; parents turn to Smart-home devices for schedules; and nearly everyone glances at devices to access the phone number or contact details of even family members and friends. Empathy is being automated. Even therapists are competing with mental health chatbots. Embracing such a culture of substitution, sans enhancement, we are creating a generation skilled in using intel-

ligence, but not in developing it. **Reclaiming Human Brains**

The simple point is... Are we creating morons? The answer may be 'No' in the clinical sense. If that be the case, we are creating something far more dangerous—a generation that is happily relinquishing its cognitive sovereignty for comfort, speed and convenience. Who is responsible for this? Not machines, surely, but the same cannot be said for those who created the machines. By teaching children how to use AI, without teaching them when not to, we are playing with fire. We are rewarding shortcuts, not effort. We are sacrificing human skills for a disposable commodity. AI is brilliant, but it is not human.

Machines can be taught to mimic intelligence, but they can never replicate wisdom, intuition or moral judgment. With all respect to AI, be it American, Chinese, European or Finnish, machines are but tools designed by man—efficient, functional and bloody soulless. The brain is not a filing cabinet; it is the foundation of human insight, creativity and identity. If you disagree, look at history's great minds such as Einstein, Da Vinci, Curie or Bach. They weren't brilliant because they could access facts, but because they absorbed knowledge and feelings, juggled with this memory and reassembled it in new ways. If we outsource that foundational process to machines, what remains of intelligence?

The danger is not that AI will surpass human intelligence, but that we may just stop looking for wisdom and intellectual maturity and growth. In our quest to make things easier, we may inadvertently make ourselves irrelevant. Moore's Law gave us miraculous machines. But it did not promise meaning, purpose or humanity. That was all us. Machines are not making us morons. We are doing that all by ourselves.

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RAJEEV NARAYAN

THE WRITER IS A VETERAN JOURNALIST AND COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

For its creators and the rest of an extremely excited world, AI began with the promise of liberation through technology. Instead, we are witnessing a subtle but catastrophic mental stagnation globally, especially among the young



NEP के कामयाब पांच साल



डॉ. विनीत जोशी

29 जुलाई, 2020 को भारत ने न केवल एक नई नीति की शुरुआत की, बल्कि एक नए भारत की कल्पना करने का साहस भी दिखाया। राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति (NEP) 2020 एक सामान्य सुधार नहीं, बल्कि ऐतिहासिक क्षण था। यह नीति हमारे आत्मबोध, हमारी आकांक्षाओं और उस शिक्षा व्यवस्था की परिकल्पना की अभिव्यक्ति है जो हमें भविष्य की ओर ले जाएगी।



कॉमन रूम

अंकों से अर्थ की ओर | NEP 2020 भारत में अब तक की सबसे व्यापक परामर्श प्रक्रिया का परिणाम है, जिसमें देशभर से दो लाख से अधिक लोगों ने भाग लिया। इसका उद्देश्य पुरानी चीजों को केवल संवारना नहीं था, बल्कि सोच में परिवर्तन लाकर शिक्षा को रटत से समझ की ओर, अंकों से अर्थ की ओर ले जाना था। और, सबसे जरूरी बात, इसे परीक्षा-आधारित दौड़ से हटकर उद्देश्य-आधारित यात्रा का रूप देना था।

जीवन के अनुरूप | सिर्फ पांच वर्षों में यह दूरदर्शी दस्तावेज एक जीवंत आंदोलन बन चुका है। यह केवल सरकार द्वारा संचालित नहीं, बल्कि शिक्षक, संस्थान, अभिभावक, छात्र और समुदाय - सभी की भागीदारी से संचालित हो रहा है। हमने स्कूली शिक्षा के ढांचे को 5+3+3+4 में दोबारा परिकल्पित किया है, जिसमें प्रारंभिक बाल्यावस्था देखभाल, खेल-आधारित शिक्षा और मूलभूत साक्षरता पर विशेष बल दिया गया है।

सीधी छाप | NEP की सबसे प्रभावशाली उपलब्धि इसकी आम जनजीवन में पड़ने वाली सीधी छाप है। हमारा सकल नामांकन अनुपात (GER) 26.3% से बढ़कर 30% से अधिक हो गया है। पिछले छह वर्षों से महिलाओं का GER पुरुषों से अधिक रहा है। अनुसूचित जाति, जनजाति, अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग और अल्पसंख्यक समुदायों में

नामांकन निरंतर बढ़ रहा है।

बुनियादी संरचना | हमारा शोध भी तीव्र गति से आगे बढ़ रहा है। पीएचडी नामांकन दोगुना हो चुका है, शोध प्रकाशनों में 142% की वृद्धि हुई है और आज भारत वैश्विक शोध में तीसरे स्थान पर है।

भाषा का उत्सव | NCRF, NHEQF और CCFUP जैसे तंत्र छात्रों को शैक्षणिक, व्यावसायिक और कौशल के क्षेत्रों में निर्बाध रूप से आगे बढ़ने का अवसर दे रहे हैं। दोहरी डिग्री और 45 से अधिक अंतरराष्ट्रीय विश्वविद्यालयों के साथ साझेदारी ने स्टूडेंट्स के लिए नए अवसरों के द्वार खोल दिए हैं। पहली बार, CUET, NEET और JEE जैसी परीक्षाएं 13 भारतीय भाषाओं में उपलब्ध हैं। यही नहीं, अनुवादिनी, ई-कुंभ और अस्मिता जैसी पहलें बहुभाषावाद का उत्सव मना रही हैं।

परंपरा बनी ताकत | पांच वर्षों के अनुभव से स्पष्ट है कि NEP 2020 एक पीढ़ीगत बदलाव है। यह दुनिया को यह दिखाता है कि हमारे दिलों में बसी परंपरा हमारी सबसे बड़ी ताकत बन चुकी है। जब हम आगे बढ़ते हैं, तो अपने साथ केवल उपलब्धियों का गौरव नहीं, बल्कि आने वाले भविष्य को बेहतर बनाने का संकल्प भी लेकर चल रहे हैं।

28/7/2025 लेखक उच्च शिक्षा के सचिव हैं

Student unions as laboratories of citizenship

JOHN J KENNEDY

The Karnataka government's proposal to reintroduce student elections in colleges and universities has reignited a long-dormant debate about campus politics and the kind of citizens our educational institutions are shaping. After over three decades of a ban, the move is being considered following a proposal from the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and a nudge from Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who reportedly urged the government to cultivate leadership among students. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar have signalled intent. However, university administrators remain wary, warning that the return of campus politics could bring back violence, graft, and political interference. These concerns are not unfounded, but they also raise a deeper, more urgent question: What is lost when we silence student voices in the name of stability?

Student elections in Karnataka were

banned in 1988, following a few violent incidents. But since then, the state has undergone massive political, social, and educational transformation. Today, the push for reintroducing student unions is not just nostalgia; it speaks to a growing recognition that student leadership is not a threat to academic life but potentially its most vital force. Many Indian states and cities, such as Kerala, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and particularly Delhi, have continued to hold student elections. Their experiences offer Karnataka both a cautionary tale and a roadmap.

The case for reintroducing student elections rests on a foundational democratic principle: participation. A university is not merely a site for acquiring knowledge but also a space where students learn to negotiate power, voice dissent, and imagine a better society. Elections help institutionalise this spirit. In places like Jawahar Nehrū University and Delhi University, student unions have historically played pivotal roles in defending academic freedom, im-

proving student welfare, and demanding administrative accountability. For example, the JNU Students' Union has successfully intervened in policies around fee hikes, hostel allocations, and anti-discrimination measures. These student bodies often act as intermediaries between the administration and the student community, amplifying concerns, channelling grievances, and organising collective action.

Critics, however, highlight the risks and serious concerns: violence, polarisation, and academic disruption. Incidents like Rajsthan and Punjab, the return of student elections has sometimes led to aggressive factionalism, clashes, and even criminal allegations against candidates. In Delhi, the DU Students' Union elections have occasionally been marred by large-scale spending, mob clashes, and interference from major national parties. The 2015 DUSU elections saw such intense political rivalry that the university cancelled its presidential debates amid security concerns.

However, does this mean we should

scrap campus democracy altogether? The challenge is not student politics per se, but its direction. When student bodies become mere proxies for political parties, the educational purpose of their existence collapses. However, Karnataka can, and must, learn from these experiences to build a better, more accountable model.

The Longkesh Committee, set up by the Supreme Court in 2006, has already provided a robust framework to regulate student elections. It prescribes age limits, caps on campaign spending, and bans on candidates with criminal records, and insists on fair and peaceful campaigning. If effectively implemented and monitored, these guidelines can act as strong guardrails against the degeneration of student democracy into a power struggle.

States like West Bengal have gone further, experimenting with "apolitical" student councils that ban political party names, symbols, and slogans. While such models have been critiqued for being over-sanitised or undemocratic, they offer

one way to prevent external interference without silencing student representation. The key is not to depoliticise students but to allow them to develop their political consciousness organically, within ethical and civic bounds. After all, the purpose of education is not just to produce employable graduates but thinking citizens capable of engaging with democracy in all its complexities.

Today, campuses often feel colder. Many students express hesitation in making their voices heard for fear of administrative reprisals. Activism is viewed with suspicion; leadership is seen as a disruption. The result is a generation of students who may be bright and qualified but less practiced in disagreement, negotiation, or civic courage.

In this context, Karnataka's proposal can be seen not just as a political move but as an educational reform. With adequate safeguards, transparent monitoring, and a commitment to student welfare, campus elections could become training grounds for the next generation of India's demo-

cratic leaders. The goal is not to manufacture politicians but to cultivate informed, engaged citizens. To get there, universities must not act from fear but from vision. Vice chancellors and faculty have a critical role in regulating the process, mentoring student leaders, ensuring equity, and promoting a culture of dialogue over division. Faculty-guided debates, issue-based campaigns, and promoting civic values over party loyalty can help build a new grammar for student politics—one that is democratic, not demagogic.

Ultimately, the question is not whether student elections are risky; it is whether we believe our students can use voice over violence, ideas over ideology, and responsibility over rhetoric. The Karnataka government's rethink is a chance to trust students again—to let them participate, lead, and learn in a democracy on young, noisy, and urgent as ours, that trust may be the best education we can offer.

(The author is a former professor and dean of a Bangalore-based university)

How NEP facilitated a UK-India partnership

The framework on education, which turns five today, has identified internationalisation of education and invited the world to invest in India

In July 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set out a new vision for education in India, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). This visionary framework for the very first time identified internationalisation of education as a national priority and invited the world to collaborate and co-create with India's thriving higher education ecosystem. Provisions for foreign university campuses, joint and dual degrees, credit transfers, and an increased focus on research and innovation aim to propel India towards becoming one of the world's leading knowledge economies.

