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# Plagiarism and malicious intent: does ChatGPT have an ethics problem?

While cybersecurity experts are concerned about the chatbot correcting and enhancing nefarious code and even writing phishing emails, teachers and academicians are worried about the bot's impact on written assignments

**John Xavier**

In November 2022, OpenAI opened to users its most recent and powerful AI chatbot, ChatGPT, to test its capability. It amazed netizens all over the world with its range of answering questions across disciplines. The search interface could also generate fixes for broken code. The bot continues to attract diverse people to run experimental questions.

However, some users have been testing the bot's capability to do nefarious things. Illicit actors have tried to bypass the tool's safeguards and carry out malicious use cases with varying degrees of success.

Research outlet ArsTechnica shared some exchanges between several forum users and ChatGPT. These users claimed the chatbot helped them write malicious code even though they claimed to be amateurs.

ChatGPT is programmed to block obvious requests of writing phishing emails or code for hackers.

While it can close the gates for amateur coders looking to build malware, the more seasoned ones could trick the bot into correcting or enhancing malicious code they have partially developed.

They could get through the system by phrasing their request in an innocuous way.

## A malicious code generator?

OpenAI notes that asking its bot for illegal or phishing content may violate its content policy. But for someone trespassing such policies, the bot provides a starting point. Cybersecurity firm Check Point's researchers tested the bot by asking it to draft a phishing email for a fictional web-hosting firm. In response, ChatGPT gave an impressive 'phishing email'. The generated reply included a warning that read: "This content may violate our content policy. If you believe this to be in error, please submit your feedback – your input will aid our research in this area."

While surreptitiously asking ChatGPT to write malware is one problem, another issue several coders face is the inherently buggy code (buggy code refers to code which either already has bugs in it or is written in a way that will introduce bugs in the future) the bot spews out. Things have gotten so bad that Stack Overflow, a forum for software programmers, banned its users from using any AI-generated code on the platform. Check Point researchers also tested the bot on multiple scripts with slight variations using different wordings. They note that large language models (LLM) can be easily automated to launch complicated attack processes to generate other malicious artefacts.

"Defenders and threat hunters should be vigilant and cautious about adopting this [ChatGPT] technology quickly, otherwise, our community will be one step behind the attackers," the company noted.

## Plagiarism alert

Teachers and academicians have also expressed concerns over ChatGPT's impact on written assignments. They note that the bot could be used to turn in plagiarised essays that could be hard to detect for time-pressed invigilators. Most recently, New York City's education department banned ChatGPT in its public schools. The authorities have forbidden the bot's use in all devices and network connected to schools. It is not that plagiarism is a new problem in academic institutions; ChatGPT has changed the way AI is used to create new content. This makes it hard to single out copied content. "It's definitely different than traditional copy paste plagiarism. What we've noticed with AI writing, like these GPT models, is that they write in a statistically vanilla way," Eric Wang, VP, Artificial Intelligence at plagiarism detection firm Turnitin said.

Humans write based on metrics called "burstiness" and "surprise," while LLMs essentially fill in words based on a probability model. "They choose the

most probable word in the most probable location far more often than a human writer," Mr. Wang explained. When the bot is controlled for these two metrics, the probability of a word in a particular spot jumps up and down, and is all over the place. Humans tend to deviate while writing, but models like GPT deviate much less on average. Turnitin's plagiarism detectors "can cue in that type of behaviour pretty reliably. And we have in the labs, detectors that are working quite well in terms of understanding student writing, versus GPT," Mr. Wang claimed. But there could be fewer such deviations in a more formal essay as such assignments demand a certain type of logical flow, which could be similar to a GPT-style response. So, in a scenario where the answers coming from a human and ChatGPT are in a similar zone, a different kind of pedagogy could help. Perhaps, looking beyond summarisation and reporting based on what is available on the Internet can help.

Comparing and contrasting something to modern events or writing own personal experiences aren't going to come from ChatGPT. So helping educators think through the different types of prompts to best assess students to help them stay away from using ChatGPT is important, Annie Chechitelli, Chief Product Officer at Turnitin, said.



# PULL AND PUSH

Data on Indian students abroad has important takeaways.  
Retaining talent will require more than foreign campuses

**A**T A TIME when the government is embarking on far-reaching reforms in the higher education sector, including instituting enabling measures for foreign universities to set up campuses in the country, data compiled by the US State Department and the non-profit Institute of International Education provides interesting insights. An analysis of the data in this newspaper reveals that an increasing number of Indian students studying in the US are staying back after their degree to join that country's workforce. In 2021-22, nearly 35 per cent of the 1.99 lakh Indian students in American universities enrolled in the Optional Training Programmes that allow foreign students with F-1 visas to join paid or voluntary work for up to three years in the US. One takeaway from this is that merely paving the way for campuses of prestigious foreign universities may not be enough to retain talent in the country. Planners need to find ways to link the reforms in education with the job market. But this task cannot be left only to the government — industry bodies will also need to contribute to this endeavour.

The trends related to Indian students in US campuses hold for their peers who seek education in other parts of the developed world. Last year, an OECD report on international migration patterns pointed out that Indians studying in economically developed countries are the most likely among all foreign students to join the local workforce. The transition rates from study permits to work permits were far higher in Indians compared to the Chinese — students from the two countries constitute the lion's share of the foreign students in campuses in the US, UK, Australia and other developed countries.

For decades, engineering institutes held the highest attraction for Indian students in the US. The trend began to change about seven years ago. Data for the last academic year, 2021-2022, show that 38 per cent of Indian students in American campuses study mathematics and computer sciences and about 30 per cent are enrolled in engineering courses. The OECD report shows that this trend holds for Indian students attending universities in other parts of the developed world. This, of course, is in line with the increased demand, globally, for skills related to digital technology, data analysis and cyber security. The role of Indian talent in powering global technology powerhouses is well-known. At the same time, the country that aspires to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2025 cannot afford to keep losing home-grown talent. In the coming months and years, as planners give shape to the NEP's vision, addressing this vexing question cannot be postponed.

JE/m



# Why democracy needs a healthy public education system

SIMRANPREET SINGH OBEROI

## DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN INDIA: A CONTEXT

India is the largest democracy in the world and home to millions of people across cultures, demography, language, and religion. Throughout history, education has been integral to the larger process of socioeconomic and cultural transformation. It has always been a strong prerequisite for the survival and success of any democracy. With time, a strong public education system became not just an ideal, but an imperative requirement. India carries the responsibility of ensuring quality education to more than 25 crore students. As education is sought to function as a public good in a democracy, the state is not only entitled to expand educational provision and opportunities but also work to address the important issue of equity that is desirable for advancing any democracy.

In India, the onus is on the large public education system with more than 10 lakh government schools to strengthen the existing educational scenario. With more than 52% of students under its ambit, it is responsible to increase access and improve the quality of education provided. As per data, in 1978, 74 per cent studied in govt schools while in 2017, the number declined to 52 per cent. This reduction reiterates a concern for our democracy related to the state of government schools in India. Additionally, 75 per cent of the children studying in the government schools of India belong to SC, ST, and OBC categories. Thus, 'equitable education' is their only hope to emancipate themselves and live a dignified life.

## DEMOCRATIC IMPORTANCE OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL

A public school is an energizer of our democracy. It is not meant to mirror a particular family or community but it is ought to expose children to multiple ways of 'other' people. These schools should be viewed not only as institutions that impart certain knowledge and skills to students but also as environments that socialize them. Education needs to be the democratizing force that helps to

prepare students to participate actively in all aspects of democratic life. However, in an authoritarian society, schools select the elites who grow up to make the decisions. A functioning democracy needs citizens who know how to make decisions together. This is how a healthy public education system will enable democracy.

## WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION WILL HELP US KEEP OUR DEMOCRACY?

A commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Mudaliar, tried to lay down the educational needs of a democratic India. It stated that our educational system must make its contribution to the development of habits, attitudes, and qualities of character, which will enable its citizens to bear the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

The traditional 'closed' classroom environments rely on didactic, authoritative learning methodologies in which the teacher is viewed as the 'expert' with the knowledge to impart to the students. It fails to teach students much about democratic processes and how to function within them. India needs to bring forth classrooms where teachers are encouraging big inquiries, enabling deep listening, and sowing the seeds of doubt in young minds. For a thriving democracy, we need individuals who can think rationally, look at the data, and form their own independent judgments.

Research has shown that countries with strong public education systems tend to have higher levels of political participation and more inclusive and stable political systems. Only social and economic democracy, both of which required the transforming force of universal education, could lead to political democracy. In contrast, countries with weak public education systems may have lower levels of political participation and more unstable or authoritarian regimes.

The number of government schools in India is decreasing continuously. As per the school education department's United District Information System for Education (UDISE) Plus reports, it declined by over 51,000 since 2018. Meanwhile, the number of private schools in the

country increased from 325,760 in 2018-19 to 340,753 in 2020-21. To build resilient infrastructure, India needs to increase constructive investment across public education. Every national education policy (NEP) since 1968 has said that India needs to spend 6% of its GDP on education. In 2019-20, 52 years since that recommendation, India spent only 3.1% of its GDP on education.

## WAY AHEAD

As stated in our Preamble, if the people of India have committed to upholding specific values, then it is worth striving for. As constituents, citizens need to demand quality education from government schools and make it a priority for our elected representatives.

It is significant for the citizens to lend a supporting hand to the government schools in whichever way possible. Government schools, their students, and teachers who are doing really well should be provided with credible recognition at all levels.

Today, education officials need to be pushed to rethink how our teachers are being prepared. The state of teacher education in our country is far from being adequate and needs to be redesigned and restructured to increase its effectiveness.

All of our democracy's major architects have explicitly emphasized the importance of education in their ideas and deeds. From Bhimrao Ambedkar to Jawaharlal Nehru, all envisioned education as the catalyst of democracy. A healthy government school in our neighborhood will ensure future citizens with democratic values, leading to a much more vibrant democracy. 'Right to Education' was and will always be essential in making a strong democracy function.

The author is co-founder, Sanskriti Krishi Samiti.





# College students who work more hours are less likely to graduate

WALTER G ECTON, CAROLYN  
HEINRICH & CELESTE K  
CARRUTHERS

## THE BIG IDEA

Students who work while enrolled in college are about 20% less likely to complete their degrees than similar peers who don't work, a large and meaningful decrease in predicted graduation rates. Among those who do graduate, working students take an average 0.6 of a semester longer to finish. This is mainly because students who work large amounts — over 15 hours a week — take fewer college credits per semester.

These findings come from a new study in AERA Open, a peer-reviewed open-access journal published by the American Education Research Association.

To learn more about how work might affect a student's chances of graduation, we examined 17 years of data — 2001 to 2017 — from the state of Tennessee. We matched college student records to employment records for about 600,000 students. We compared working students with those

who did not work but were otherwise similar in terms of family income, high school GPA, location and demographic characteristics. We also looked at college progress for students who worked during some semesters but not in others, to see whether they were more successful in completing their classes in semesters when they did not work.

Ultimately, we found that working students signed up for about one less credit on average per semester than students who don't work. This is likely because they had less time available for classes. Students who worked were every bit as successful in their classes after signing up, with similar course completion rates and similar GPAs. But because they signed up for fewer courses, their progression through college was slower, and they were less likely to graduate.

Notably, we did not see a decrease in graduation rates among students who worked smaller amounts, especially less than eight hours per week. These students signed up for similar numbers of credits as their nonworking classmates, and they completed their degrees at similar

rates. This suggests that smaller amounts of work may not affect a student's progress toward graduation.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Working while in college is very common, especially with the rising price of college tuition and the burden of student loan debt.

Recent estimates show that 43 percent of full-time students and 81 percent of part-time students work while enrolled in college. In Tennessee, we found that working is especially common among community college students, first-generation students and students returning to college as adults.

With so many students trying to juggle work and school, colleges and policymakers could take more steps to support working students and help them meet their needs.

If working students take longer to complete college, policymakers could extend access to financial aid for longer periods if needed. For example, students can access federal Pell Grants for only 12 semesters. This may leave some students without an important



source of aid if their work causes them to take longer to finish their degree.

Students should be aware of the challenges that work might pose in their college journey. Work may be crucial for paying bills and creating opportunities for professional development. However, when students work 15 hours or more, they could have a more difficult time earning a college degree, which can ultimately

enable a person to get a higher-paying job in the future.

## WHAT STILL ISN'T KNOWN

One important question is whether certain jobs may work better for college students than others. Some research suggests on-campus jobs might be more convenient and help keep students focused on their classes.

Students working in a job related to their major might find real-world connections between their jobs and classes — like a nursing student working in a hospital. Given that work is a necessity for many students, educators can do more to guide students to jobs that might work best for their college success.



## FURQAN QAMAR

## FIFTH COLUMN

## COSTLY COURSE

**T**he National Education Policy, 2020 strives to raise the gross enrolment ratio in higher education from 27.1% in 2019-20 to 50% by 2035. This would amount to doubling the higher education enrolment within the next 15 years. This would require the enrolment to grow by 4.7% annually. During 2014-15 to 2019-20, the growth rate was no more than 1.99% a year. The required growth in enrolment could come from enhancing the intake capacity of existing institutions or by establishing new ones. The NEP hopes to achieve these twin objectives mainly through an increased participation of the private sector in higher education.

The private sector does create capacity but is not necessarily helpful in increasing enrolment. The engineering and management institutions are glaring examples — half of their sanctioned intakes remains unfilled, while the Indian Institutes of Technology and Management have a very high seat-to-application ratio for these very programmes. Students are clearly attracted if institutions can offer quality higher education at affordable prices.

In India, undergraduate programmes account for four-fifths of the total enrolment and within this a third of the students are enrolled in humanities, social sciences, arts and languages. Science, commerce and engineering/technology account for 16, 14.9 and 12.6%, respectively. Agriculture, law, medicine, paramedical, nursing, physiotherapy and other programmes account for a minuscule fraction of the total enrolment. These in no way reflect the demand and preferences of students. Nor are they in sync with the current needs of the industry. The economy and society need graduates with professional and technical knowhow and skills, and students want to pursue such programmes. They are unable to do so for capacity constraints of institutions which could provide quality higher education at a reasonable cost.

India suffers from a shortage of doctors, but not due to a lack of interest. In 2021, about 16 lakh students appeared for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, out of which about eight lakh were eligible to pursue a medical degree. But the capacity of government and private medical colleges is just one lakh. Fees for a bachelor's degree in the IITs is said to have seen a three-fold rise over the past six years. A BTech degree from these institutions now costs 8-10 lakh for the general and other backward caste categories. Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and persons with disabilities and those belonging to the general and OBC category with a family income of one lakh rupees or less are eligible for a full tuition waiver. It still costs them Rs 2 to 3 lakh. An MBBS degree in some government colleges may be available, for the most meritorious, for a nominal fee. The rest may have to shell anywhere between Rs 20 to 24 lakh a year.

Tuition fee is often determined by demand and supply. Some institutions charge exorbitant fees as a strategy for brand building, in business and management institutions, for instance. An MBA from some of the newly established ones may cost about Rs 11 lakh, but the old and established ones charge Rs 23 - 25 lakh. They target consumers who prefer higher-priced goods over low-priced ones, even though the two are quite similar. The private sector abhors and resists pricing regulation. The public sector, on the other hand, used to despise raising their fees, for they held the belief that higher education is at least a public responsibility. Most have, however, succumbed to circumstances. Public-funded Central and state universities held the fort most stubbornly. Deprived of funds, they face an existential threat and have no option but to raise their fees.

Higher education institutions are vulnerable and easily manipulated into resorting to cost recovery. The rising cost of higher education does not augur well either for students or for the nation. It would affect equity and inclusion.





MEENAKSHI GOPINATH

# Vishwaguru to shreshtha shishya

By 2047, I hope for an education system that fosters fraternity and humility

ANNIVERSARIES INVARIABLY EVOKE expectations. To set out a vision for India at 100 from where we are today at 75 is daunting, given the bewildering pace at which the world is changing. Yet, having spent most of my working life in the higher education space, I have learnt the value of the audacity of hope.

Maria Montessori said, "establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is to keep us out of war". The need for education to play an effective role in nurturing "cultures of peace" is internationally acknowledged. Change, complexity, fragility and uncertainty define the world today, with Covid reminding us of the need for leveraging cooperation, collective action and an ethic of care for a sustainable planet.

In multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies like India, which are fractured along the lines of class, caste, region, religion and gender, the transformative potential of education to play a peace-sustaining role faces challenges. Populism and jingoism the world over have deepened divisions, triggered sectarian violence and reinforced prejudices.

Indian education must set itself the task to provide effective antidotes to the "militarisation" of the mind and proactively nurture the canvas of coexistence. Critical thinking, dialogue, civic participation, community engagement and non-violent action are integral to this moment.

In 1995, UNESCO endorsed a declaration on the Integrated Framework of Action on Education for peace, human rights and democracy. It was the first international instrument that established the link between the practice of democracy and learning about diversity and "the wealth of cultural identities".

Education can provide the conceptual al-

phabets for a vocabulary of peace, only through the consistent interrogation of pedagogical frames that overtly — or even subliminally — transmit prejudice and intolerance. The implementation of the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) must provide the context to not only mould "global citizens" but also "intelligent patriots" with the courage to hold up the mirror and question the shibboleths we live by.

Critical thinking, beyond "proscribed texts" and "prescribed" curricula, is needed to propel education towards nourishing predispositions and an inclination for peace in societies. Education must be open to the not-always harmonious reverberations of learning. The pluriverse of the global Learning Commons can potentially arrest our cartographic anxieties and processes of "othering". Its sheer diversity can inure education from proselytising tendencies, sectarian impulses and partisan agendas. (The contestations over the writing of history are all too familiar to us).

History is replete with examples of "heretical" interrogations within "dissenting traditions," opening new continents of thought. The contributions of an Aryabhata, Buddha, Copernicus, Galileo, Al-Zahrawi, Descartes, Newton, Marx and Einstein were built on paradigm shifts that disrupted settled comfort zones. The oft-invoked Nalanda tradition too excelled in pushing the Sutras to evoke new voices through reasoned debate — from "safe spaces" to "brave spaces".

In the Preamble, our Constitution foregrounds justice, liberty, equality and frater-

nity as interlinked foundational principles. The one value, however, that has received the least attention both in policy and legislation is fraternity. It is time to address that lacuna, with education playing a decisive role.

I imagine an India at 100, that inscribes the spirit of *sa vidya ya vimuktaye* (that alone is knowledge which leads to liberation) into its educational initiatives. I imagine pedagogical practices imbued with a social purpose to remove all forms of discrimination.

I imagine an India at 100 that provides a hospitable space for pedagogies that cultivate the intellect and also integrate body, mind and spirit to balance our ecological, ethical, emotional, creative and spiritual needs — emphasising what makes us human — not merely our global competitiveness.

The emphasis on self-knowledge with the recognition of the interconnectedness of all sentient beings and context sensitivity has been integral to our traditions of learning. How well can we retrieve these values?

Civic responsibility in an interdependent world requires perspectives on how every considered action can potentially impact multiple lives across time and geography. This to me appears as fundamental to the spirit of "Vasudhaiva kutumbakam".

I dream of an India where institutes of learning will cease to be domesticating spaces and will reconstruct themselves as transformative, and above all, engendered spaces. These spaces do more than assure mere numeric representation for women. They ensure substantive equality to counter

the violence and exclusions of class, caste and patriarchy. For instance, although women constitute an unprecedented 49.3 per cent in the higher education space in India, they still face several obstacles to the full and equal participation guaranteed by our Constitution.

At 100, women will not remain the hugely underutilised resource they are today. They will drive and helm processes of change for a more inclusive, humane world, crafting a new social compact that fulfils the emancipatory potential of education.

This calls for opening up more spaces to converse in the metaphoric mother tongue (the potent utterance of the sacred Vāc) the language of empathy in which maps can change and scripts be rewritten to include invisibilised histories and that can speak truth to power.

With 100 per cent substantive literacy, India at 100 will be home to the finest citadels of learning that mould sensitive, global citizens who make their voice count in world affairs, providing ethical and intellectual leadership in every field of human endeavour.

India at 100 in my imagination will evolve from the certitudes of a Vishwaguru to the resilience of a "Shreshtha Shishya", with the humility of the eternal seeker, ever learning, ever flowing, malleable enough to put her own truths to stringent scrutiny.

The writer is Principal Emerita, Lady Shri Ram College, Director, Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace, and Chair, CPR, New Delhi. This article is part of an ongoing series, which began on August 15, by women who have made a mark, across sectors





# Onerous times for Afghan women



AVNI SABLOK

The women in Afghanistan are not allowed in schools. It is high time the world community took note and did something about it.

**H**istorical evidence shows that circumstantial adversaries and crisis situations such as the pandemic, humanitarian and security threats, as well as climate change, have tested and even reversed the progress in expanding women's rights and opportunities across the world. There is also evidence that reversal of democratic processes has adversely impacted the rights of women. The takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban can be seen as one such adversary that has not only stunted the progress but also reversed the established democratic environment. The recent decisions by the Taliban for a nation-wide ban on university education for girls can be seen as a violation of Afghan women's right to education and freedom.



## Derailment of Women Rights

Over the past one year, Afghanistan has witnessed heightened restrictions and a rapid reversal of women's rights, impacting their future in terms of education, employment, healthcare, freedom of movement and even participation in public and political life. Various policies announced by the Taliban regime is indicative of systematic exclusion of women from public life such as the recent nation-wide ban on education, dissolution of ministry dedicated to women's interests and welfare, the absence of women in the cabinet, restraints on women's free movement who are to be accompanied by a male relative (mahram) and to cover faces in public, and depriving women their right to work as enshrined in the 2004 Constitution. Women's position in the media landscape has changed rapidly too. For instance, in November 2021 a media restriction introduced by the Taliban regime prohibited women from appearing in television dramas.

On account of the regressive and repressive policies of the Taliban regime Afghanistan ranked last (170 out of 170 countries) on the Global

Women, Peace and Security Index 2021, reflecting the abysmal situation of women and girls across many provinces in the country. According to UN Women, approximately 60% of children who are out-of-school are young Afghan girls and only 4.9% of women are accessing tertiary education, compared to 14.2% of men. Further, according to a UNDP report, Afghanistan may incur an immediate economic loss of up to US\$1 billion — or up to five percent of the country's GDP due to restrictions of women from work.

## Domestic Resistance

When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, Ms Pramila Patten, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, urged the international community to sustain its attention and action to ensure women's rights are non-negotiable. The restrictive policies of the Taliban in Afghanistan specifically aimed at the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls have disrupted the cycle of women development, examined at the 9075th UNSC meeting. Speaking to the UNSC, Yalda Hakim, international correspondent and news presenter for BBC News, underscored

OVER THE PAST ONE YEAR, AFGHANISTAN HAS WITNESSED HEIGHTENED RESTRICTIONS AND A RAPID REVERSAL OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS, IMPACTING THEIR FUTURE IN TERMS OF EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, HEALTHCARE, FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

that "Afghanistan is now the only country in the world where girls are prevented from getting an education, locked out of their classrooms, simply because of their gender".