Almost exactly five years on, India is celebrating five years of the National Education Policy in action and India and the UK have prioritised education in our refreshed and forward-looking Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Last week in the UK, Prime Ministers Keir Starmer and Modi set out a vision for 2035 that will build on our already strong education and skills partnership, nurturing the next generation of global talent, creating opportunities for cross cultural

learning and accelerating our cooperation and ambition through an annual strategic education dialogue. And the future of our education partnership is already clear to see, with the opportunity to access the UK's world-class education growing right here in India.

In July, the University of Southampton became the first foreign university to open a comprehensive branch campus in India under the University Grants Commission regulations. We were delighted to attend the opening ceremony in Gurugram along with dignitaries from the Government of India and the University of Southampton. But it was among students that the excitement was most palpable – one told us that she was delighted to have the chance to attend a UK university without having to travel thousands of miles from her family.

It is students like her that this partnership benefits most.

This is an important milestone in the UK-India relationship, which has been made possible by the NEP, the UGC regulations and the UK and India's shared commitment to internationalisation, inclusion and innovation. And with four other UK universities set to follow Southampton's lead and open campuses in India next year, and two more set to launch soon

in GIFT City, this excitement is continuing to grow.

With some of the UK's best universities bringing their brands to India, thousands of bright Indian students will have new opportunities to gain the global skills that India's fast-growing economy needs. These students will be the pillars of India's knowledge economy and integral to the achievement of the vision of *Viksit Bharat*.

But these university openings are just one strand in the golden thread of people-to-people connections linking the UK and India.

For decades, British and Indian students have travelled to each other's countries, enriching our living bridge and playing their important part in our vibrant research, education and skills partnership. In the UK, we are proud to celebrate our 1.9 million strong Indian diaspora. Their contributions to the arts, language, culture, food, sports and everything else have been felt in towns and cities across the UK.

We are at an inflection point in transnational education. Together, both countries are shaping a future-ready, equitable and innovative model of transnational education that prioritises access, quality, and cross-cultural exchange. UK campuses in India are only one part of the story. More India-UK joint and dual degrees, con-



Regulations, when thoughtfully crafted and consistently implemented, can be powerful enablers of international learning.

(DPR PMU)

tures of excellence with industry, and science and research hubs are joining the thriving Indian higher education ecosystem. All this creates greater opportunities for young people, including for British students to spend time studying in India.

The bespoke Young Professionals Scheme (YPS), a visa scheme which allows young Indian and British graduates to live, study, travel and work in the other country for up to two years, is also an enabler of that.

The timing of our commitment to deepen our educational partnership could not be more important. In a world of geopolitical, geo-economic and technological shifts, and greater demand for higher education, it is crucial that our education systems evolve to drive innovation and build a skilled and forward-looking talent pool, ready to address global challenges and contribute to a safe and sustainable future for all.

That is why the UK and India's intellectual partnership will build on the strong foundations of the first five years of progress we have seen under the NEP. We will be responsive to emerging opportunities, adapt to the

rapid advancement of technology, and strengthen our collaboration.

And we hope to see universities continuing to partner to align their curricula, processes, and support systems to meet students' international aspirations. As the NEP shows, regulations, when thoughtfully crafted and consistently implemented, can be powerful enablers of international learning.

India and the UK are collaborating to build institutions that can foster a generation of globally minded, socially conscious leaders equipped to tackle complex transnational challenges. Education is the foundation on which economies grow, and where innovations that create the opportunities of the future are shaped. The UK and India will continue to nurture the next generation of talent through our global education and skills partnership – and we are excited to see what the next five years of the NEP will bring.

Lindy Cameron is British high commissioner to India and Alison Barrett is country director, British Council India. The views expressed are personal.



Lindy Cameron



Alison Barrett

BE A POOKIE

How IIT-Ropar's convocation became a masterclass in connection — a reminder that joy belongs on campus

A POOKIE, BY any other name, is someone who gets it. What it means to be young and vulnerable; to crave joy in unexpected places, or to question why solemnity must always march in step with ceremony. At IIT-Ropar's recent convocation, director Rajeev Ahuja, professor of Computational Materials Science, showed he hasn't forgotten the feeling of wavering between hope and anxiety, standing on the cusp of change. The 60-year-old didn't just hand out degrees. He doled out dabs, fist bumps, and Korean finger hearts. Formal, it wasn't. But memorable? Absolutely.

The videos of the ceremony on social media, clocking over 30 million views, have earned Ahuja the affectionate moniker of "pookie professor". His moves may not have had the Gen Z chutzpah — Boomer shoulders can only shimmy so much — but what mattered was the spirit. In a space often weighed down by formality and hierarchy, Ahuja brought presence, play, and a rare emotional intelligence. He didn't just preside over a convocation, he participated in it. Ahuja met students where they were, and in doing so, made the stage feel a little less daunting and a lot more empathetic.

The moment may have been light, but its resonance is far from trivial. Higher education in India is often weighed down by stress, burnout and a sense of alienation. In the endless jugglery of exams, deadlines, institutional pressures and existential dread, a small gesture of warmth — a shared laugh, a playful photograph — can feel like a moment of levity; an affirmation that learning isn't just about instructions, it is also about connections. Ahuja's gesture symbolised a rare kind of academic leadership that institutions could do more with: One that is committed to creating spaces where students can thrive as more than the sum total of their grades; one that values joy over ceremony. Because long after the degrees are framed and the marks forgotten, what stays with students is someone who made them feel seen and heard. Someone like a pookie, on their side.

National Sports Governance Bill, 2025: A game-changer for Indian sports

On 1 July 2025, at the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Lausanne, Switzerland, a high-level Indian delegation faced a stern reality check. The IOC voiced serious concerns over the persistent mismanagement, corruption, and governance issues within India's sports bodies. It flagged India's rampant doping problem, inconsistent Olympic performances, and the overall lack of accountability in sports administration. This intervention was not unexpected.



ASHOK KUMAR

For years, Indian sports bodies have operated in a largely opaque and self-serving manner, governed by internal constitutions and court orders rather than any comprehensive legal framework. In this context, the Government of India's introduction of the 'National Sports Governance Bill, 2025' marks a historic and much-needed step towards ensuring transparency, athlete welfare, and alignment with global standards.

Reform Anchored in Structure

At the core of the new legislation are three institutional mechanisms designed to restructure India's sports governance:

- The National Sports Board (NSB)
- The National Sports Election Panel (NSEP)
- The National Sports Tribunal (NST)

These bodies are envisioned to work in synergy to ensure fairness, ethical conduct, democratic functioning, and efficient conflict resolution in Indian sports.

Pillar for Development and Welfare

The National Sports Board will function as the apex policy and oversight body for sports development in India. Comprising experts such as former athletes, legal professionals, administrators, and representatives of civil society, the NSB will be responsible for:

- Formulating national sports policies
- Ensuring equitable distribution of funding and infrastructure
- Coordinating with state sports bodies and federations
- Supporting athlete welfare, scholarships, mental health, and injury management

Importantly, the board is expected to play a proactive role in addressing age fraud and doping, two critical issues that continue to damage the credibility of Indian sports.

With centralised verification systems and stricter monitoring, the NSB aims to restore integrity in athlete participation.

Democracy in Sports Federations

India's sports federations have long been plagued by non-transparent elections, unopposed selections, lifetime tenures, and nepotism.

The National Sports Election Panel (NSEP) is proposed as a key reform instrument to enforce democratic, fair, and time-bound elections in National Sports Federations (NSFs) and other governing bodies.

The NSEP will lay down guidelines and supervise the electoral processes independently, minimising external influence and internal manipulation. If executed successfully, this reform can foster greater legitimacy and trust in how sports bodies are managed. However, the real challenge lies in implementation, given the entrenched power dynamics. Yet, if achieved, it would indeed be a dream come true for Indian sports.

Towards Fair and Speedy Justice

Perhaps the most game-changing aspect of the bill is the establishment of the National Sports Tribunal (NST), a specialised legal body for resolving disputes related to sports. From selection controversies and contract disputes to disciplinary actions and doping cases, the NST will offer:

- A fast, impartial, and accessible dispute resolution system
- Relief from the burden of lengthy civil court proceedings
- Appeals that can go directly to the Supreme Court unless global norms specify otherwise

The NST aligns India with international best practices in sports jurisprudence, as seen in countries like the UK and Australia. It is a major step in ensuring that athletes and sports professionals have a trusted platform for justice. The Hon'ble Supreme Court and High Courts should not entertain any litigation unless the parties have first exhausted the option of approaching the NST.

Promoting Fair Play

The bill takes inspiration from the Olympic and Paralympic Charters, which uphold the values of fairness, honesty, equality, and respect. Indian sports, unfortunately, has often been tainted by ethical lapses, including favouritism, corruption, age fraud, and banned substance use. To counter this, the Sports Governance Bill mandates:

- Transparent governance practices
- Conflict-of-interest regulations
- Periodic audits and public disclosures

These mechanisms are designed to restore public faith and ensure that sporting institutions serve national interests, not individual fiefdoms.



ALAKNANDA ASHOK

Autonomy with Accountability

Crucially, the bill strikes a delicate balance between respecting the independence of sports federations and ensuring they operate transparently and ethically. As per the Olympic Charter, sports bodies must be autonomous and self-governing. The Indian Government respects this principle but emphasises that autonomy must coexist with accountability. The role of the National Sports Board will be that of a facilitator, not a controller, ensuring cooperative, standards-driven, and ethically sound governance.

Tackling Age Fraud

India continues to struggle with age manipulation in junior-level sports and a growing doping crisis. According to a WADA 10-year study, India ranks second globally in the number of doping violations. A recent 'Economic Times' article revealed that India also has the highest positivity rate (3.8 per cent) for banned substances among major countries. The bill proposes creating specialised units within the NSB to:

- Use biometric, medical tools for age verification
- Maintain centralised athlete databases
- Collaborate with NADA and WADA to enhance testing, education, and enforcement

If rigorously implemented, this could position India as a global example of clean and fair sport.

A Law Born Out of Urgency

The 'National Sports Governance Bill, 2025' is not merely a policy document; it is a visionary legal framework aimed at transforming the Indian sporting landscape.

For too long, India's athletes have been at the mercy of the sports federations and have borne the brunt of systemic flaws; this bill recognises their right to fairness, support, and justice. It is rooted in the understanding that sports organisations perform public functions that directly impact national pride, youth development, and global perception. Hence, they must operate openly, ethically, and in the public interest.

The National Sports Governance Bill, 2025 holds the potential to be a watershed moment for India's sports ecosystem. Through its tripartite reform structure — NSB, NSEP, and NST — it promises accountability, professionalism, and athlete — first governance. Its success will depend not just on enforcement but also on the political will and cultural shift within Indian sports institutions.

If implemented both in letter and spirit, the bill can elevate India to global leadership in sports governance, paving the way for cleaner competitions, empowered athletes, and a sporting system that the nation can be proud of.

(Ashok Kumar is Vice Chancellor Sports University of Haryana and Alaknanda Ashok is Joint Secretary of Indian Olympic Association)

Let's empower youth to change the world

A. K. MERCHANT

Our planet is caught in a grip of chaos, confusion and instability. At the same time its political, economic, and social order is volatile and out of control. People everywhere are surrounded by ordeals and hardships, struggling against incurable ills. There is despair, hopelessness and a lack of confidence about the future. Relationships are devoid of trust resulting in widespread crises, particularly among the young people.

A recent analysis of the terrible world conditions concludes that the deplorable plight of the "institution of family" which is the bedrock and cornerstone of society is the primary cause. In the Bahá'í Faith the importance of living a Bahá'í life, family relations, and upholding the sanctity of marriage are given high priority and all the followers are encouraged to reflect the divine teachings. Protecting the family from destructive forces and making it a space for children and youth to acquire the values and build character is absolutely essential for fulfilling the goals of *Atma Nirbhar* (Self-reliant) and *Viksit Bharat* (Developed India).

In December 2014, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 15 July as World Youth Skills Day. The goal is to achieve better socio-economic conditions for today's youth as a means of addressing the challenges of unemployment and under employment. In its 'State of World Population Report 2025' the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) records that India's population had reached 146 crores (1.46 billion). How can we turn this demographic milestone into a gateway to unprecedented possibilities

instead of a huge burden?

India's youth are brimming with potential - but many are navigating a maze of challenges.

■ **Education versus Employability** - Degrees do not always translate into jobs. Employers want practical skills; unfortunately many graduates in the country lack hands-on experience. While the world races ahead with Artificial Intelligence and digital tools, many institutions still teach outdated theories. Dropout rates in schools are still quite high, especially in rural areas and among girls after Class X.

■ **Unemployment and Underemployment** - Youth unemployment in India hovers around 20-23 per cent. The informal sector may provide jobs but there is no security or long-term benefits. On the other hand, there are many who are overqualified for the jobs they get, leading to frustration and burnout.

■ **Mental Health Crisis** - There are rising cases of anxiety, depression, and burnout, especially among students and young professionals. As per the most recent data available, one in every seven youth suffers from mental stress. Likewise, stigma around therapy and lack of affordable mental health care keep many from seeking help.

■ **Social Media Pressure** - The illusion of the "perfect life" online leads to self-doubt and comparison. Constant exposure to curated success stories can make young people feel like they are falling behind.

■ **Digital Divide** - Only ~45% of rural youth have internet access. Digital literacy remains low in many areas, limiting access to online education and jobs.

■ **Skill Development Gaps** - Just 5% of India's workforce is formally skilled,

Programs like YouthHub and Suryamitra are trying to bridge this gap, but scale and reach are still limited.

With 65 per cent of India's population under 35 years old, we must view it as an unparalleled opportunity to rewrite narratives of poverty, inequality, unemployment and underdevelopment. Youth must become doers and not remain dreamers. They need to ask not "How do I stand out?" rather "What do I stand for?"

Those in schools and institutions of higher learning, instead of chasing marks or grades, must seek meaning in whatever they are pursuing or striving for in building their career. In present-day education sharpening intellect, instilling empathy, providing direction and a sense of purpose! The youth are not inheritors of the nation but are shaping the nation.

There is power in collective action. It means recognizing that scale magnifies impact. For example, in a school of 5,000, if each child picks up one piece of litter, the entire campus shines. But if each drops one, it turns into chaos. Pupils must foster harmonious action - whether it is reducing waste, fighting misinformation, helping a struggling classmate, or speaking up for justice. Even small efforts by large numbers can have far-reaching impact.

Ownership is all about participation, engaged ethical, and empathetic responsibility in shaping a better and disciplined India. It is a shared duty of all citizens. India's youth are restless and ambitious - but to truly thrive, they need systems that support their growth, not just demand their success.

In the Bahá'í Community over

several decades, generations of young people have dedicated themselves to community-building endeavours and the advancement of their societies, through service to others, dedication to the well-being of the generations to come, living a coherent life, and forging new patterns of human interaction based on the principle of the oneness of humankind and remaking "the character of human society".

Given the fact that India holds the world's largest powerhouse of human potential and youth are at the very heart of it, Bahá'í institutions have devised, with a tried and tested track record, two successful grassroots educational programmes. The first one is for junior youth: Preparation for Social Action (PSA). This programme is rooted in the belief that spiritual and scientific knowledge should go hand in hand. It is an educational initiative designed to empower youth and adults to become active contributors to the well-being of their communities. It develops capabilities - defined as the ability to think and act effectively in specific areas of community life.

Participants are trained to become "promoters of community well-being", applying what they learn to real-life challenges. It is composed of 25 units covering: (a) Language and communication; (b) Mathematics and science; (c) Education, agriculture, health, and environmental conservation. PSA emphasizes learning by doing, with practical projects like community gardens, health awareness campaigns, and environmental restoration.

The second one for older youth is Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP). It is an educational and research organization that explores how science and religion - as comple-

mentary systems of knowledge - can be harnessed to promote the betterment of society. It aims to contribute to global discourses on peace, prosperity, and social transformation. It creates learning environments where individuals reflect on spiritual principles and apply them to real-world challenges.

Active in over a dozen countries, including India, ISGP has become a platform for thousands of young people to reflect, consult, and act on ideas that advance civilization. It is not just a seminar - it is a movement that helps young minds become protagonists in shaping a more just and unified world. These 10-day gatherings help college students explore how their studies and careers can align with service to humanity. ISGP collaborates with NGOs and development agencies to study topics like governance, equality, and sustainable development.

Both these programmes strengthen family harmony, and social fabric through the transformation they bring in the lives of the youth. These endeavours have proved that both programmes are scalable and already accessible in many languages around the world. Educators and development practitioners are invited to extend their support, understand the spiritual and scientific framework for the betterment of present-day society.

The world is watching India. Great numbers call for greater accountability, higher levels of commitment and even higher degree of moral responsibility. Then and only then, would the goals of *Atma Nirbhar* and *Viksit Bharat* be achieved.

(The writer is a social worker, independent researcher, and member of the Bahá'í Community of India. Views expressed are personal.)

'Multilingual, Inclusive Education Being Realised At Scale'

Marking five years of NEP, Union education minister argues its ideas, from language choice to stress on skills, have fundamentally changed classroom experience

Dharmendra Pradhan



In 2020, India more than just released a policy – it rekindled an ancient ideal. National Education Policy (NEP) placed learning at the heart of nation building, drawing from civilisational wisdom. Framed through one of the most participatory policy-making processes in history under late K. Kasturirangan's guidance, NEP 2020 was a visionary roadmap rooted in cultural values. It reimagined learning as a process free from confines of rote memorisation, rigid structures, and linguistic hierarchies. It set the stage for a holistic, inclusive and future-ready education system.

Five years on, NEP's impact is visible in policy corridors and classrooms. In early childhood classrooms, play-based learning is displacing rote memorisation; children read fluently in their mother tongue; Class 6 students explore hands-on skills in vocational labs. Its imprint is visible in research hubs where India's knowledge systems engage in dialogue with cutting-edge science. NEP's vision is reflected in the rise of women in STEM fields and in the growing global presence of Indian institutions.

Nipun Bharat Mission has improved learning outcomes, ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy by Class 2. Nipun Bharat's success, reflected in Aser 2024 and Parakh Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024, has made classrooms spaces of curiosity and comprehension. Initiatives like Vidya Pravesh and institutionalisation of Balvatikas will help integrate early childhood care and education. Add to this new-age textbooks and introduction of Jaadui Pitara and e-Jaadui Pitara in 22 Indian languages. Over 14L teachers have completed Nishtha training, and platforms like Diksha have expanded access to teaching resources.

NEP recognised language is not a hurdle but a powerful medium of empowerment. With 117 language primers developed and Indian Sign Language introduced as a subject, vision of multilingual, inclusive education is being realised at scale. Bhartiya Bhasha Pustak Yojana and National Digital Depository for Indian

Knowledge Systems will democratise access to linguistic and civilisational learning.

National Curriculum Framework for School Education and new textbooks for Classes 1 to 8 are in place. Prerna is a bridge programme to help curriculum transition and ensure students aren't overwhelmed but supported at each stage of their learning journey.

Centrally sponsored schemes like Samagra Shiksha and PM Poshan have helped achieve near-universal enrolment. NEP's reach has extended to underserved populations. More than 7.12L girls from disadvantaged



groups are enrolled in over 5,138 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas. Over 490 hostels have been sanctioned for PVTG learners and 692 hostels under Dharti Aash Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan. Prashast, a programme that screens for disability, helps the schooling system become more resilient and inclusive.

A key driver of the transformation under NEP 2020 are 14,500 PM Shri schools. These modern, inclusive and green institutions are being developed as exemplary schools aligned with NEP's vision, redefining both infra and pedagogy. The Vidyamall platform has connected over 8.2L schools with more than 5.3L volunteers and 2,000 CSR partners, directly benefitting 1.7cr students.

In higher education, total enrolment has risen from 3.42cr to 4.48cr, a 30.5% increase. Women now comprise nearly 48% of all students, and female PhD enrolment has more than doubled from 0.48L to 1.12L. This expansion in enrolment, especially for SC, ST, OBC, and minority students, marks a historic achievement for inclusivity in higher education. Female GER has surpassed male GER for six consecutive years.

Introducing Multiple Entry and Exit, Academic Bank of Credits with over 21.12cr APAAR IDs issued, and National Credit Framework have together provided flexibility and mobility. With 153 universities offering multiple entry and 74 multiple exit options, learning is not linear but modular and student-driven.

NEP's emphasis on research and innovation has improved India's Global Innovation Index rank from 81st to 39th. Over 18,000 startups have been incubated across 400 HEIs. Amusandhan NRE revamped PMRP 2.0, and the Vikr or One Nation One Subscription initiative show a commitment to decentralise access to research.

Tech platforms like Swayam and Swayam Plus have recorded over 5.5cr enrolments. Support of Diksha and PM e-Vidya with over 200 DTH Channels ensures high-quality content is available countrywide. Digital learning ecosystem's success, including biannual admissions and dual degree regulations, has made higher education more inclusive, interdisciplinary and industry-relevant. In QS World University Rankings 2026, 54 Indian institutions made the list, up from just 11 in 2014. Global universities Deakin, Wollongong, and Southampton have set up campuses in India.