The international community needs to understand that the repercussions of depriving women of the right to education, employment, freedom of movement and expression in Afghanistan will be felt world-wide. The most discernible impact with global effects will be felt in the performance of the country in terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) committed to promote gender equality, women empowerment, and women led-development, which has severely deteriorated in Afghanistan in the last one year since the Taliban takeover.

Considering the recent curtailment of women's rights to education, the global players need to bring a consensus on mainstreaming Afghan women rights. In achieving this, multilateral forums such as the W20 (Women 20) platform, under the current G20 presidency of India can prove instrumental. Second, the international community must collectively strengthen

international cooperation in upholding UNSC Resolution 2593 to uphold women's rights and their full and equal participation in the political settlement of Afghanistan. To achieve this, the neighbouring countries, in collaboration with the international community, need to be more proactive on the diplomatic and security front and insist on guaranteeing respect in the full spectrum of women's rights as a priority, aligning national and international interest. Third, to foster 'gender equality' the world community needs to stand with the Afghan women and support their cause to fight against the systematic exclusion of women from public life enforced by the Taliban regime. This may also help the regime to realize and acknowledge that participation of women at all levels is paramount for the country's inclusive development cannot be based on exclusive policies in complete disregard of the contribution of women to the society at large.

(The writer is a Delhi based researcher. She worked as Senior Researcher at Public Policy Research Centre (PPRC), New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)



# एक नई क्रांति के मुहाने पर दुनिया



शिवकांत शर्मा

आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलीजेंस का उद्गम औद्योगिक क्रांति के बाद होने वाला सबसे बड़ा परिवर्तन है, जिससे हमें अपनी ताल मिलानी ही होगी

**बी**ते वर्ष प्रिंस्टन यूनिवर्सिटी प्रेस ने एक किताब छपी, 'यू आर नाट एक्सपेक्टेड टू अंडरस्टैंड दिस' यानी यह अपेक्षा नहीं कि आप इसे समझ ही लें। दिलचस्प शीर्षक और सामग्री की वजह से चर्चा का विषय बनी यह पुस्तक, जिसकी संपादक टोरी वाश हैं, हमारे वर्तमान और भविष्य पर कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता (आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलीजेंस-एआइ) और मशीन लर्निंग जैसी तकनीकों के प्रभाव का आकलन करती है। 1975 में जारी किए गए कंप्यूटरों के ओपन सोर्स आपरेटिंग सिस्टम 'यूनिक्स' के छोटे संस्करण के लेखकों ने उसके कोड में एक दिलचस्प टिप्पणी डाली थी-आप इसे समझ लें, यह आशा नहीं। यह उस कोड की चमत्कारिक क्षमताओं की घोषणा थी, क्योंकि यह आपरेटिंग सिस्टम अलग-अलग कंप्यूटरों पर एक साथ कई एप्लीकेशन चला सकता था। यहाँ से नई तकनीक की वह यात्रा शुरू हुई, जो आज एल्गोरिद्म के जरिये कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता और

मशीन लर्निंग तक आ पहुँची है। एआइ के क्षेत्र में गत वर्ष कई उल्लेखनीय बातें हुई हैं, जिनकी वजह से यह किताब लिखी गई है। जैसे फेसबुक की प्रवर्तक कंपनी मेटा के कुछ कर्मियों ने ऐसा एआइ प्रोग्राम बनाने का दावा किया, जो रणनीति के प्रसिद्ध खेल 'डिप्लोमैसी' में अधिकांश लोगों को हरा सकता है। चीन के शेनजेन शहर के अधिकारियों ने दावा किया कि वे 5जी नेटवर्क से जुड़े मोबाइल के डिजिटल जुड़वा रूपों के जरिये लोगों, उनकी आवाजाही और ऊर्जा खपत की निगरानी कर रहे हैं। इस बीच सबसे अधिक चर्चा चैट-जीपीटी नामक चैट बोट की रही, जो आकलन-विश्लेषण कर सकता है। जटिल विषयों पर लेख लिख सकता है। उलझाऊ समस्याओं के तर्कसंगत हल बता सकता है। चुटकुले और कहावतें समझ सकता है और फंसेने वाले सवाल की गुत्थी सुलझा सकता है। खबरें हैं कि माइक्रोसाफ्ट चैट-जीपीटी बनाने वाली कंपनी 'ओपन-एआइ' में 1,000 करोड़ डालर के निवेश की योजना बना रही है।

माइक्रोसाफ्ट एक छोटी उदीयमान कंपनी पर इतना बड़ा दांव इसलिए लगाना चाहती है, क्योंकि उसे गूगल के सर्च इंजन से मुकाबले के लिए विकल्प की तलाश है। चैट-जीपीटी में उसे ऐसा इंजन बनाने की क्षमता नजर आती है। चैट-जीपीटी में जीपीटी का आशय ऐसी तकनीक से है, जिसमें इंटरनेट पर उपलब्ध नाना विषयों की लाखों किताबों की सामग्री पढ़कर स्मृति का विशालकाय डाटाबेस तैयार होता है। फिर उसका प्रयोग समझने और भाषाई व्यवहार करने में कर सकता है। अभी चैट-जीपीटी शैशव अवस्था में है, लेकिन जैसे-जैसे उसमें और जानकारी



अव्यंश राजपूत

भरी जाएगी, वैसे-वैसे उसकी क्षमता और समझ बढ़ती जाएगी। ऐसी मशीनें अनुवाद करने, कानूनी और दफ्तरी दस्तावेज लिखने के अलावा रचनात्मक लेखन या संगीत के कच्चे मसौदे बनाने के काम भी कर सकेंगी, जिसके बाद लेखक उन्हें परिमार्जित कर सकेंगे।

गूगल पर हम शब्द या फिकरे डालकर जानकारी खोजते हैं और सर्च इंजन वांछित जानकारी के सही संदर्भ और विषय के बजाय जहाँ-जहाँ शब्द और फिकरा मिले उसे पेश कर देता है, लेकिन यदि कल्पना करें कि आप किसी सर्च इंजन से सधे हुए सवाल करें और वह उसके एकदम सटीक उत्तर खोज दे तो कितना अच्छा होगा? माइक्रोसाफ्ट को 'ओपन-एआइ' से इसी तरह के सर्च इंजन की दरकार है, जिसके सहारे वह गूगल सर्च इंजन के एकछत्र राज को चुनौती देना चाहता है। यह सब इसलिए संभव हो रहा है, क्योंकि आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलीजेंस प्रोग्राम अब अपनी डीप लर्निंग की पीढ़ी से फ़ाउंडेशन माडल के पड़ाव पर पहुँच गए हैं। पिछले दस वर्षों से हम गूगल और एपल नक्शों के सहारे घूमने

के आदी हो गए हैं। अमेजन की एलेक्सा और एपल की सीरी से भी छोटे-मोटे काम करा लेते हैं, लेकिन फ़ाउंडेशन माडल के बोट एकदम अगली पीढ़ी के होंगे। पायलट से कहीं भूल हो रही होगी तो वे चेतावनी देंगे। आपकी कार चलाएंगे। ड्रोन उड़ाएंगे। डाक्टर को बीमारी का सही निदान बताएंगे। संगीतकार के गुनगुनाते ही धुन और संगीत के नोट बनाकर दे देंगे। यह सब इसलिए संभव लगता है, क्योंकि आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलीजेंस के कोड अब मशीनों को हमारे मस्तिष्क की तंत्रिकाओं के करोड़ों नेटवर्कों की तर्ज पर प्रशिक्षित कर रहे हैं। मशीनें अपनी भूलों से खुद सीख रही हैं। वैसे अभी भी हवाई और रेल यातायात नियंत्रण, विमान नियंत्रण और चालन, मौसम पूर्वानुमान, मिसाइल, राकेट और उपग्रह प्रक्षेपण जैसे काम मशीनों की आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलीजेंस ही करती है। नई पीढ़ी की एआइ मशीनों में भूल सुधार की क्षमता भी होगी।

टोरी वाश का मानना है कि लगभग हर काम में प्रयोग आने वाली मशीनों के कोड लिखने वाले लोग हम और आप ही हैं। इसलिए ये उनकी धारणाओं से अछूते

नहीं रह सकते। नीति निर्माताओं के लिए चुनौती यह है कि ये मशीनें आंकड़ों का खगाल और समझ तो सकती हैं, परन्तु इनकी नैतिक और सामाजिक ज़रूरत का सही फैसला नहीं कर सकती। आम लोगों के लिए चुनौती यह है कि एक बार जब सब मशीनों में हर जगह एआइ को कोई न कोई मात्रा लग जाएगी तो उन्हें चलाने और उनकी मरम्मत करने वालों की भी उनकी कुछ जानकारी चाहिए होगी। अन्यथा ये कैसे चलेंगी और ठीक होंगी? संभवतः इसी सोच-विचार के बाद ब्रितानी प्रधानमंत्री ब्रिजिस सुनक ने हाल में कहा कि स्कूलों में बारहवीं कक्षा तक गणित को अनिवार्य किया जाएगा। उनका कहना था कि तेजी हो रहे तकनीकी विकास और बदलाव को देखते हुए गणित की बुनियादी मजबूत किए बिना युवाओं को रोजगार मिलने में दिक्कतें होंगी। आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलीजेंस और मशीन लर्निंग में हो रहे विकास और रोजगार के प्रत्येक क्षेत्र में गणित की महत्ता को सुनक से चेन्नर और कौन समझ सकता है? ऐसे में, भारत के नेताओं और नीति निर्माताओं को भी इस विषय पर जागने की ज़रूरत है। बृद्धमान मशीनों की क्रांति औद्योगिक क्रांति के बाद होने वाला सबसे बड़ा परिवर्तन है। लोगों के रोजगार पर इनके संभावित असर को लेकर अभी गहरे मतभेद हैं, लेकिन इस परिदृश्य में हमारे समक्ष दो ही विकल्प हैं या तो एआइ और उसकी कोईिंग के बारे में जानकारी हासिल करें और मशीनों की अपनी ज़रूरतों और चुनौतियों के हिसाब से ढालें। या सब कुछ कोड लिखने वालों और मशीनें बनाने वालों पर छोड़ दें।

(लेखक बीबीसी हिंदी सेवा के पूर्व संपादक हैं।)

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# सेल्फ स्टडी कल्चर से राजस्थान में ज्यादा IAS

पिछले कुछ वर्षों से राजस्थान से यूपीएससी में चयनित होने वाले युवाओं की संख्या बढ़ रही है। यह यूपी को पछाड़कर इस मामले में टॉप पर पहुंच गया है



नरपतदान बारहट

सिविल सेवा परीक्षा 2021 (सीएसई-21) में भारतीय प्रशासनिक सेवा (आईएएस) के लिए चुने गए कुल 180 अभ्यर्थियों में से 24 राजस्थान से हैं।

इसके साथ ही राजस्थान ने आईएएस के मामले में उत्तर प्रदेश को पछाड़कर शीर्ष स्थान हासिल कर लिया है। यूपी से इस बार 19 अभ्यर्थी ही चुने गए। कार्मिक और प्रशिक्षण विभाग के पिछले चार साल के आंकड़े देखें तो राजस्थान ने देश को कुल 84 आईएएस अधिकारी दिए हैं। पिछले तीन सालों से इस संख्या में लगातार बढ़ोतरी देखने को मिल रही है।

वर्ष 2019 में संघ लोक सेवा आयोग (यूपीएससी) परीक्षा में राजस्थान से 16 उम्मीदवार चयनित हुए। सीएसई-2020 की परीक्षा में राजस्थान के 22 उम्मीदवार चुने गए और 2021 में यह संख्या बढ़कर 24 हो गई। राजस्थान से लगातार बढ़ती आईएएस

अधिकारियों की संख्या के कारणों को समझने की कोशिश करें तो कई तथ्य उभरते हैं।

- राज्य में पिछड़े तबकों के ज्यादातर छात्र आईआईटी या मेडिकल की महंगी कोचिंग के बजाय यूपीएससी में किस्मत आजमाना पसंद करते हैं।
- दिल्ली में रहने और कोचिंग लेने का खर्च काफी ज्यादा पड़ता है। इसलिए यहां के ज्यादातर कैंडिडेट सेल्फ और ऑनलाइन स्टडी का सहारा लेते हैं।
- ऑनलाइन कंटेंट, ऐप, सोशल मीडिया आदि से यूपीएससी एग्जाम तक छात्रों की पहुंच सहज हुई है। इसका फायदा राजस्थान के छात्र खूब उठा रहे हैं।
- राजस्थान सरकार की अनुप्रति योजना ने पिछड़े छात्रों को यूपीएससी एग्जाम के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया है।
- आईसीएस में सफल छात्रों से प्रेरित होकर सिविल सर्विस में जाने का क्रेज राजस्थान में सर्वाधिक देखने को मिलता है।
- चयन प्रक्रिया में हिंदी माध्यम का फायदा राजस्थान के छात्र उठाते हैं, यह भी सिविल सेवा में उनकी बढ़ती संख्या की एक बड़ी वजह है।

**सेल्फ स्टडी का असर :** तकनीकी प्रगति और पाठ्यक्रम में बदलाव जैसे फैक्टर्स पर थोड़ा और ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। अब

Dall E 2 image generator



कॉमन रूम

सिविल सेवा में करंट अफेयर्स पर अधिक फोकस किया जाता है। बीते कुछ सालों में सिविल सेवा परीक्षा के टॉपर्स विभिन्न इंटरव्यू में बता चुके हैं कि उन्होंने सेल्फ स्टडी के माध्यम से मुकाम हासिल किया है। तकनीक के बढ़ते प्रभाव के कारण दूरदराज क्षेत्रों में बैठे अभ्यर्थी भी समसामयिक घटनाओं पर ई-बुक, गुणवत्तापूर्ण नोट्स, ई-लर्निंग और यूट्यूब के माध्यम से बेहतरीन कंटेंट प्राप्त कर सकता है। इससे उसे दिल्ली जाकर कोचिंग की जरूरत कम हो जाती है।

टेलिग्राम, गूगल मीट और वट्सऐप आदि का भी काफी योगदान है। जहां टेलिग्राम के जरिए नोट्स सहज उपलब्ध हो जाते

हैं वहीं गूगल मीट और जूम ऐप के जरिए समसामयिक विषयों पर कई अभ्यर्थी ग्रुप डिस्कशन करते हैं। हालांकि ये सुविधाएं पूरे देश में हर क्षेत्र के अभ्यर्थियों को उपलब्ध हैं, लेकिन राजस्थान के छात्र इनका ज्यादा व्यवस्थित इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं।

एक बड़ा कारण यह भी है कि राजस्थान में अनुसूचित जाति/अनुसूचित जनजाति समुदाय कुल आबादी का करीब 25 प्रतिशत है। अन्य राज्यों के मुकाबले यहां इन समुदायों में न केवल अधिक जागरूकता है, बल्कि सिविल सेवा में करियर बनाने की प्रवृत्ति भी है। इस वजह से वे अधिक संख्या में परीक्षा में सम्मिलित होते हैं।

**अनुप्रति योजना की मदद :** यह देखना दिलचस्प है कि कैसे सरकार की कोई खास योजना राज्य के युवाओं को खास सेवा की ओर आकर्षित करने में अहम भूमिका निभाती है। बहुचर्चित अनुप्रति योजना के अंतर्गत अखिल भारतीय सिविल सेवा परीक्षा में विभिन्न स्तर (प्रारंभिक परीक्षा, मुख्य परीक्षा और साक्षात्कार) पर पास होने वाले अनुसूचित जाति और अनुसूचित जनजाति के गरीब विद्यार्थियों को राजस्थान सरकार की तरफ से एक लाख रुपये तक की प्रोत्साहन धनराशि दी जाती है। इससे पिछड़े तबके के अभ्यर्थियों को आर्थिक संबल मिलता है।





# Big changes in early years; funding education is key



Suman Bhattacharjee

In the last few years, several factors have altered the education landscape for young children. Those under lens belong to the pre-school cohort (roughly aged between three and five years). Some of the changes are due to the closure of pre-schools and schools for about two years because of Covid-19. In addition, recent changes to education policy have also influenced the organisation of pre-school education in India.

An important change, in how the Government of India envisaged early childhood education took place in 2018 — a process that had already begun several years earlier, with the release of the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education in 2013. Launched in 2018, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan's Integrated Scheme on School Education aimed to address school education "holistically without segmentation from pre-nursery to Class 12". This new scheme encouraged states to co-locate anganwadi centres (AWCs) in government primary schools or else provide up to two years of pre-primary classes prior to Class I, thus taking a first step towards coordination between the institutions providing educational services to children in the earliest stages of their educational journeys.

The impetus for integrating pre-school and school education took another giant step forward with the release of the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020. NEP integrates early childhood education into the continuum of educational opportunities offered to children by envisioning ages three to eight as a single integrated "foundational" stage in the child's education. It comprises three years of pre-primary education and the first two years of primary school.

How did these forces — major policy changes as well as a pandemic — alter young children's participation in pre-school?

Because the information available on pre-primary institutions, facilities, staff, and enrolments is still fragmented and incomplete, it may be years before we have clear picture of how this four-year period altered the landscape of educational provisioning, participation, and outcomes for young children. However, comparing data from the recently released Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2022, with that from the previous round in 2018, it is possible to identify some initial trends.

**Enrolment of 3- and 4-year-olds increased, mainly in AWCs:** Many observers expected that after such an extended closure, children and their families would find it difficult to return to school. The ASER-2022 data shows that this is far from the case. For the youngest learners, results from ASER-2022 show that parents' commitment to children's education is stronger than ever: In 2022 in rural India, 75.8 per cent of three-year-olds and 82 per cent of four-year-olds are enrolled in some form of pre-school, and the fraction of children in this age group not attending any institution at all has fallen sharply. What's more heartening — this trend is not limited to young children — it is visible across all age groups and in all states in the country. Not just evidence of a remarkable recovery from a devastating pandemic, it reflects clear progress towards the NEP objective of universal early childhood development, care and education by 2030.

Now, as with all national estimates, these averages hide considerable and, sometimes surprising, variations across states. For example, states where almost all three-year-olds

**Not just a remarkable recovery from a devastating pandemic, the data reflects clear progress towards the NEP goal of universal early childhood development, care and education by 2030**

were enrolled in 2018, such as Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, were not always able to regain these remarkable coverage levels post school reopening in 2022. These figures show big drops in 2022. In contrast, many states where moderate or high proportions of young children had remained outside the coverage of pre-school programmes in 2018, such as Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, did much better at reaching and enrolling these children in 2022.

The changes in young children's enrolment patterns also show a shift towards government institutions (in this case, anganwadis) between 2018 and 2022, once again echoed by the results gathered for older age groups. This is unsurprising given the loss of livelihoods and financial distress experienced by households during the pandemic as well as the reported closure of many low-cost private schools. As a result, in 2022, more than two-thirds of all four-year-olds (67.8 per cent) in rural India remained enrolled in government institutions, the vast majority in anganwadis.

**Five-year-olds continue in primary school:** Major national policy documents — the Right to Education Act (2009), the Early Childhood Care and Education policy (2013), and the National Education Policy (2020) — all reiterate that children should enter Class I of primary school at age six. Despite these national policy prescriptions, in 2022 approximately one in every three five-year-old children was enrolled in primary school albeit in somewhat smaller numbers than was the case four years ago. Five-year-olds in rural India continue to

avail of a diverse range of options. About a third are in anganwadis, a quarter are in private pre-schools (LKG or UKG classes) and another quarter are in government schools (most likely in Class I).

**Lessons:** The shifts in enrolment patterns described above have major implications for the early years' ecosystem, going forward.

A first, major, challenge confronts the ICDS anganwadi network. In 2022, on average, four in every 10 children in the three-six years age group in rural India was enrolled in an AWC. With a single anganwadi worker responsible for the delivery of six different services to mothers and young children, the delivery of quality pre-school education was a difficult task, even prior to 2022, but this recent expansion in enrolments imposes significant extra strain on the system. Ways to leverage additional human, material and financial resources to support the work of these centres have been implemented in different states. Similar initiatives need to be designed, tested and scaled up to enable these centres to successfully deliver quality pre-school education.

Currently, the other possible pathway to increasing institutional capacity for pre-school education is the establishment of pre-primary classes in schools. This year, as part of ASER-2022, survey teams visited over 17,000 schools with primary sections across the country. The data shows that 28.7 per cent of the primary schools and 22.7 per cent of the upper primary schools visited had a separate pre-school class. However, just ten per cent or less had received separate funds or had a separate teacher for the pre-primary level classes.

It suggests that unless good intentions are supported with adequate resource allocations, the NEP's ambitious goal of achieving universal quality early childhood development, care and education will be remain on paper only.

The writer is the director of research at the ASER Centre



# Success, distraction, anxiety at Kota's famous coaching factory

Shiv Sunny

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**KOTA:** Sitting in a park near his daughter's hostel in Kota, Vivek Kumar basks in a relieved smile, congratulating himself on a mission accomplished. For the last few months, the police head constable, posted in Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh, has spent most evenings calling his daughter's friends, checking about her attendance. Still suspicious, in the middle of December, he travelled 750km to the Rajasthan town unannounced, and unbeknownst to her, followed her for two days. He is now convinced, his daughter, he says, is sure to crack the NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test). "Everyone already believes she is a doctor," Kumar, 43, said.

Kumar spends ₹22,000 a month as fee for his daughter to study at one of Kota's prominent coaching institutes, and ₹15,000 a month for her hostel accommodation. It stretches his government salary, something that he reminds his daughter about often. He refuses to spend money on a cup of tea because she must be aware of the family's sacrifices. But the goal is clear. Above him is one of the many advertising hoardings that dot every vacant inch of space in the city. "I want my daughter to be up there, with a photograph proclaiming she is one of the NEET toppers," he said.

But, as has been becoming ever clearer over the past few years, the Kota narrative isn't only about aspiration. On December 12, 2022, three students of coaching institutes killed themselves on a single day. From 2021, government data shows that as many as 121 students have died by suicide. 15 in 2022 alone. That counter has begun ticking in 2023 already. On Sunday evening, a 17-year-old JEE aspirant from Shahjahanpur was found hanging in his hostel room. In the wake of the December deaths, HT spent a week in Kota

interacting with students, parents, teachers, coaching institute owners, psychiatrists and district administration officials, to piece together the story of life (and death) in Kota, India's coaching factory, where a heady, often poisonous mix of rigour and expectation produces IIT and NEET toppers from one end, but broken youngsters from the other.