The journey of transformation is being celebrated through Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Samagam, but is being measured in the quiet confidence of learners, teachers, and parents. We must continue to green our campuses, expand critical research infra, and deepen learning outcomes. Under PM's leadership, education is not just policy but the greatest national investment. Where there is learning, there is progress. A billion minds unshackled and empowered aren't just a demographic dividend, but New India's supernova.

Views are personal

July 20

As digital media reshapes our reading habits and cognitive abilities, a concerning trend emerges: the rise of a 'post-literate' culture. This shift may exacerbate existing inequalities

MARY HARRINGTON

When I was a kid in the 1980s, my parents sent me to a Waldorf school in England. At the time, the school discouraged parents from allowing their kids to watch too much TV, instead telling them to emphasise reading, hands-on learning and outdoor play.

I chafed at the stricture then. But perhaps they were on to something: Today I don't watch much TV and I still read a lot. Since my school days, however, a far more insidious and enticing form of tech has taken hold: the internet, especially via smartphones. These days I know I have to put my phone in a drawer or in another room if I need to concentrate for more than a few minutes.

Since so-called intelligence tests were invented around a century ago, until recently, international IQ scores climbed steadily in a phenomenon known as the Flynn effect. But there is evidence that our ability to apply that brain power is decreasing. According to a recent report, adult literacy scores levelled off and began to decline across a majority of OECD countries in the past decade, with the sharpest declines visible among the poorest. Kids also show declining literacy.

Writing in the Financial Times, John Burn-Murdoch links this to the rise of a post-literate culture in which we consume most of our media through smartphones, eschewing dense text in favour of images and short-form video. Other research has associated smartphone use with ADHD symptoms in adolescents, and a quarter of surveyed American adults now suspect they may have the condition. School and college teachers assign fewer full books to their students, in part because they are unable to complete them. Nearly half of Americans read zero books in 2023.

The idea that technology is altering our capacity not just to concentrate but also to read and to reason is catching on. The conversation no one is ready for, though, is how this may be creating yet another form of inequality.

Think of this by comparison with patterns of junk food consumption: As ultraprocessed snacks have grown more available and inventively addictive, developed societies have seen a gulf emerge between those with the social and economic resources to sustain a healthy lifestyle and those more vulnerable to the obesogenic food culture. This bifurcation is strongly class-inflected: Across the developed West, obesity has become strongly correlated with poverty. I fear that so, too, will be the tide of post-literacy.

Long-form literacy is not innate but learned, sometimes laboriously. As Maryanne Wolf, a literacy scholar, has illustrated, acquiring and perfecting a capacity for long-form, "expert reading" is literally mind-altering. It rewires our brains, increasing vocabulary, shifting brain activity toward the analytic left hemisphere and honing our capacity for concentration, linear reasoning and deep thought. The presence of these traits at scale contributed to the emergence of free speech, modern science and liberal democracy, among other things.

The habits of thought formed by digital

When thinking is a luxury



NRT

reading are very different. As Cal Newport, a productivity expert, shows in his 2016 book, "Deep Work," the digital environment is optimised for distraction, as various systems compete for our attention with notifications and other demands. Social media platforms are designed to be addictive, and the sheer volume of material incentivises intense cognitive "bites" of discourse calibrated for maximum compulsiveness over nuance or thoughtful reasoning. The resulting patterns of content consumption form us neurologically for skimming, pattern recognition and distracted hopping from text to text — if we use our phones to read at all.

Increasingly, the very act of reading scarcely seems necessary. Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts offer a bottomless supply of enthralling, short-form videos. These combine with visual memes, fake news, real news, clickbait, sometimes hostile misinformation and, increasingly, a torrent of AI-generated slop content. The result is a media environment that seems like the cognitive equivalent of the junk food aisle and is every bit as difficult to resist as those colourful, unhealthy packages.

A classical liberal might retort: Sure, but just as with junk food, it's up to the individual to make healthy choices. What this fails to take into account, though, is that just like the negative health impacts of junk food overconsumption, the cognitive harms of digital media will be more

pronounced at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale.

We see hints of this already. As Dr. Wolf points out, literacy and poverty have long been correlated. Now poor kids spend more time on screens each day than rich ones — in one 2019 study, about two hours more per day for US tweens and teens whose families made less than \$35,000 per year, compared with peers whose household incomes exceeded \$100,000. Research indicates that kids who are exposed to more than two hours a day of recreational screen time have worse working memory, processing speed, attention levels, language skills and executive function than kids who are not.

Bluntly: Making healthy cognitive choices is hard. In a culture saturated with more accessible and engrossing forms of entertainment, long-form literacy may soon become the domain of elite subcultures.

Already, elites, religious groups and conservatives are embracing self-imposed limits on tech use. Between 2019 and 2023, over 250 new classical schools, many of them Christian, opened in America, with an ethos centred on long-form "great books" literacy. New guides and initiatives from this crowd abound, such as the recent book "The Tech Exit: A Practical Guide to Freeing Kids and Teens From Smartphones," by Clare Morell, a fellow at a conservative think tank.

It's not just conservatives. Tech nota-

bles such as Bill Gates and Evan Spiegel have spoken publicly about curbing their kids' use of screens. Others hire nannies who are required to sign "no phone" contracts, or send their kids to Waldorf schools, where such devices are banned or heavily restricted. The class scissor here is razor-sharp: A majority of classical schools are fee-paying institutions. Shielding your kids from device overuse at the Waldorf School of the Peninsula will set you back \$34,000 a year at the elementary grades.

Many US states, including California, are restricting student smartphone use, which in theory ought to level the playing field. But it is optimistic to assume such rules will be enforced with the same determination in small-class private schools as in massive public schools, let alone in these students' homes.

Even beyond Silicon Valley, some people are limiting digital stimulation (like social media or video games) for set periods of time as part of the self-improvement practice of dopamine fasting.

The ascetic approach to cognitive fitness is still niche and concentrated among the wealthy. But as new generations reach adulthood having never lived in a world without smartphones, we can expect the culture to stratify ever more starkly. On the one hand, a relatively small group of people will retain, and intentionally develop, the capacity for concentration and long-form reasoning. On the other, a larger general population will be effectively post-literate — with all the consequences this implies for cognitive clarity.

What will happen if this becomes fully realised? An electorate that has lost the capacity for long-form thought will be more tribal, less rational, largely uninterested in facts or even matters of historical record, moved more by vibes than cogent argument and open to fantastical ideas and bizarre conspiracy theories. If that sounds familiar, it may be a sign of how far down this path the West has already travelled.

For canny operators, such a public affords new opportunities for corruption. Oligarchs attempting to shape policy to their advantage will benefit from the fact that few will have the attention span to track or challenge policies in dull, technical fields; what a majority now wants is not forensic investigation but a new video short "owning" the other tribe. We can expect the governing class to adapt pragmatically to the electorate's collective decline in rational capacity, for example, by retaining the rituals associated with mass democracy, while quietly shifting key policy areas beyond the reach of a capricious and easily manipulated citizenry. I do not celebrate this, but our net-native youth seem unfazed: International polls show waning support for democracy among Gen Z.

Let's you mistake me, there is no reason the opportunity to sideline the electorate or to arbitrage the gap between vibes and policy should especially favour either the red team or the blue team. This post-literate world favours demagogues skilled at code-switching between the elite language of policy and the populist one of meme-slop. It favours oligarchs with good social media game and those with more self-assurance than integrity. It does not favour those with little money, little political power and no one to speak up for them.

The New York Times 25/7/2019

Why schools must embrace inclusion

ANCHAL BHATEJA

Two weeks before my Class 10 board exams, I lost my eyesight. There was no time to request a modified question paper from the CBSE that excluded visual-based questions. I was assigned a scribe. I painstakingly recreated diagrams—from convex to concave mirrors—on rough sheets so my scribe could replicate them. I completed the exam and secured a full CGPA.

But when I returned to my school seeking admission to Class 11, I was told, "You are abnormal. We are a normal school."

That was almost a decade ago. But the fight for access, respect, and dignity in India's school system continues. The only difference now is that the legal framework has strengthened—and the courts are finally beginning to step up. Last month, in a landmark judgement, the Delhi High Court ruled in *Aadriti Pathak vs GD Goenka Public School* that the school's refusal to readmit a child with autism was not just callous—it was illegal. Aadriti had been enrolled at the school under the general category. When she faced challenges adjusting, her parents offered sustained support, paying fees and providing a shadow teacher.

Instead of accommodating her needs, the school shut its doors. Its reasons—"no vacancy" and "behavioural concerns"—failed to hold up in court. Justice Vikas Mahajan rightly concluded that the school's actions violated Sections 16 and 17 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act), which mandate inclusive education and prohibit discrimination in schools—government and private alike.

The RPwD Act, enacted to align Indian law with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), provides a robust legal architecture to uphold the right to inclusive education. Section 16 obligates all recognised educational institutions to admit children with disabilities without discrimination, ensure physical and curriculum accessibility, provide necessary support systems, and offer reasonable accommodations tailored to each child's needs. Section 17 strengthens these protections by requiring access to assistive technology, transport facilities, accessible books and materials, and curriculum modifications such as extra time, scribes, and language exemptions.

Further, the RPwD Rules, 2017, prescribe detailed accessibility norms for school infrastructure, digital education platforms, and teaching practices. Rule 15 empowers the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) to contin-

uously update these standards. In 2024, this led to the notification of the Accessibility Code for Educational Institutions, which mandates physical, functional, and ICT accessibility across all educational spaces, with cost-effective retrofitting measures for existing buildings.

The Right to Education Act, 2009, as amended post the *Rajneesh Kumar Pandey* case, requires schools to ensure barrier-free access and mandates one special educator for every 10 students with disabilities in primary school and every 15 in upper primary. Schools that fail to comply can lose their recognition. The National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, goes further, acknowledging the systemic transformation required to build inclusive schools. It mandates flexible curricula, multimodal content, differentiated instruction, and individualised education plans (IEPs). Crucially, it demands the training of all teachers—not just special educators—to support children with disabilities and promote equity in learning outcomes.

Government schemes like Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan provide resources for infrastructure upgrades, teacher training, aids and appliances, transportation, and scribe allowances. The Pragyata Guidelines and Guidelines for e-Content for CwDs stress the importance of universal design, multimodal formats, and accessible digital learning. But without school-level enforcement, these efforts fall short.

Creating accessible school environments is only the first step. Educators must move beyond rigid curricula and one-size-fits-all assessments. They must receive training on inclusive pedagogies, cross-disability learning, and the use of assistive technologies. Schools need immediate and proactive compliance. They must shed the outdated notion of "normalcy" and embrace the full spectrum of learning needs. Teachers and principals must be trained, infrastructure made accessible, and admission policies reviewed to eliminate all discriminatory practices.