## The industry and stress

Kota is around 250km from Rajasthan's state capital Jaipur, and coaching centres didn't always define it. Until the early 1980s, the town was popular for its Doria sarees, fine grained limestone called the Kota stone, and the manufacturing of yarn and fertilisers. In 1978, a mechanical engineer, VK Bansal, who then worked for a chemical firm in the town, first began teaching a bunch of local students. "In 1981, one of his students cracked the IIT exam," said Akhilesh Jain, general manager of Bansal Classes, the first formal coaching institute to come up in Kota.

Word of success quickly spread; Bansal Classes went from strength to strength; and VK Bansal came to be known as the "Bhishma Pitamah" (elder statesman) of the coaching industry. Around the same time, the Allen Career Institute that now enrolls close to half of all students in Kota and is the biggest test-prep company in town, began operations too. "Tuition had become a necessity. We began around the same time as Bansal. They focused on IIT preparations, we were into medical," Naveen Maheshwari of Allen Institute said. Four-and-a-half decades later, Kranti Jain, president of the Kota Vyapar Mahasangh, says there are 250,000 students who study for various entrance examinations in Kota, serviced by at least 2,500 hostels. While there is

little official data, estimates by coaching institute owners put the annual revenue from that at ₹3,000 crore a year.

Most institutes recruit students after they graduate from school, some even earlier, and prepare them for entrance examinations ranging from the medical stream, engineering, law, and chartered accountancy. A student will typically wake up at around 5.30am, rush through breakfast, and arrive at the coaching institute by 6.15am. There are three classes that span between 75 and 90 minutes, and at least an hour spent at "doubt corners" to clarify any questions. The rest of the day is spent on daily practice problem (DPP) sheets — a term used in Kota for homework — meals, and daily chores.

The students spend no time in regular schools, although admission to both engineering and medical colleges requires that they have finished school; for this, there are local schools where they are enrolled. But they do not have to attend classes; only appear for the school-leaving examinations conducted by the board. Then, there are students who have finished school elsewhere, and are in Kota on a gap year, to prepare for college.

In the frenetic survival-of-the-fittest culture that dominates Kota, a sense of inadequacy can quickly set in. "It was a board topper among 80 students in my class. Here, I was suddenly thrown amid 80,000 toppers," said Lalba Fadima, an 18-year-old NEET aspirant from Bihar studying at the Allen Career Institute.

Experts suggest that, in an ideal world, students should be "mentally readied" for six months before they are sent to Kota. Nitin Vijay, physics teacher and founder of Motion Coaching, for instance, says he offers an "Experience Kota" option, where students can



Around 250,000 students study for entrance exams in Kota. HTfile

decide whether they continue after a week. "At least 10% of students leave in the middle of that week." A 2015-16 survey by Kota's School of Management and Commerce Studies said that 42% of teachers believed that only half of all students who come to Kota stand a chance of succeeding in competitive examinations.

This has led to suggestions that coaching centres should conduct screening tests. But Maheshwari of the Allen Institute argues, "Students in Kota that have poor board exam marks and inadequate schooling have made it to IITs because of sheer hard work. Who are we to deny them a dream based on a test?" Institutes also say the secret to Kota's coaching industry is to simplify complicated concepts, and make them accessible. "Kota's speciality is the ability to teach in the form of storytelling. The words we use in our classes are carefully chosen to be graspable." Most students can succeed by following 50% of our instructions," said RK Verma, a mathematics teacher and founder of Resonance Coaching.

Once in the pace is relentless. A missed class or two, or a week of illness, sets students back and, of late, the examinations — NEET

examinations are held in May, JEE in January and April — do not change (except perhaps for a world-altering pandemic). The schedules are not designed individually — one batch of classes typically has anywhere between 100 and 250 students in an academic year — and the onus is on them to keep pace. Coaching centres do have "special classes" for students to claw back, but students often fall behind regardless.

"I was ill for a while, and from the front benches, I moved to the last bench because the course moved forward... By the end of the year, I would play 'book cricket' at the back of the class to pass the time," said Gurav, who only wanted to identify himself with his first name, an 18-year-old IIT aspirant.

Institutes are punctilious about attendance — parents are called when their ward misses classes — but there are many who find ways around these systems. Investigators who looked at the three suicides on December 12 said two of them were getting their friends to punch in attendance cards. "A third found a way to replace his parents' phone number with his own," said deputy superintendent of police Amar Rathore.

Several big institutes have also

created a division within their own ranks, commonly known as 'special rankers group' (SRG), which separates 50-70 students in an academic year. Members of SRG are those with consistently high marks in internal exams, and the process of handpicking them begins within a couple of months of the course commencing.

Once picked, these students have access to better hostels, personal attention from teachers, even free coaching. But for the vast majority, this segregation means a sense of desolation, and anxiety. "Teachers drink tea with SRG, but we aren't even allowed to interact with them. For the institutes, they are rankers, we put the money in the bank," said a distraught Abha Joshi, a NEET aspirant from Rajasthan.

Coaching Institutes, however, argue that the shuffling of batches is a "necessary evil". "Weak students cannot grasp advanced concepts, and we cannot slow down the pace. Every student benefits from shuffling," said Amit Jain, a chemistry teacher at Allen.

## Pressures of life beyond classes and hostels

Beyond pressure within the classroom, Kota is also the story of young men and women, emerging out of the cocoon of living at home for the first time in their lives, and struggling with life and love. With its reputation as a launchpad for competitive success, Kota draws its 250,000-student population from all over India, from metros, from tier 2 and 3 towns, even from India's villages. For most, this is the first time they live outside the sanctuary that is home.

Over the years, Kota has evolved into a city that caters to its young core. Its streets are peppered with coffee shops, malls, and Bakhsh Jain, general manager of Bansal Classes, said, "Students come here to study, but they are young. There are distractions from the opposite gender,

phones, and social media."

Kesar Singh Sheldhawar, superintendent of police, Kota, said, "It is natural, but it is also true that several student suicides have their roots in relationships that have gone wrong." Investigations into one of the 15 student suicides in Kota last year revealed that a 17-year-old girl jumped to her death from her hostel room, even as her parents waited downstairs, luggage in hand. "Her parents found out about her relationship because her phone was constantly busy. So, they arrived to take her away," said Omprakash Bunkar, Kota's district magistrate.

Dr Chandrasekhar Sushil, senior professor of psychiatry and former superintendent of Kota's Medical College and Hospital said that most students complain both of academic pressure and reasons such as these. "There are many students who enter relationships, or find themselves in bad company. This can result in poor academic performance and the subsequent tear of pressure from home." The institutional response to this is often predictably restrictive. Mantu Pandey, who operates a 36-room boys' hostel, says that students are made to remove social media applications, their interactions with girls from the neighbouring hostel are barred, and parents are informed if their ward is out after 9pm. "What I consider carefully is whether to call parents if the student is not studying seriously. Mostly I don't because it can drive a student to depression and fear," she said.

## The path forward

Coaching institute owners and teachers argue that Kota's student suicides receive disproportionate attention. They point to 2021 NCRB data which shows that "failure in examination" was a cause for 29 deaths in Dhanbad, 13 in Nashik, 14 in Patna, and 18 in Vadodra. "There is an attempt to malign Kota and bring down the

coaching eco-system here," Maheshwari said.

To be sure, several top coaching institutes such as Allen and Resonance have teams of psychiatrists on campus, as well as active students' welfare association in the town. "Only a few suicides are purely academics-related. There are children that find it difficult to leave their comfort homes, exacerbated by parents telling their children not to return home without succeeding," said Dr. Harish Sharma, Allen's principal psychologist.

But both the district administration and the state government view student suicides as a problem. On December 15, the Kota district administration issued guidelines which asked institutes to find ways to gauge interest and aptitude in students, portray a correct sense of their success rate, and ensure a refund of money if students quit mid-term.

The Rajasthan government is also expected to introduce a bill in the budget session of the Assembly, starting on January 23, proposing an aptitude test for students before admission, a ban on the display of pictures of toppers of different entrance examinations to prevent their glorification, and a mandate to all coaching institutes to set up career counselling cells.

Most in Kota, however, believe that the atmosphere of a cauldron of relentless competition will persist. "Our industry delivers what it promises — nothing more and nothing less. Competition will always cause stress," said Sameer Bansal, director of Bansal Classes.

In his small hostel room in Kota's Mahaveer Nagar, Nitin Nayan has a framed photograph of his parents, who live in Bithur, on his crowded desk. The photograph is double-edged: eliciting both inspiration and fear. "Whenever I imagine failure, I look at their picture," he said. "Failure is simply not an option."

PICK OF THE DAY





# Re-imagine schooling to check learning loss

That the pandemic wreaked havoc on basic education was well known since the first few months of school closure. The *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural)* on Wednesday quantified some of this loss, and the numbers are grim. On learning levels, children's basic reading ability dropped to pre-2012 levels. This was visible in most states and across genders; children's basic arithmetic levels declined over 2018 levels for most grades. The percentage of children in class 3 in government or private schools who can read at class 2 level dropped from 27.3% in 2018 to 20.5% in 2022. The national figure for children in class 3 who are able to at least do subtraction dropped from 28.2% in 2018 to 25.9% in 2022.

The non-governmental report resumed its physical nationwide survey after a gap of four years, reaching 19,060 villages across 616 districts, 374,544 households and 699,597 children between the ages of three and 16. Worryingly, the report found that the drop in reading and comprehension levels was steeper among younger children, and acute in states that had made strides in propelling basic education.

Though the rise in overall enrolment numbers is good news, the increase in the number of students seeking private tuition and enrolment in government schools indicates persistent distress. The three As of universal education are Access, Attendance and Achievement. While the first two seem to be under control, the last (learning levels) needs a major push from the government and society. The pandemic forced us to look at schooling differently. Now that there are no Covid-19 restrictions, it's essential to try new ideas and create new norms to raise the education levels of India's young, while simultaneously ensuring (through robust vaccination) that shutting schools is no longer needed.

HT/14

# FIRST COLUMN

## NAAC HELPS STUDENTS CHOOSE INSTITUTION

We must not see NAAC accreditation just as an event



SG. VATS

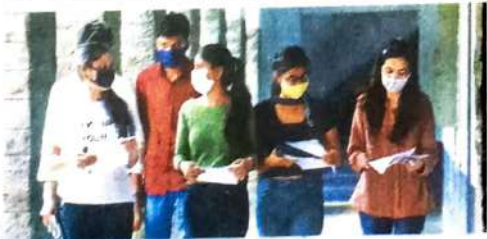


ANURADHA JAIN

**Q**uality is a concept; it's a philosophy; it's a journey; it's also what we practice. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) strives to create awareness and understanding of quality, and quality assurance in higher education as a necessary ingredient to national development.

The accreditation status in case of higher education signifies that the particular Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) – a College, a University, or any other recognized unit therein achieves the standards of quality as set by the accreditation agency on grounds of performance, linked to the educational processes and outcomes, covering the programmed, teaching-learning, evaluation, faculty, research, infrastructure, learning resources, organization, governance, financial well-being and student services.

From the point of view of students, NAAC grading helps the students to choose the institution for higher studies. Getting the highest grade of A++ for any institute is certainly a great achievement. For the record, many big brands in the field of higher education, living on their past glory or on the strength of an associated corporate brand, have not been able to rise to the challenge which the rigorous NAAC inspection poses.



The inspection is based on both qualitative and quantitative criterions. Guided by its vision, "to establish, maintain and promote centers of excellence for imparting quality professional education in India and abroad" and striving to achieve its mission of "Man Making, Character Building, Nation Building", Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies has always believed in the holistic development of its students.