Governments must go beyond guidelines and ensure implementation. Recognition, licensing, and funding must be conditional on inclusivity. Monitoring bodies like the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights and its state-level counterparts must investigate and act when complaints are raised. Parents must be partners, not adversaries. And most importantly, children must be seen not as burdens but as bearers of rights and potential.

(The writer is a research fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and a consultant at Mission Accessibility)

5/30/9

Not Just More, But Better, Jobs



Rajesh Shukla

A recent Reuters poll of policy experts confirmed that despite commendable economic growth—over 8% in the last fiscal year—job creation remains India's top economic challenge. The real issue, however, goes beyond unemployment figures. The challenge is the quality of jobs—what do they pay? How stable are they? Do they align with workers' skills, aspirations and life goals?

According to PRICE's ICE 360° survey, 40% of chief wage earners are dissatisfied with their occupation. This isn't due to job mismatch or long commutes to their offices. The survey reveals that 74% of these dissatisfied workers cite insufficient income as the main reason. Another 14% point to irregular or uncertain earnings, and 6% mention a lack of social security. These concerns underscore that many Indian workers struggle to meet their basic financial needs—even when fully employed.

Alarmingly, this isn't just a concern for those who slog in the informal sector. Even among salaried employees, only 35% are covered by PF schemes. Coverage for pension, gratuity, health insurance and maternity leave remains below 25%. A significant share of India's formal workforce still lacks adequate protections and benefits—undermining household financial stability and deepening long-term vulnerabilities.

All of these point to a clear conclusion: India's employment challenge isn't just about creating more jobs, but about making them secure, fairly paid and tied to long-term economic stability. Too many jobs today are fragile and offer little scope for upward mobility or growth.

To address this, India must redefine what success in employment policy looks like. Instead of focusing solely on job counts and GDP growth, we must also measure satisfaction, wage adequacy and access to social protections. The goal should be to build an economy in which employment supports not just survival but dignity and progress as well.

► **Modernise skilling & education** India must move away from a degree-focused model and toward practical, flexible, industry-aligned training. Dual vocational programmes, employer-led apprenticeships and modular digital certifications need to become more widespread and responsive to local job market needs. These efforts should not stop at job entry but continue as part of a culture of lifelong learning.

► **Support high-employment sectors** Logistics, RE, agro-processing, tourism and care services can absorb large numbers of workers. Policy incentives for these sectors should not just reward capital investment or output, but also factor in job crea-

tion, fair pay and the provision of benefits.

► **Invest in employees** Businesses should recognise that investing in employees is not a cost but a foundation for sustainable growth. This means offering fair wages, ensuring job security and extending social protections not only to core staff but also to contract and gig workers. Companies that value long-term workforce development will also benefit from more motivated, loyal and productive employees.

► **Local policies** State governments must be empowered to tailor employment policies to local realities. Labour markets differ vastly from state to state and city to city in this country. A centrally supported jobs innovation fund could reward states that improve employment outcomes, particularly in terms of formalisation, wage growth, and inclusion of women and youth.

► **Improve labour market data** India's current systems fail to capture the breadth of informal and gig work, leaving policymakers with an incomplete picture. Building a comprehensive labour information system—based on Aadhaar-linked job histories, earnings records and benefit coverage—can help craft better, data-driven employment policies.

India's ambition to become a global manufacturing and digital powerhouse cannot be fulfilled unless the workforce is supported in a meaningful way. Competitive economies are not defined only by innovation and infrastructure, but also by how they treat their workers.

Valuing the contributions of employees through decent pay, career mobility and workplace protections is essential for long-term progress.

The broader challenge is to ensure that economic growth translates into livelihoods that are not only available but worth having. Unless we fix this imbalance between expansion and equity, we risk eroding public trust and losing the energy of a generation that wants to contribute but finds few rewarding paths.

India's growth story is real and impressive. But it must become more inclusive and worker-centric to be truly sustainable. The real jobs crisis is no longer just about employment gaps—it is about the quality of work and whether it brings dignity and progress. As we reimagine India's employment model, our focus must be not only on creating opportunities but also on building futures—futures in which every worker has a fair chance to thrive.

The writer is MD-CEO, People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE)

Engage, Don't Spat Over Data



Deepak Mishra

Earlier this month, Reuters published results of a poll it conducted between June 19 and July 21 on India's unemployment situation. Based on four questions posed to 50 economists in July, Reuters reported that 'official jobs data is not accurate', and suggested India's true unemployment rate could be significantly higher than what official sources indicate.

Within 24 hours of its release, PIB issued a detailed response, arguing that the Reuters article 'suffers from a lack of statistical foundation and relies on unverifiable perceptions rather than data-driven evidence'. It labelled it as misleading.

While healthy disagreement is vital for a functioning democracy it can

also leave ordinary citizens uncertain about which sources to trust and how to interpret competing narratives. As a country, we can all benefit from reflecting on how to raise the quality of such discourse. In the Reuters unemployment data report case, let us consider how key actors—media, participating economists and Govt—might approach these conversations in ways that prioritise constructive engagement.

A story like this conducted by a media outlet with global reach and respect reflects India's growing global relevance. Yet, one doesn't have to be a defender of Govt to see the partisan nature of its survey. For instance, it asked, 'Are the government's unemployment data accurate?' with only two options: 'yes' or 'no'. Survey methodologists would point out that this is a leading question. It's worded in a way that guides the respondent toward a particular answer. A more neutral framing—like 'How would you characterise the government's unemployment data?' with a wider range of options—would have yielded more accurate insights.

Moreover, while some economists expressed concern about definitional issues in labour force measurement (e.g., threshold for considering someone 'employed'), these were interpreted as criticisms of the data itself. In fact, the economists were telling Reuters that the inaccuracy stems from the definition, not from the data, a crucial distinction the report fails to mention.

There are already several high-quality analyses of India's labour

market. ICRIER's India Jobs and Occupation Tracker (I-JOT), for instance, finds that Govt-NSSO's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) tracks trends in employment reasonably well. Similarly, Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment's 'The State of Working India' annual report conducts detailed analysis using PLFS data, indicating a level of confidence in its overall integrity.

Media outlets must consider partnering with domain experts, investing in stronger research capacity, tightening their editorial process, and opting for fewer clickbait headlines in favour of more robust journalism. Such steps would help ensure that critical reporting is also constructive and well-founded.

The response rate to the Reuters poll—83%—is impressively high. It's heartening to see economists actively participating in polls, rather than administering one. That said, experts participating in the Reuters survey should have declined if they don't have a good understanding of India's labour market and follow PLFS closely. Moreover, they must consider how their responses could be misinterpreted in public discourse. Greater caution and context in framing critiques can ensure that legitimate concerns are not misconstrued.

Govt has made important strides in strengthening its global image and credibility. Understandably it wishes to counter narratives it sees as misrepresenting its efforts. But not all criticisms require rebuttals. An overly swift or forceful response can amplify an issue that may otherwise have faded from public attention.

A more effective strategy may be to engage in dialogue, rather than to public contestation. For example, inviting the Reuters team to discuss their findings with senior officials—such as the CEA or secretary of MoSPI—would demonstrate openness and confidence. Exposing sloppiness would compel such reportage to be more objective in the future.

Governments in East Asia like in China, South Korea and Vietnam have often adopted a long-view approach, addressing external critiques through delicate diplomacy rather than public rebuttals. India could take a page from this playbook, tailoring it to its own domestic context.

Finally, it's essential that public institutions and personalities uphold their responsibility to promote accurate, balanced and timely information. This means calling out misinformation and poor-quality analysis wherever it originates, and defending credible work with equal vigour.

Public trust in economic data is a national asset. Safeguarding it requires a commitment to transparency, mutual respect and continuous improvement from all sides. With thoughtful engagement, we can turn moments of contention into opportunities for dialogue. In doing so, the right of every Indian to access objective, reliable and credible economic information can be upheld.

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JOB NUMBERS



Work it out to make it work

Not Just More, But Better, Jobs



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To address this, India must redefine what success in employment policy looks like. Instead of focusing solely on job counts and GDP growth, we must also measure satisfaction, wage adequacy and access to social protections. The goal should be to build an economy in which employment supports not just survival but dignity and progress as well.

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JOB NUMBERS



Work it out to make it work

Deaths in school

Infrastructure of government schools
needs urgent attention

In July 25, tragedy awaited students of Classes 6 and 7 at the Piplodi Government School in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district as they assembled for prayer. A part of their school building gave way leading to the deaths of seven and injuries to several others. Most of the students were from tribal communities. The school is in the southeastern part of the State bordering Madhya Pradesh. There was a similar incident the next day in Nagaur district but the school was closed being a holiday. There has been much public anger in the State over the incidents which, quite rightly, have thrown the spotlight on the state of government schools. As in UDISE 2023-24 data, there are more than 70,000 government schools in Rajasthan serving nearly 84 lakh students, especially from the poorer and marginalised sections. Of these, some 8,000 schools have been estimated by the Education Department to be in a poor condition. The Jhalawar school was not among the schools identified as being in a poor state, indicating the extent of the problems. Some ₹650 crore had been allocated in the past two State budgets for boosting the infrastructure but inefficiencies in government have ensured that the measures did not make much difference. Fixing the infrastructure of government schools should be a priority for the State's Bharatiya Janata Party government.

The tragedy in Rajasthan should serve as a wake-up call across India, given the current policy defocus on government-owned education institutions. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 had called for an immediate increase in spending on education, from some 4.6% of GDP to 6%, identifying one-time spends on infrastructure as the lead priority besides identifying other sectors for a boost in support. Five years into the NEP, there is little to suggest that this has been a focus area for governments, Union or State. Policy thrusts have been more towards reducing government support, self-financing, and encouraging private sector contribution. While these may be applicable to higher education, basic school education is a primary duty of the government – as it is across the world including in the most developed nations. Setting up model schools and funding them to serve as exemplars cannot be at the cost of mass school education. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy has been identified as a critical area for boosting workforce productivity and reaping the demographic dividend that will soon run its course as India's population ages. But the discourse on pathways towards achieving them is more on pedagogy, non-formal teaching and so on than the essentials – an infrastructure boost and teacher recruitment and training. *nk*



JAYANT CHAUDHARY

A roadmap for learning

Surveys like PRS 2024 can provide key insights for a stronger education system

IN RECENT YEARS, education in India has not only expanded in scale but matured in ambition. Our reforms today are about quality, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. We have made a deliberate shift towards ensuring that every child in the country not only attends school but also truly learns. To understand if that is happening, we must pause and ask the right questions. What are our children learning? Are schools enabling them to build essential skills at each stage of their education? These questions require reliable, scientific answers.

As an expert noted, "Students can learn despite poor teaching, but they cannot overcome poor assessment." This reminder is crucial because the best way to determine the effectiveness of our education system is through large-scale assessments. These analyse macro trends to determine educational effectiveness. They find patterns in data from different locations, subjects, grades, and schools. This form of evaluation helps teachers and policymakers understand the strengths and weaknesses of students. Overall, it helps diagnose systemic issues and buttress policymaking.

Over the past two decades, India has gradually built capacity in this area. Advancing from the National Achievement Surveys (NAS) to PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan (PRS) 2024, the scale of the survey has grown to cover 21.15 lakh students in 74,229 schools across the country. Students from Grades III, VI, and IX were assessed to correspond with the end of

the foundational, preparatory, and middle stages of schooling. These stages are now well-established under the new curricular structure in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

At the foundational stage, the data show that India has not only recovered from the learning losses of the pandemic but, in many cases, surpassed earlier benchmarks. In Grade III, 57 per cent of children demonstrated proficiency or above in Language, up from 39 per cent in 2021 and 47 per cent in 2017. In Mathematics, the figure has jumped to 65 per cent, compared to 42 per cent in 2021. These gains reflect the serious and sustained efforts made under the NIPUN Bharat Mission, underscoring how targeted support, teacher mentoring, and early-grade interventions are beginning to bear fruit. The data also show that government schools in rural areas have, in some cases, outperformed their urban and private counterparts in foundational grades. This is a significant development, demonstrating what focused, systemic reform can achieve. However, as we move to Grades VI and IX, the picture becomes more complex. Central government schools have performed well overall, but marginal gaps persist by gender and region, particularly in Mathematics and Science. These are areas that need urgent focus.

Many comparisons have been made between PRS 2024 and earlier surveys, which are misplaced and require clarification. The struc-

ture of the assessment has changed. Earlier surveys focused on Grades V and VIII, whereas this edition concentrates on Grades VI and IX, aligning with the new curricular stages. Moreover, the shift from textbook learning outcomes to competencies means the assessment tools are fundamentally different. Directly comparing a Grade V outcome from NAS 2021 with a Grade VI outcome from 2024 is methodologically unsound. Only Grade III scores are comparable across all three surveys, and the improvement in these scores is established. Any interpretation that suggests a decline in performance based on comparisons with other grades risks misrepresenting the actual story.

What we now have is not just a report card, but a roadmap. The actual value of the data from the survey lies in how they are used locally. PRS provides district-level insights, and it is now the responsibility of states, districts, and school systems to translate these findings into granular, need-based interventions. Every state and UT will need to study its data — where learning levels are strong, where gaps persist, which support systems are working and which are not. The Centre will continue to provide guidance, frameworks, and resources; however, the real impact will come from what is done at the school and district levels. Our goal is not just to meet national benchmarks, but to achieve international comparability, and we are steadily moving in that direction.

The importance of assessments, however, does not end with school education. We must also focus on how young people transition into the world of work, entrepreneurship, and economic participation. Skills matter as much as academics. That is why, soon, the government will initiate a qualitative, large-scale skills assessment that will help us understand the skill-readiness of our population, map regional variations, and plan targeted interventions in vocational education and skilling. The recent adoption of a data-driven IT grading system and inclusion of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the PLFS exercise is also aimed at providing key inputs for our reform process.

The ambition is to link learning to livelihood, ensuring that every young Indian is not only educated but also employable, entrepreneurial, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to the country's development.

PRS 2024 is a powerful reflection of how far we have come. But it is also a signal of what lies ahead. As we build stronger foundations in school education and expand the horizon of skill development, we remain committed to a system that is inclusive, evidence-driven, and future ready.

The writer is Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Minister of State for Education, Government of India

POOR FIGURES

Much is said about the good that the reservations policy has done. Yet the employment scene appears to fall pitifully short of the ideal as far as quotas are concerned. In Central universities, 80% of posts for professors under the other backward classes category remain vacant as do 83% for the scheduled tribes. This information was given by the Union minister of state for education in reply to a question by the Rashtriya Janata Dal member of Parliament, Manoj Kumar Jha. The figures for associate professors' posts are 69% vacancies for OBC and 65% for ST. The scheduled castes fare fractionally better, with 51% of posts being vacant. The posts of assistant professors are better filled, with 23% vacant in OBC posts, 15% in ST and 14% in SC. In the general category, 39% posts of professors are unfilled and 16% of associate professors. The contrast is stark and embarrassing. Mr Jha also asked whether the 'none found suitable' numbers were greater for reserved seats, but there is apparently no record of that. It is obvious that in spite of levelling to some extent the field of education and development, the lacuna in recruiting quota candidates in the teaching system remains huge. Is this a glimpse into deep-seated prejudices that appear as fair assessment? It is certainly possible to infer a lack of political will to implement reservations for the purpose for which they were formulated.

Recently, the department of personnel and training refused to answer a right to information query about the number of backlog vacancies under SC/ST and OBC categories in the Union government. This was in spite of the fact that the questioner had appealed under the RTI Act and the appellant authority had ordered the DoPT to share the information. The questioner feels that the department either has faulty data collection or the numbers are too shocking to be revealed. What is being revealed, though, is the entrenched refusal to create balanced representation in work. The government itself has not done it. When the caste census is being hotly debated, this is not just ironical but also politically dangerous for the ruling regime. Years of creating vacancies cannot be corrected in a day. But the government must be able to show that it is trying. So far it does not seem so.

7/13/10

नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स गवर्नेंस बिल में खेल प्रशासन को जवाबदेह और पारदर्शी बनाने की कोशिश

खेल महासंघों की निरंकुशता खत्म होगी ?



अंशु कुमार

स्विट्जरलैंड के
सॉनेन स्विट्
इंटरनेशनल ओलिंपिक
कमिटी (IOC)
मुख्यालय में इसी 1
मूल्य को भारतीय
प्रतिनिधिमंडल के साथ

2036 ओलिंपिक्स की मेजबानी को लेकर एक महत्वपूर्ण बैठक हुई थी। इसमें IOC ने भारत में खेल प्रशासन में व्याप्त भ्रष्टाचार, कुप्रबंधन और जवाबदेही की कमी पर गंभीर धिंता व्यक्त की।

वक्त की जरूरत : IOC का ऐसा रुख आकस्मिक नहीं था। भारत में बरसे से खेल संघों के संवाहन में पारदर्शिता की कमी रही है। ये खेल संघ अपने बनाए संविधान और स्वीकृत छंदों से चलते रहे हैं। इससे खेल प्रणाली में निष्पक्षता, पारदर्शिता और जवाबदेही की कमी रही है। ऐसे में 'नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स गवर्नेंस बिल, 2025' ऐतिहासिक पहल और वक्त की जरूरत के रूप में सामने आया है। इससे खेल प्रशासन में पारदर्शिता आएगी और अंतरराष्ट्रीय मानक लागू करने में मदद मिलेगी।

तीन आधार : इस बिल के तीन मुख्य आधार हैं - नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स बोर्ड (NSB), नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स इलेक्शन पैन्ल (NSEP) और नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स ट्रिब्यूनल (NST)। इन तीनों के सहयोग से पारदर्शी शासन, लोकतांत्रिक प्रक्रिया और त्वरित



विवाद निवारण सुनिश्चित हो सकेगा।
खेल नीति : नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स बोर्ड राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर खेल नीतियों का निर्माण करेगा। इसमें पूर्व अंतरराष्ट्रीय खिलाड़ी, खेल प्रशासक, कानूनी विशेषज्ञ और सिविल सोसायटी के प्रतिनिधि शामिल होंगे। राष्ट्रीय खेल नीति बनाने के अलावा इसकी प्रमुख जिम्मेदारी होगी - संसाधनों व इन्फ्रास्ट्रक्चर का सही और उचित बंटवारा, राज्यस्तरीय निष्ठाओं से समन्वय और खिलाड़ियों को छात्रवृत्ति, मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सहायता व चोट के इलाज जैसे सुविधाएं उपलब्ध कराना। NSB खासतौर पर दो गंभीर समस्याओं पर ध्यान देगा - आयु में धोखाधड़ी और डोपिंग के मामले।

समय पर चुनाव : भारत में कई बार खेल

संघों के चुनावों में गूठवाजी, अनियमितताएं और लंबे समय तक एक ही व्यक्ति के पद पर बने रहने जैसी शिकायतें आती हैं। इसी समस्याओं को दूर करने और खेल संघों में निष्पक्ष, पारदर्शी और समय से चुनाव कराने के लिए नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स इलेक्शन पैन्ल (NSEP) बनाया गया है।
आसान न्याय : नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स गवर्नेंस बिल की एक विशेष उपलब्धि है नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स ट्रिब्यूनल (NST)। यह सिलेक्शन से जुड़े विवाद, अनुशासनात्मक कार्रवाई, अनुबंध, डोपिंग सहित अन्य मामलों की निष्पक्ष और त्वरित सुनवाई सुनिश्चित करेगा। इससे अदालतों पर बोझ कम होगा।
पारदर्शिता का ध्यान : ओलिंपिक और पैरालिंपिक चार्टर न्याय, समानता, सम्मान

और पारदर्शिता जैसे मूल्यों को प्राथमिकता देते हैं। भारत में भ्रष्टाचार, डोपिंग और एन फ्रीड ने खेल की साफ को ठेस पहुंचाई है। इस बिल में ऐसे प्राधान्य हैं, जिन्हें निर्णय प्रक्रिया पारदर्शी होगी। इसमें हितों के टकराव से संबंधित स्पष्ट दिशा-निर्देश हैं।
निर्वाचन उद्देश्य नहीं : IOC के चार्टर के अनुसार, खेल संघों को प्रशासन का अधिकार है, जिसे वह विधेयक मान्यता देता है। इसमें कहा गया है कि NSB का कार्य मार्गदर्शन देना है, न कि नियंत्रण करना।
विशेष युनिट : भारत में युनिवर्सल स्तर पर डोपिंग और उष से जुड़ी धोखाधड़ी बड़ी समस्याएं बनी हुई हैं। WADA की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, भारत डोपिंग मामलों में दूसरे स्थान पर है।

Economic Times की रिपोर्ट कहती है कि डोपिंग पॉजिटिविटी रेट 3.8% है। (बिल में नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स बोर्ड के तहत विशेष युनिट गठित करने का प्रावधान है। इससे बायोमेट्रिक और मेडिकल टेस्ट से एन एंटीडोपिंग होगा, खिलाड़ियों का सेंट्रलाइज्ड डेटा बैंक बनाया जाएगा और NADA व WADA के साथ सहयोग किया जाएगा। यदि यह व्यवस्था सही रूप में लागू हो गई, तो भारत 'कॉरन स्पोर्ट्स नेशन'