This is the spur behind our elevation to the highest category after a recent inspection. Shouldering the responsibility of being a HEI, we believe in disseminating relevant knowledge, identifying skill gaps, and running specially designed programs to build the right skills to develop a workforce suitable to the changing needs of the economy. Providing the best state of the art infrastructure along with introducing progressive initiative to hone the cognitive, problem solving, leadership and communication skills of our students has been at the center of the years of efforts that the Institute has put in and will continue to put in to transform "education".

With various Centers of excellence, numerous value-added and skill enhancement courses, lectures from the best experts in the field, workshops for hands-on experience, VIPS continuously strives to cater to the needs of the changing order of the business environment. The teaching pedagogies followed at the Institute are specially designed to ensure maximum student engagement. Not just intellectual, VIPS caters to the socio-emotional and mental wellbeing of its students and staff. Inner Space – The spiritual Centre at VIPS is a unique offering that provides students and staff a place to unwind and be with oneself. The NAAC A++ grade reflects the untiring efforts and commitment of the Institute towards imparting quality education par excellence.

Constant support and motivation from the management provided additional zeal to the team to take care of any minute change required to present the work more comprehensively and meaningfully. The team worked beyond their comfort zone to take care and cover all technical aspects of the process. Continued commitment to contribute, a visionary leadership and a meticulous team are the key pillars to reaching this milestone in our unstoppable journey.

We must not see NAAC accreditation as an event that concludes with receiving the accreditation certificate. When viewed from the lens of the inspiration and purpose of internal improvements, it gives a new sense of direction to build strength and overcome weaknesses and also helps in strengthening systematic ways of planning. It's an exercise which every teaching institution should undertake.

(The authors are Chairman and Principal of Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, New Delhi)



# AI Vs Schools

*ChatGPT rises, ASER scores fall, India needs much better trained teachers to navigate this vortex*

Even as India struggles to rise to the present challenges of improving school learning outcomes, a big new one is looming on the horizon. The ASER 2022 report indicating how much the pandemic pushed reading and math outcomes below already disquieting levels, has come amidst a global panic about how much ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence tool that can write college and school essays and solve some basic problems, will be upending education. For example, it's been banned from New York City public schools' devices and networks. Remember this chatbot was launched less than two months ago, more advanced versions and cousins will take exponentially faster tolls.

Yet, most of India's policymakers, school administrators and teachers maintain a loud silence on this topic. Their attitude makes zero sense given the breakneck pace at which the country has been embracing new technologies. It is also tone-deaf to the buzz among



the students themselves. They are strikingly swifter at catching global cultural trends. The pull of a tool that can do the homework without the teacher detecting the plagiarism, is no different in Bengaluru than New York. Bans are a poor counter, with ChatGPT itself suggesting multiple ways of evading them. Much more sensible workarounds are also being devised, such as increased in-class, hand-

written and creative assignments.

ASER reports that across rural government and private schools, since 2018 the proportion of Class V children who can read at least a Class II text has fallen from 50.5% to 42.8%, while the number of Class V children who can do division has fallen from 27.9% to 25.6%. In theory it is possible that as deep learning is being deployed for mass admissions and testing, it can help guide more effective lesson plans. But this will need teachers with very sophisticated pedagogic and digital competency to be in the driving seat.

Basically a new paradigm of foundational education is rising up in the world even as India is rallying the building blocks of the previous one. But our Achilles heel remains the same: poorly trained teachers. Herding them into a stadium to sit through lectures is a very poor substitute for 'learning by doing'. Meanwhile, Bihar's pupil-teacher ratio is a horrifying 54, 55 and 63 at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. Let's equip our teachers better, then they can help turn AI from learning's foe to friend. *to do*



# Poor learning

While the State's overall educational scenario does not quite paint a rosy picture, the urban-rural divide remains another serious concern. As evidenced by successive Annual Status of Education Reports (ASERs), – and notwithstanding improvement in enrolment – the learning abilities of a vast segment of our future citizens stand hindered largely because education has not been imparted in the manner it should. Many students in rural areas cannot do simple arithmetic calculations or read or understand simple sentences in English. The latest ASER assessment merely revalidates what has been a stagnant area of education in the rural areas of our State. The government schools have been worse performers on this count compared to their private counterparts, and it does not merit much surprise that enrolment levels in government schools have been declining in recent years with parents exhibiting a marked penchant for having their children educated in private schools even in the rural areas. The findings of the survey, though, are not entirely unexpected, given that all along our thrust has been on increasing enrolment rather than improving the qualitative aspects of education. The performance of the government-run schools in particular has left a lot to be desired. It is a fact that various educational projects, including SSA, are primarily content with enrolling more students to meet their targets and devote little effort towards ensuring that the enrolled students get quality education. Unless we recognise the fact that greater enrolment does not necessarily lead to qualitative improvements, the prevailing situation is unlikely to change for the better.

The urban-rural divide, unless addressed with appropriate interventions, will leave long-term and disturbing effects on our education, the spiralling fallout of which will also impact the State's socio-economic spheres. Perpetuation of the current situation will create a large population of unqualified and unskilled youths unable to fend for themselves in a competitive world. This will be a colossal wastage of human resources just because our governments and policy makers have failed to put adequate thrust on the qualitative aspects of education. To check the disquieting trend, the sphere of school education must be treated as a high priority area. Aspects like appointment of competent and trained teachers require sustained intervention. Teachers' training in particular has always been neglected in our State. A monitoring mechanism on the performance of students is another must. Teachers and school managements must be made answerable for bad performance by the schools. Use of various teaching technologies, too, merits attention of the authorities. Right to Education (RTE) does have its emphasis on qualitative improvement but much will depend on the State government's commitment towards implementation. According to ASER findings, learning levels in those states witnessed maximum improvement where the state governments ran special programmes to improve reading and numerical ability under the SSA programmes. The ills afflicting our school education being far from one-dimensional, there is an urgent need for an integrated approach. ১৫/১৬



# Alarmed by chatbots, universities start revamping how they teach

With the rise of the popular new chatbot ChatGPT, colleges are restructuring some courses and taking preventive measures

KALLEY HUANG

**W**hile grading essays for his world religions course last month, Antony Aumann, a professor of philosophy at Northern Michigan University, read what he said was easily "the best paper in the class." It explored the morality of burqa bans with clean paragraphs, fitting examples and rigorous arguments.

A red flag instantly went up.

Aumann confronted his student over whether he had written the essay himself. The student confessed to using ChatGPT, a chatbot that delivers information, explains concepts and generates ideas in simple sentences — and, in this case, had written the paper.

Alarmed by his discovery, Aumann decided to transform essay writing for his courses this semester. He plans to require students to write first drafts in the classroom, using browsers that monitor and restrict computer activity. In later drafts, students have to explain each revision. Aumann, who may forgo essays in subsequent semesters, also plans to weave ChatGPT into lessons by asking students to evaluate the chatbot's responses.

"What's happening in class is no longer going to be, 'Here are some questions — let's talk about it between us human beings,'" he said, but instead "it's like, 'What also does this alien robot think?'"

Across the US, university professors like Aumann, department chairs and administrators are starting to overhaul classrooms in response to ChatGPT, prompting a potentially huge shift in teaching and learning. Some professors are redesigning their courses entirely, making changes that include more oral exams, group work and handwritten assessments in lieu of typed ones.

The moves are part of a real-time grappling with a new technological wave known as generative artificial intelligence. ChatGPT, which was released in November by the artificial intelligence lab OpenAI, is at the forefront of the shift. The chatbot generates eerily articulate and nuanced text in response to short prompts, with people using it to write love letters, poetry, fan fiction — and their schoolwork.

That has upended some middle and high schools, with teachers and administrators trying to discern whether students are using the chatbot to do their schoolwork. Some public school systems, including in New York City and Seattle, have since banned the tool on school Wi-Fi networks and devices to prevent cheating, although students can easily find workarounds to access ChatGPT.

In higher education, colleges and universities have been reluctant to ban the AI tool because administrators doubt the move would be effective and they don't



Faculty at the University of Florida in a meeting to discuss how to deal with ChatGPT. In response to the increased student use of ChatGPT, a chatbot that generates eerily articulate and nuanced text, colleges and universities are restructuring some courses and overhauling classroom practices. THE NEW YORK TIMES

want to infringe on academic freedom. That means the way people teach is changing instead.

"We try to institute general policies that certainly back up the faculty member's authority to run a class," instead of targeting specific methods of cheating, said Joe Glover, provost of the University of Florida. "This isn't going to be the last innovation we have to deal with."

That's especially true as generative AI is in its early days. OpenAI is expected to soon release another tool, GPT-4, which is better at generating text than previous versions. Google has built LaMDA, a rival chatbot, and Microsoft is discussing a \$10 billion investment in OpenAI. Silicon Valley startups, including Stability AI and Character.AI, are also working on generative AI tools.

An OpenAI spokesperson said the lab recognised its programmes could be used to mislead people and was developing technology to help people identify text generated by ChatGPT.

At many universities, ChatGPT has now vaulted to the top of the agenda. Administrators are establishing task forces and hosting university-wide discussions to respond to the tool, with much of the guidance being to adapt to the technology.

At schools including George Washington University in Washington, DC, Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, professors are phasing out take-home, open-book assignments — which became a dominant method of assessment in the pandemic but now seem vulnerable to chatbots.

They are instead opting for in-class assignments, handwritten papers, group

work and oral exams.

Gone are prompts like "write five pages about this or that." Some professors are instead crafting questions that they hope will be too clever for chatbots and asking students to write about their own lives and current events.

Students are "plagiarising this because the assignments can be plagiarised," said Sid Dobrin, chair of the English department at the University of Florida.

Frederick Luis Aldama, the humanities chair at the University of Texas at Austin, said he planned to teach newer or more niche texts that ChatGPT might have less information about, such as William Shakespeare's early sonnets instead of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The chatbot may motivate "people who lean into canonical, primary texts to actually reach beyond their comfort zones for things that are not online," he said.

In case the changes fall short of preventing plagiarism, Aldama and other professors said they planned to institute stricter standards for what they expect from students and how they grade. It is now not enough for an essay to have just a thesis, introduction, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion.

"We need to up our game," Aldama said. "The imagination, creativity and innovation of analysis that we usually deem an A paper needs to be trickling down into the B-range papers."

The misuse of AI tools will most likely not end, so some professors and universities said they planned to use detectors to root out that activity. The plagiarism detection service Turnitin said it would incorporate more features for identifying AI, including ChatGPT, this year.

More than 6,000 teachers from Harvard University, Yale University, the University of Rhode Island and others have also signed up to use GPTZero, a program that promises to quickly detect AI-generated text, said Edward Tian, its creator and a senior at Princeton University.

Some students see value in embracing AI tools to learn. Lizzie Shackney, 27, a student at the University of Pennsylvania's law school and design school, has started using ChatGPT to brainstorm for papers and debug coding problem sets.

"There are disciplines that want you to share and don't want you to spin your wheels," she said, describing her computer science and statistics classes. "The place where my brain is useful is understanding what the code means."

But she has qualms. ChatGPT, Shackney said, sometimes incorrectly explains ideas and misquotes sources.

The University of Pennsylvania also hasn't instituted any regulations about the tool, so she doesn't want to rely on it in case the school bans it or considers it to be cheating, she said.

Other students have no such scruples, sharing on forums such as Reddit that they have submitted assignments written and solved by ChatGPT — and sometimes done so for fellow students too. On TikTok, the hashtag #chatgpt has more than 578 million views, with people sharing videos of the tool writing papers and solving coding problems.