बनाने की दिशा में अग्रसर हो सकता है।
निर्णायक मोड़ : नैशनल स्पोर्ट्स गवर्नेंस बिल देश को एक स्पष्ट, बाध्यकारी और नैतिकता-आधारित कानून प्रदान करता है। इसमें केवल विषयों की बात नहीं है, सांकेतिक सेवा के प्रति उत्तरदायित्व भी है। यह बिल भारतीय खेल व्यवस्था में निर्णायक मोड़ संचित हो सकता है। NSB, NSEP और NST की विस्तरीय संरचना मजबूत और पारदर्शी बनाम तैयार करती है। इस प्रस्तावित छंदों का नुकसान है खेल प्रशासन की ईमानदारी, जवाबदेह और खिलाड़ी केंद्रित बनाना।

खेल महाशक्ति : यह प्रणाली भारत को वैश्विक खेल मानकों के करीब लाएगी, जहां निष्पक्षता, समानता, सशक्त खिलाड़ी, और राष्ट्र की प्रतिष्ठा जैसे मूल सिद्धांत साकार हो सकें। इस बिल की असली सफलता सिर्फ इसकी राह में नहीं, इसे ईमानदारी से लागू करने की राजनीतिक इच्छा शक्ति और खेल संस्कृति में बड़े बदलाव लाने की कोशिश पर निर्भर करती है। अगर इस पर सही तरीके से अमल हुआ, तो भारत खेलों में एक वैश्विक महाशक्ति बन सकता है।
(लेखक हरिकृष्ण खेल विश्वविद्यालय, राई के जूनियर हैं।)

Unsafe schools: A tragedy on loop

The collapse of a portion of a school building in Rajasthan's Jhalawar district on Friday, which claimed the lives of seven children and injured at least 27, was no accident. The residents had alerted the authorities that the building was unsafe, but their concern was ignored. District authorities had recently sought information about unsafe buildings, but the school escaped their attention. After the Jhalawar tragedy, one student was killed when a school gate collapsed in the state's Jaisalmer district. Portions of two school buildings collapsed in other districts, but there were no deaths or injuries because the incidents happened after school hours. The deaths in Jhalawar need to be seen as the result of criminal negligence.

These incidents underline the need for regular inspection and upkeep of public buildings, especially schools, where hundreds of children remain vulnerable to collapses of structures and other mishaps, increasingly in the rainy season. As many as 2,710 school buildings in Rajasthan had been identified as needing repairs. Water structures and electrical fittings in many schools were also reported as faulty. However, no funds were allocated in the state budget for repair and maintenance work in schools.

Madan Dilawar, the state school education minister, made a callous remark that he cannot personally fund the repairs. The state government has announced an inquiry, and the Centre has ordered a safety audit of all schools. This is also a time to look at recent incidents to assess the bigger national picture. In Kerala's Ernakulam district, an unused

Incidents in Rajasthan and elsewhere emphasise the need to ensure the structural safety of school buildings

portion of a school building collapsed. A student died of an electric shock in another school in the state.

Safety and security of children at school is the government's responsibility; they need to be prioritised with greater focus. Inadequate infrastructure and lack of safety may be one of the reasons for low enrolment in many states. In Rajasthan, the government school enrolment among children aged between 6 and 14 is just about 60%. The Rajasthan High Court has taken *suo motu* cognisance of the school collapse and sought reports from the authorities. It noted that 32% of government schools in the state lacked electricity, and 9% did not have access to drinking water. Many did not have separate toilets for boys and girls. The court also quoted a survey which showed that 22% of schools in 12 states, including Rajasthan, were in a dilapidated condition. The New Education Policy prescribes a safe and comfortable school environment for all children. Beyond the policy text, the governments should ensure tangible action on the ground.



AN ECONOMIST OF MANY PARTS

Meghnad Desai resisted affiliation to any one school of thought

SURJIT S BHALLA

I GOT TO know Meghnad Desai well over the last two decades, and especially over the last 10 years. He had been unwell for some time, but his mind was as acute and incisive as ever. It was a life well lived, and I want to celebrate my good fortune of having known him "closely" over the last decade. In many discussions (arguments) between friends, Meghnad was never at a loss for insight. Gentleness marked his approach to people — but not towards bad ideas.

I had the occasion to visit him often at the House of Lords, dining and even being allowed to sit in on the debates. No visit to London was complete without a joint meal with Meghnad. We had a lot in common — cricket, economics and the difficulty of economic reforms in India, and a passionate interest in politics and films (and he has many books on politics, and one book on films — *Nehru's Hero: D.K. Kumar in the Life of India*).

His greatest accomplishment is his book *The Rediscovery of India*. It starts with Vasco da Gama and extends to the end of the UPA's first term. His views on the destructive economic policies of the Congress party, Jawaharlal Nehru to Sonia Gandhi, anticipated what is now conventional wisdom.

Meghnad was kind, a gentle and modest soul, with a lot to be immodest about. In many ways, he had no equal. He obtained his PhD at

He was a 19th-century liberal renaissance individual — captivated by ideas, their origins, consequences, and remedies. He possessed, in abundance, both intellectual integrity and rigor in thought. He was a classical political economist, though his training and early career was, for lack of a better word, as a quantitative economist. From a very early age (try 23!) he was at the forefront of econometric modelling,

the age of 23, the youngest Indian to do so, along with K.N. Raj. While trained as an econometrician, he was everywhere in thought. His well-known works include a considerable amount on Marxian economics, including *Marxian Economic Theory*, a book that compares and contrasts Marxian economics with their classical and neoclassical avatars. Just so that nobody can typecast him, there are his treatises on the pricing of tin in the world market, problems with Phillips curve, history of economic thought, on Islam (*Rethinking Islamism*), *The Poverty of Political Economy*, on globalisation, and climate change. I could not find a single important economic or political economy topic that he has not written expertly on — with facts, figures, and dispassionate analysis.

Sir David Hendry, a world-renowned econometrician at LSE, wrote in *Arguing about the World — The Work and Legacy of Meghnad Desai* (2011): "In an era when specialisation has been a dominant force, his many and diverse contributions are a welcome beacon of genuine multi-disciplinarity, and a leading indicator of a recent recognition of the benefits of drawing on a range of skills and knowledge."

His independence of thought and action are illustrated by several acts of commission. He was at LSE, a university founded on the principles of Fabian socialism, but was extremely critical of the practice of socialism in

England, and elsewhere. He was made a member of the House of Lords by the Labour Party, but resigned over its acts of racism and antisemitism. He was a 19th-century liberal renaissance individual — captivated by ideas, their origins, consequences, and remedies. He possessed, in abundance, both intellectual integrity and rigor in thought. He was a classical political economist, though his training and early career was, for lack of a better word, as a quantitative economist. From a very early age (try 23!) he was at the forefront of econometric modelling. He obtained his PhD under the guidance of Lawrence Klein, a Nobel Prize-winning pioneer in macro-modelling.

His short articles for *Blaze Global Research* summarised the economic and political scene in India, and did so as a one-handed political economist. Clear, concise, dispassionate in analysis but deeply passionate about the issues.

As a young kid, I often heard a band with a funeral procession. I was told that when an old person passes away (Meghnad was 85), it is a celebration for a life well-lived. I will drink to that. Especially to the fact that Meghnad held himself up to the highest sense of intellectual integrity, a rare individual in a polarised world.

Bhalla is chairperson of the Technical Expert Group for the first official Household Income Survey for India

IE/10



MRIDULA MANGLAM

The politics of care

Building empathy on campus must begin by listening to the dissenting student

HAVE INDIA'S EDUCATIONAL institutions always been sites of silent, systemic violence? Spaces meant for learning, for nurturing questions, and for producing knowledge are turning into graveyards of unrealised dreams. From student suicides to institutional apathy, from unaddressed harassment to symbolic initiatives like "Campus Mothers", the violence remains constant, structural, and often deadly.

The recent suicide of a student in Odisha who set herself on fire after being denied justice for sexual harassment, the tragic case of Darshan Solanki at IIT Bombay, and the long, painful list that includes names like Rohit Vemula and Payal Tadvi, are not disconnected events. These are not isolated tragedies, but a reflection of systemic violence. They show how institutional spaces can push students to the brink, and then respond with symbolic gestures instead of accountability.

Academic spaces continue to be shaped by patterns of violence that define the everyday lives of students. There are countless students whose names will never be known. Those who live and study within institutions that shame, isolate, and silence them. Those who endure relentless academic pressure, wait months for fellowships to be released, face discriminatory behaviour from faculty, or are punished for simply demanding dignity. Women students who are moral-policed, students from marginalised communities who are made to feel they do not belong and stu-

dents struggling with mental health who are offered no support. They are made to carry these burdens quietly, as though suffering is an expected part of their education.

In this context, the editorial Mum's not the word, (IE, June 14), argues that though the intention behind the initiative may be good, its gendered framing is problematic. However, it stops short of questioning the logic of such initiatives. The issue is not only about who is being assigned the task of care but also about what this task is meant to replace. The editorial narrows its critique to the gendered framing of the "Campus Mothers" initiative — it fails to confront a deeper concern that such gestures of care are being used to substitute structural accountability with symbolic empathy.

This initiative at IIT Kharagpur must be seen for what it is: A displacement of responsibility. The institution, in assigning women such as faculty or non-teaching staff as emotional points of contact, has not created support structures. It has rebranded care as an individual act, rather than a systemic responsibility. The burden of care is both feminised and depoliticised. It is taken away from structures with the power to change condi-

tions. It is reinforcing a gendered logic in which women are made responsible for tending to emotional wounds, regardless of where those wounds come from. Their academic expertise, institutional authority, and professional roles are sidelined to make room for a more palatable identity: The ever-giving, ever-listening, ever-available mother.

To imagine care differently, we need to turn to political frameworks that have treated it as a collective right, not a personal burden. Feminist thinkers like Kristen Ghodsee have shown how collectivised care systems, especially under socialist frameworks, allowed women greater freedom, dignity, and autonomy. Care cannot be a temporary plaster over structural wounds.

Students need care. They need to be seen and heard. But modelling it into motherhood turns care into something private, emotional, and feminine, rather than collective, political, and structural. It is a redistribution of institutional neglect. The editorial recognises this. It notes that "a more inclusive and thoughtful model that invites faculty, staff and residents of all genders to serve as trained campus mentors would reflect the span of empathy, equality,

and shared responsibility". But a truly empathetic care system hinges on listening to the student. The editorial overlooks this imperative. Student movements have already imagined what collective care can look like. Through peer support networks, anti-caste collectives, and demands for institutional changes like functioning grievance bodies, these students have built spaces of care grounded in solidarity. Student organisations and collectives are often the only ones demanding structural change. Yet, in several institutions, they are the first to be surveilled, vilified, and punished. This is part of a broader refusal to engage with dissent, to treat students as stakeholders, or to acknowledge the violence embedded in campus hierarchies.