One video shows a student copying a multiple choice exam and pasting it into the tool with the caption saying: "I don't know about y'all but ima just have Chat GPT take my finals. Have fun studying. The New York Times 5/4/2019"



# Glimpses of another Presidency College

## A tale of three Ps

KANAD SINHA

**T**he day I entered Presidency College as a student of the History department was a memorable one. My grandmother was excited that I had been admitted in an institution where so many luminaries had studied. On the other hand, several 'well-wishers' were concerned about my consistent streak of wrong choices: Humanities over Science, History over English, and Presidency over Jadavpur University. Obviously, it was then an India where the 'moral and political degeneration of the Jadavpur students' and the length of the skirts of the Jadavpur girls were not yet prime-time gossip.

I myself had doubts whether my 'bad choices' were indeed worth it. Moreover, coming from an all-boys' school, it was the first time that I had no alternative but to face the other half of the human population I had always been scared of. There were other concerns too. Would my schooling in a district town put me in a disadvantageous position *vis-à-vis* the Calcutta-bred students? Would shifting from the Bengali medium to English be difficult?

All these apprehensions vanished after the first day. In the three subsequent years, I never felt that I could have been anywhere else, doing anything else. I learned a lot of new things on that day, including that life in Presidency can be summarised by three Ps: *porashona* (academics), *prem* (romance) and politics.

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"What happened in history?" When a teacher fired this question to start his first lecture, we were perplexed. The way we approached History in school taught us to accumulate dry facts, identify the possible questions for the upcoming exams, and memorise them like a blank cassette. How were we to answer what had happened in human history's entirety? However, we soon understood that it was not a question but the name of V. Gordon Childe's classic on the technological evolution of human civilisation. Gradually we would be introduced to various debates on food production and the Harappans, Aryan migration, and effects of the use of iron. The discipline of History would never be the same. We saw how history shapes every debate around us and gets reshaped by them. We realised how every aspect of our social being has a history and how every community has its



own perception of the past. While Calcutta University had a set pattern of questions repeated every alternate year and there were guidebooks for securing good marks, our teachers would still toil to train the interested students in what Marc Bloch called "the historian's craft", the methodology of reconstructing history from the sources of the past, the rigour needed to discern between an acceptable method of history-writing and the several popular histories around us.

When Subhash Ranjan Chakraborty lectured on the French Revolution and Napoleon, we wondered how Derozio might have taught the same events not long after they took place. When Rajat Kanta Ray showed us a magnificent collection of Renaissance paintings, we could envision how Renaissance Art differed from its medieval predecessors. Kaushik Roy animatedly re-enacted the strategic and performative aspects of every battle. A question in the class triggered Uttara Chakraborty to explore various books in the library with us to finally discover that the nationalist historians of Maharashtra, not Peshawa Baji Rao I, had coined the term, 'Hindu *pad-padshahi*'. Therefore, when our teachers in the universities taught us how all history was contemporary history, it was no surprise.

Everything about Presidency was, thus, also about history. Rajatbabu would take us around the college and narrate its history. After being mesmerised by stories of the legendary teachers whose portraits decorated the staff-room wall, he would point towards a portrait in the Central Library, declaring: "But our greatest teacher is there." The portrait of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio would smile at us, still encouraging the students to learn, to question, to challenge the *status quo*, and to live and die for truth ab-

out two centuries after he was forced to resign. Thinking historically would gradually become not just an academic pursuit but a way of life that would never allow us to accept any given knowledge uncritically, a spirit of questioning and debating that would constitute what we proudly called 'the Derozian community'.

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The three Ps of Presidency were an organised whole. Neither the romance nor the politics was divorced from the academics. A budding politician would explain his streak of bad results as a crusade against English, a colonial language, or against 'bourgeois education', while another would tell his junior comrades — like Narayan Gangopadhyay's comic hero, Tenida — how to draw perfect coconut trees on an answer-sheet.

However, politics in Presidency was not mere comedy. Sitting in the Union room or the canteen, the new students would often be introduced to Marx or Althusser, Lacan or Foucault, by their political predecessors. The politics in Presidency would not bring any world-shattering change. It was apparently petty and childish factional fighting between the two predominant unions. Yet, the meritorious but cocooned school-student entering the college would often leave it with a better understanding of gender sensitivity and social justice, an ability to question heteronormativity and power structure, a firmer grasp over the problems of patriarchy and communalism, and trained enough to accept differences and agree to disagree.

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Romantic relationships in the Presidency College could be the

subject of a full-fledged book. In fact, we had planned the outline of such a book containing four sections named after four major History books: 'What Happened in History?' (famous love stories of the History department), 'History and Beyond' (love stories involving departmental students and students of other departments), 'Age of Extremes' (the incidents of recent years) and 'What If?' (counterfactual reconstruction of unrequited love affairs).

Love was in Presidency's air, as was budding enthusiasm about theories. My fear of the feminine gender went away and, soon, a friend came up with a theory about the romantic attention I supposedly received modelled on the 'Tripartite Struggle' among the Gurjara-Pratiharas, Palas, and Rashtrakutas for occupying the coveted city of Kannauj in early medieval India.

Each of the students would have his/her own stories like that. The departmental excursions would contribute to them heavily, being not just academic tours but an emotional roller-coaster ride for both the successful and unsuccessful endeavours.

How did the 'Tripartite Struggle' end? History says that neither the three powers nor Kannauj remained important in the long run. Soon, there would be new powers to rewrite history and the centre of North Indian politics would shift to Delhi.

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Presidency is a university now. The main building has been painted white, with carved names of random luminaries haunting the visitors. Ever-vigilant guards protect the campus like a fortress. There are encouraging news such as the creation of a much-needed archive, while there are concerning reports of bureaucratic high-handedness, moral policing, and the censoring of questions. At a time when the discipline of History is under a constant threat from an aggressive and populist political rhetoric that tries to undermine its methodological foundation, the liberal political space in the country is being endangered, attempts are being made to destroy people's right to choose their partners freely, will the University be able to play the role its previous avatar played as an undergraduate college?

Every preceding generation is known to have woven a story of Presidency in decline in the next generation. Hence, I reserve my scepticism. May be, and I sincerely hope so, the portrait of Derozio still smiles at the students. May be, there is still a 'Derozian community'.



# The fate of big science feats

**A new study finds a steady drop in disruptive breakthroughs since 1945 as an effect of scientific and technological advancement, writes William J Broad**

**M**iracle vaccines. Videophones in our pockets. Reusable rockets. Our technological bounty and its related blur of scientific progress seem undeniable and unsurpassed. Yet analysts now report that the overall pace of real breakthroughs has fallen dramatically over the past almost three-quarters of a century.

This month in the journal *Nature*, the report's researchers told how their study of millions of scientific papers and patents shows that investigators and inventors have made relatively few breakthroughs and innovations compared with the world's growing mountain of science and technology research. The three analysts found a steady drop from 1945 through 2010 in disruptive finds as a share of the booming venture, suggesting that scientists today are more likely to push ahead incrementally than to make intellectual leaps.

"We should be in a golden age of new discoveries and innovations," said Michael Park, an author of the paper and a doctoral candidate in entrepreneurship and strategic management at the University of Minnesota.

The new finding of Park and his colleagues suggests that investments in science are caught in a spiral of diminishing returns and that quantity in some respects is outpacing quality. While unaddressed in the study, it also raises questions about the extent to which science can open new frontiers and sustain the kind of boldness that unlocked the atom and the universe and what can be done to address the shift away from pioneering discovery. Earlier studies have pointed to slowdowns in scientific progress but typically with less rigour.

Park, along with Russell J. Funk, also of the University of Minnesota, and Erin Leahy, a sociologist at the University of Arizona, based their study on an enhanced kind of citation analysis that Funk helped to devise. In general, citation analysis tracks how researchers cite one another's published works as a way of separating bright ideas from unexceptional ones in a system flooded with papers. Their improved method widens the analytic scope.

"It's a very clever metric," said Pierre Azoulay, a professor of technological



**What happened to science's big breakthroughs?**

innovation, entrepreneurship and strategic management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "I was giddy when I saw it. It's like a new toy."

## **Popular, but only routine!**

Researchers have long sought objective ways to assess the state of science, which is seen as vital to economic growth, national pride and military strength. It became more difficult to do so as published papers soared in number to more than one million annually. Each day, that's more than 3,000 papers — by any standard, an indecipherable blur.

Defying the surge, experts have debated the value of incremental strides versus "Eureka!" moments that change everything known about a field.

The new study could deepen the debate. One surprise is that discoveries hailed popularly as groundbreaking are seen by the authors of the new study as often represent-

ing little more than routine science, and true leaps as sometimes missing altogether from the conversation.

For instance, the top breakthrough on the study's list of examples is a gene-splicing advance that's poorly known to popular science. It let foreign DNA be inserted into human and animal cells rather than just bacteria ones. The feat produced a run of awards for its authors and their institution, Columbia University, as well as almost \$1 billion in licensing fees as it lifted biotechnology operations around the world.

In contrast, the analysts would see two of this century's most celebrated findings as representing triumphs of ordinary science rather than edgy leaps. The mRNA vaccines that successfully battle the coronavirus were rooted in decades of unglamorous toil, they noted.

So too, the 2015 observation of gravitational waves — subtle ripples in the fabric of

space-time — was no unforeseen breakthrough but rather the confirmation of a century-old theory that required decades of hard work, testing and sensor development.

The three analysts uncovered the trend toward incremental advance while using the enhanced form of citation analysis to scrutinize nearly 50 million papers and patents published from 1945 to 2010. They looked across four categories — the life sciences and biomedicine, the physical sciences, technology and the social sciences — and found a steady drop in what they called "disruptive" findings. "Our results," they wrote, "suggest that slowing rates of disruption may reflect a fundamental shift in the nature of science and technology."

Their novel method — and citation analysis in general — gets analytic power from the requirement that scientists cite studies that helped to shape their published findings. Starting in the 1950s, analysts began to tally those citations as a way to identify research of importance. It was a kind of scientific applause meter.

But the count could be misleading. Some authors cited their own research quite often. And stars of science could receive lots of citations for unremarkable finds. Worst of all, some of the most highly cited papers turned out to involve minuscule improvements in popular techniques used widely by the scientific community.

The new method looks at citations more deeply to separate everyday work from true breakthroughs more effectively. It tallies citations not only to the analyzed piece of research but to the previous studies it cites. The measure is called the CD index after its scale, which goes from consolidating to disrupting the body of existing knowledge.

Funk, who helped to devise the CD index, said the new study was so computationally intense that the team at times used supercomputers to crunch the millions of data sets.

The novel technique has aided other investigators, such as Wang. In 2019, he and his colleagues reported that small teams are more innovative than large ones. The finding was timely because science teams over the decades have shifted in makeup to ever-larger groups of collaborators.

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

*snh*



# ASER survey points to arduous path ahead



UDAY BHASKAR

DIRECTOR, SOCIETY FOR POLICY STUDIES

**T**HE 2022 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is an invaluable document that surveys the state of education in rural India in the formative age group of 3-16 years. India must be grateful to Pratham Foundation, a non-governmental organisation that has been rendering yeoman's service in the education sector for putting this comprehensive report together — more so, given the current aridity of national surveys and credible HDI (human development indicator) statistics. The last such ASER survey was conducted in 2018 and the Covid years led to a gap that has now been redressed.

ASER-2022 is derived from a detailed household survey conducted across 616 rural districts across the country covering almost 7 lakh children in the designated age group. A preliminary analysis of some of the data provides some links, albeit non-linear, with the national security lattice and warrants objective policy review and deliberation.