Care, if it is to be meaningful, cannot come from silencing those who resist. It must come from listening to them, learning from them and building with them. To truly reimagine care, institutions must first learn to listen. It is students who have already begun to show what solidarity, support, and resistance can look like. Institutions must follow their lead. It is through their vision that campuses can imagine something better — structures of care rooted not in symbolism, but in justice and shared responsibility.

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DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A column in which readers tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

EDU TALK

A Deferred Vision

NEP 2020 remains an ambitious blueprint for educational reform, but its transformative promise is mired in patchy implementation, infrastructural gaps, and political inertia, leaving students in limbo



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NEP 2020
is a well-
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It has been five years since the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was approved by the Union Cabinet. Five years is a sufficient period to evaluate the gains made as well as the distance left to be travelled. There has been good progress in some areas, but a large number of reforms visualised in the policy are still only on paper, and it is not clear when they will see the light of day.

The NEP rightly stated that, in education, the major stakeholder is the student. It found that enrolment gradually declined as one moved up through the classes in the school system, and dropped even more sharply in higher education. There were also glaring disparities on grounds of region and community. The policy focused on the creation of school complexes. It also emphasised redesigning the curriculum and pedagogy to root it in the Indian and local context. Books were to be made accessible and affordable, and reading habits encouraged. The problem of shortage of teachers was to be addressed, along with upgrading their quality.

NEP has a lofty goal. It aims to bring about the full development of the human personality. Students are expected to develop foundational skills of literacy and numeracy. They are also supposed to imbibe higher-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. In addition, they have to learn social and emotional skills like empathy, teamwork, leadership, grit, and perseverance. India has to develop as a knowledge economy with Indian culture and ethos as its base. A slew of reforms to achieve these ideals was suggested.

One of the positives has been the success of the NIPUN mission for foundational literacy and numeracy. The school structure has been changed from a 10+2 to a 2+3+3+3 framework, covering pre-primary to secondary level. A significant achievement has been that the National Curriculum Framework for School Education has laid out learning outcomes and competencies for each stage.

The challenges before the nation when the 1986 Education Policy was formulated related to universal access and enrolment. However, it is the quality of education that remains a major problem today, and the goal is to achieve universal education. It is towards this end that NEP 2020 has rightly focused, but no dramatic change is visible at the moment.



A large number of reforms visualised in the National Education Policy are still only on paper

Even at the foundational level, the problem of coordination between Anganwadi workers and primary school teachers remains an obstacle. Anganwadi workers are not trained in education, and their motivation suffers due to the low-paid, temporary nature of their jobs. Besides, they report to the Department of Women and Child Development, whereas primary education is under the purview of the Education Department. A smooth, syncretic approach between the two requires the creation of an institutional mechanism—which is yet to take shape.

The NEP visualised flexibility and a multidisciplinary approach and suggested a bank of credits. A national credit framework has been developed, which allows students to earn and store credits digitally, making it possible to move from one course to another. However, the implementation of this concept needs

much more rigour.

The Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for admission into colleges at the undergraduate level has been introduced since 2022. One negative fallout has been the anticipated mushrooming of coaching institutions for the CUET exam. Also, students are facing problems in actually applying for courses online on the basis of CUET. This one single national test requires a lot of rethinking.

The CBSE has brought about changes in the board exam by allowing Class 10 students to take the exam twice a year. It is not clear how this will improve learning outcomes. Other boards are yet to follow CBSE. A strange reform proposed is having two levels of mathematics, keeping in mind the anxiety some students have about math. CBSE is planning to extend this to science subjects as well.

To my mind, this is a meaningless reform and does not help students in any way.

Holistic report cards are an excellent idea, and NCERT has developed progress cards that assess the performance of a student in extracurricular and co-curricular activities and also provide scope for peer and self-assessment. Once again, this relevant reform is at the infant stage.

I have seen that many universities have rolled out the four-year undergraduate framework, but there is no clarity on how this system would be an improvement over the past. Moreover, issues of faculty and infrastructure are proving to be roadblocks in its implementation.

I strongly feel that the focal point for improving the quality of education has to be the teacher. Issues of recruitment of teachers have become disputed in most states. At the school level, there is a shortage of trained teachers across the board. Further issues like teacher absenteeism continue to plague the system. A framework for continuous and quality training of teachers is yet to be put in place. We have to make sure that the best enter the teaching profession. There has to be a clear plan for the career progression and management of teachers. In the states, the transfer of teachers must be done through a transparent mechanism.

School management committees involving all stakeholders have to be strengthened. The time has come to seriously consider involving urban and rural local bodies in the running of the school system, at least till Class 8.

UGC is yet to be replaced by another regulatory system for higher education. How we will achieve a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 50 per cent by 2035 is not spelt out. It would require a large amount of investment. Where is this going to come from? Making professional institutions multidisciplinary still remains just an idea.

It is unfortunate that the implementation of NEP has got stalled on the controversial issue of the three-language formula. Education has to be looked at beyond politics by all concerned.

NEP 2020 is a well-intentioned and comprehensively thought-out policy, but it requires a lot of planning, strategising, and execution skills to become a reality. Tinkering with the education system at the periphery will be a gross injustice to our students, on whom the future of India depends.

Views expressed are personal

NEP से सुधरी देश की इनोवेशन रैंकिंग



धर्मेंद्र प्रधान

2020 में भारत ने केवल एक नई शिक्षा नीति ही नहीं अपनाई, बल्कि एक प्राचीन आदर्श को फिर से जीवंत किया। राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति (NEP)

ने सीखने को राष्ट्र निर्माण का आधार बनाया और इसे हमारी सभ्यतागत परंपराओं से जोड़ा।

बढ़ता कौशल | पांच वर्षों में NEP का असर केवल नीतियों तक नहीं, बल्कि कक्षाओं तक साफ दिखता है। अब छठी कक्षा के विद्यार्थी व्यावसायिक प्रयोगशालाओं में हाथों-हाथ कौशल सीख रहे हैं। अनुसंधान संस्थानों में भारत का पारंपरिक ज्ञान आधुनिक विज्ञान के साथ संवाद कर रहा है। NEP की सोच STEM क्षेत्रों में महिलाओं की बढ़ती भागीदारी और वैश्विक मंचों पर भारतीय संस्थानों की उपस्थिति में भी झलकती है।

भाषा नहीं बाधा | निपुण भारत मिशन ने बुनियादी साक्षरता और संख्यात्मक ज्ञान को कक्षा 2 तक सुनिश्चित किया है। यह प्रगति ASER 2024 और परख राष्ट्रीय

सर्वेक्षण 2024 जैसी रिपोर्टों में दिखाई देती है। NEP ने यह स्पष्ट किया कि भाषा कोई बाधा नहीं, बल्कि सशक्तिकरण का माध्यम है। 117 भाषाओं में प्राइमर विकसित किए गए हैं और भारतीय सांकेतिक भाषा को एक विषय के रूप में शामिल किया गया है।

वंचित भी आगे | समग्र शिक्षा और पीएम पोषण जैसी योजनाओं ने लगभग सार्वभौमिक नामांकन को संभव बनाया है। NEP का प्रभाव वंचित समूहों पर भी हुआ है। 5,138 से अधिक कस्तूरबा गांधी बालिका विद्यालयों में 7.12 लाख से अधिक वंचित समुदायों की बालिकाएं नामांकित हैं। धरती आबा जनजातीय ग्राम उत्कर्ष अभियान के तहत 692 और PVTG छात्रों के लिए 490 से अधिक छात्रावास स्वीकृत किए गए हैं।

छात्रों को सीधा लाभ | NEP 2020 के परिवर्तन का एक प्रमुख स्तंभ हैं 14,500 पीएम-श्री स्कूल, जो आधुनिक, समावेशी और पर्यावरण के अनुकूल हैं। ये विद्यालय NEP के विजन के अनुरूप आदर्श मॉडल स्कूल बन रहे हैं, जो बुनियादी ढांचे और शिक्षण पद्धति दोनों को

AI Image



कॉमन रूम

पुनर्निर्माणित कर रहे हैं। विद्यांजलि प्लेटफॉर्म ने 8.2 लाख स्कूलों को 5.3 लाख से अधिक वॉलंटियर्स और 2,000 CSR पार्टनर्स से जोड़ा है, जिससे 1.7 करोड़ छात्रों को सीधा लाभ मिला है।

बढ़ता नामांकन | उच्च शिक्षा में कुल नामांकन 3.42 करोड़ से बढ़कर 4.46 करोड़ हो गया है। इनमें लगभग 48% छात्राएं हैं। महिला PhD नामांकन 0.48 लाख से बढ़कर 1.12 लाख हो गया है। SC, ST, OBC और अल्पसंख्यक छात्रों का बढ़ता नामांकन उच्च शिक्षा में समावेशिता का ऐतिहासिक संकेत है।

इनोवेशन में आगे | NEP के अनुसंधान और नवाचार पर जोर ने भारत के ग्लोबल इनोवेशन इंडेक्स को 81वें स्थान से 39वें तक पहुंचाया है। 400 से अधिक उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों में 18,000 से अधिक स्टार्टअप इनक्यूबेट किए गए हैं। अनुसंधान NRF, PMRF 2.0, और 6,000 करोड़ रुपये की वन नेशन वन सब्सक्रिप्शन योजना शोध को विकेंद्रीकृत और सुलभ बना रही हैं। QS वर्ल्ड यूनिवर्सिटी रैंकिंग 2026 में भारत के 54 संस्थान शामिल हुए हैं, जबकि 2014 में केवल 11 थे।

नए सुपरनोवा | परिवर्तन की इस यात्रा का उत्सव अखिल भारतीय शिक्षा समागम के माध्यम से मनाया जा रहा है, लेकिन इसका मूल्यमांकन शिक्षार्थियों, शिक्षकों और अभिभावकों के शांत आत्मविश्वास में हो रहा है। हमें अपने परिसरों में सीखने के परिणामों को और अधिक गहरा करना जारी रखना होगा। जहां शिक्षा है, वहीं प्रगति है। एक अरब जागरूक और सशक्त नागरिक केवल जनसांख्यिकीय लाभार्थी नहीं हैं, बल्कि नए भारत का सुपरनोवा हैं।

(लेखक केंद्रीय शिक्षा मंत्री हैं)