The quantitative bullet points of the report are encouraging and a praiseworthy strand is the fact that almost 98.4 per cent of students in the age bracket of 6-14 years are now enrolled in schools in rural India. The trend is positive and shows that there has been a steady improvement in enrolment from 96.6 per cent in 2010 to 96.7 per cent in 2014 and 97.2 per cent in 2018 to 98.4 per cent in 2022.

However, it is the qualitative aspect



**QUANTITATIVE IMPROVEMENT:** Almost 98.4 per cent of students in the age bracket of 6-14 years are now enrolled in schools in rural India. TRIBUNE PHOTO

of ASER-2022 that is a cause for deep concern in relation to young India and the findings are incongruous for a nation that has, in a heady mix of emotive nationalism and misplaced certitude, now cast itself as a 'vishwaguru' (world teacher).

Since education is a state subject in India, there are variations in the learning skills of children and one point that merits attention is Maharashtra-related — one of the more progressive states apropos of per capita and

human security indicators.

The report noted that there was an alarming decline in maths skills among government school students and the numbers are revealing — whereas 28 per cent of Class-III children could do subtraction in 2018 and 31 and 41 per cent of Classes V and VIII could do division in a satisfactory manner, the corresponding percentage in 2022 was 18.5 (Class III); 20 (Class V) and 38 (Class VIII).

This decline in one state (Maharash-

tra) could be attributed to a variety of factors, including Covid-induced disruptions in teaching methodologies and the quality of schools, teachers, student abilities et al, but another data strand is instructive. The report highlighted the trend towards private tuitions, wherein at an all-India level, the percentage of students who took such an option increased from 26.4 to 30.5 in 2022. While Bihar topped the list at 71.7 per cent, the exceptions to this increase in private tuition are Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Tripura.

The link between the overall index of education across India and national security can be reviewed on two tracks. On January 16, PM Narendra Modi addressed the first batch of Agniveers of the three armed forces and congratulated them for being pioneers of a new recruitment scheme. He added that the way wars are being fought in the 21st century is changing and that 'technologically advanced soldiers will play a key role in our armed forces'.

The issue that merits interrogation is whether the prevailing education setup, as assessed by ASER 2022, is the most viable ecosystem to nurture the kind of technologically enabled soldier that PM Modi envisions. While it is true that recruitment to the Indian military at all levels is fiercely competitive and that only the best and brightest qualify to don the uniform, it is valid to extrapolate and note that in the coming decades, educated youth will only burnish the image of composite national security

The reverse is that an increasing percentage of uneducated youth will transmute India's aspiration of a productive demographic dividend into a demographic drag factor — with the worst-case exigency of them morphing into an unemployable and frustrated pan-India demographic cluster with attendant internal security implications.

The second track that links education to national security and which is relevant to Indian policymakers is contained in a survey by a US academic, Caroline Wagner, of the Ohio State University. Her study revealed that in 2019, Chinese authors published a greater proportion of the most influential scientific papers globally — 8,422, followed by the USA 7,359 and EU, 6,074. In 2022, the Wagner study indicated that 'Chinese researchers published three times as many papers on artificial intelligence as US researchers'. To the extent that citations are an indicator of the quality of research, Chinese authors were leading in the top 1 per cent of most cited papers in many S&T disciplines.

If a robust national R&D industrial and manufacturing base was deemed to be a central determinant of composite military capability in the 20th century, it is axiomatic that in the current era, a high quality national education ecosystem is central to acquiring the kind of technological profile that a major power needs to deal with the complex challenges it will have to grapple with. ASER-2022 points to the arduous path ahead for India.

Trifun

If a robust national R&D, industrial and manufacturing base was deemed to be a critical determinant of composite military capability in the 20th century, it is axiomatic that in the current era, a high quality national education ecosystem is central to acquiring the kind of technological profile that a major power needs to deal with the complex challenges it will have to grapple with.



# देश में विदेश के विश्वविद्यालय

**भारत** में विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों के कैम्पस खोलने की अनुमति ने सभी खेमों में खलबली मचा दी है। वाम उदारवादी तो हमेशा की तरह सरकार के हर कदम को जांचे बिना ही टूट पड़ते हैं, लेकिन इस बार स्वदेशी जागरण मंच और आत्मनिर्भर भारत के हिमायती भी परेशान हैं। विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों को अनुमति देने की चर्चा पिछले 20 वर्षों से होती आ रही है। मनमोहन सिंह सरकार में भी इससे जुड़े विधेयक पेश होते रहे, लेकिन पारित नहीं हो पाए। भाजपा विपक्ष में रहते इसके विरोध में थी, लेकिन अब उसकी ही सरकार अधिक सुविधाओं-रियायतों के साथ विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों के कैम्पस खोलने की अनुमति दे रही है। इसमें सबसे बड़ी रियायत यही है कि ये विश्वविद्यालय मुनाफे को अपने मूल देश भेज सकते हैं। इसके अलावा दाखिला, फीस, पाठ्यक्रम और शिक्षकों की नियुक्ति जैसे सभी क्षेत्रों में भी उन्हें पूरी स्वतंत्रता दी जाएगी।

ऐसे में यह सवाल स्वाभाविक है कि विदेशियों के लिए एकाएक इतनी सारी रियायतें क्यों? मौजूदा सरकार शिक्षा के कई पहलुओं के प्रति गंभीर और सक्रिय रही है। पांच वर्ष पहले दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय समेत उसके कालेजों को स्वायत्तता देने की चर्चा जोरों पर थी। उसके पीछे भी यही उद्देश्य था कि हमारे विश्वविद्यालयों में पाठ्यक्रम को जकड़न दूर हो और वे वैश्विक ज्ञान को आसान और त्वरित गति से आत्मसात करते हुए ऐसी पीढ़ी तैयार करें जो विकसित देशों को टक्कर दे सके। विश्वविद्यालय का ही एक बहुत बड़ा वर्ग इसके विरोध में खड़ा हो गया। विरोधियों ने तरह-तरह के आरोप लगाए। जैसे कि इससे शिक्षकों की नियुक्ति पर असर पड़ेगा। आरक्षण का लाभ नहीं मिलेगा। फीस बढ़ाई जाएगी। मजबूरन सरकार ने कदम पीछे खींच लिए। हालांकि इसी वर्ग ने उन्हीं दिनों शुरू हुए कुछ निजी विश्वविद्यालयों की फीस और स्वायत्तता पर कभी अंगुली नहीं उठाई। सरकार ने एक और पहलु को भी इस्टीमेट आफ एक्सीलेंस। इसके अंतर्गत ऐसे विश्वविद्यालय बनाए जाने थे, जो दुनिया के 10 सबसे प्रतिष्ठित शिक्षण संस्थानों में शामिल किए जा सकें। इसमें कुछ आईआईटी और आईआईएम जैसे संस्थान भी चिह्नित किए गए, लेकिन चार वर्ष बीतने के बाद भी इस मोर्चे



प्रेमपाल शर्मा



सुधार की बाट जोहते भारतीय शिक्षण संस्थान • फाइल पर कोई संतोषजनक प्रगति सामने नहीं आई।

विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों के प्रस्तावित देसी परिसरों को लेकर सबसे बड़ी आपत्ति यह है कि यदि वे शिक्षा से हुए मुनाफे को अपने देश भेजेंगे तो सुप्रीम कोर्ट के उस दृष्टिकोण का क्या होगा, जिसमें शीर्ष अदालत शिक्षा को कोई धंधा नहीं मानती। एक सवाल यह भी है कि क्या इससे देश के संस्थान मजबूत होंगे? प्रश्न फीस का भी है। क्या बिना किसी लगाम के फीस की आजादी गरीबों के हित में होगी? अमीर तो गुणा-भाग कर रहे हैं कि विदेश में भेजने पर यदि एक करोड़ खर्चा होता है तो उनका यहां आधे में ही काम हो जाएगा। पाठ्यक्रम पर भी संदेह जताया जा रहा है। निःसंदेह, हमें ज्ञान की खिड़कियां खुली रखनी चाहिए, लेकिन जिस देश में आंबेडकर और गांधी के कार्टून के विवाद पर संसद ठप रही हो, प्रेमचंद की कहानी के एक शब्द पर लोग सड़कों पर उतर आए हों, वहां विदेशी विश्वविद्यालय के लिए हर तरह की आजादी के लिए कैसे गुंजाइश बनेगी? क्या देश में शिक्षा के अलग-अलग द्वीप बनेंगे? और भारतीय भाषाओं और शिक्षा के भारतीयकरण का क्या? यह भी सर्वविदित है कि प्रिंस्टन, येल, स्टैनफोर्ड

**प्रसिद्ध विश्वविद्यालयों की सामग्री जब सहजता से उपलब्ध है तो उनसे सीख लेकर हम अपने संस्थान भी तो सुधार सकते हैं**

और आक्सफोर्ड जैसे विश्वविख्यात विश्वविद्यालय अपने देश के अलावा बाहर शायद ही कोई कैम्पस खोलते हों और इसीलिए सैकड़ों वर्षों से वे शीर्ष पर बने हुए हैं। अपनी स्वायत्तता के साथ वे शिक्षा में नई-नई खोजों एवं प्रयोगों को और आगे बढ़ा रहे हैं। हमारे यहां जो विश्वविद्यालय आने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं, वे दूसरे या तीसरे दर्जे से भी नीचे वाले हैं। उन्हें दिख रहा है तो बस दुनिया का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा शिक्षा बाजार। यूनेस्को की रिपोर्ट बताती है कि भारत विद्यार्थियों का सबसे बड़ा निर्यातक है। हर साल पांच लाख बच्चों का बाहर पढ़ने के लिए जाना क्या आत्मनिर्भर भारत और स्वदेशी भारत के खोखलेपन को नहीं दर्शाता?

वस्तुतः वैश्वीकरण से तो हमें यही सीखने की जरूरत है कि जब विश्वप्रसिद्ध विश्वविद्यालयों की पाठ्यक्रम सामग्री सहजता से उपलब्ध है तो उनसे सीखते हुए हम अपने विश्वविद्यालयों को ही क्यों नहीं बेहतर बना सकते? हम उन्हें थोड़ी स्वायत्तता क्यों नहीं दे सकते? शिक्षा में सुधार के इच्छुक भली मंशा वाले हमारे तमाम उद्यमियों के इसमें योगदान हेतु अनुकूल परिवेश क्यों नहीं बनाते? शिक्षा में लाल कालीन सिर्फ विदेशियों के लिए ही क्यों? यदि सरकार स्वायत्तता और अन्यान्य सुविधाएं विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों को देना चाहती है तो उससे पहले उसे देसी संस्थानों को भी यही देनी होंगी। अच्छा होता कि देश के श्रेष्ठ शिक्षा संस्थानों को इतना समर्थ बनाया जाए कि वे देश के विभिन्न हिस्सों में अपना विस्तार कर सकें। एक संवेदनशील लोकतांत्रिक सरकार से ऐसी अपेक्षा का हक सभी को है। सोचिए हमारे स्वतंत्रता सेनानियों के आत्मा पर क्या गुजरेगी, जो भारतीय पैसे को विदेश जाता देखकर द्रवित होते थे। इसलिए सरकार की नीयत भले ही कितनी नेक क्यों न हो, उसे इस मुद्दे को समग्रता में समझकर ही कोई कदम उठाना होगा। राज्यों के विश्वविद्यालयों को भी सख्त कानूनों के जरिये और बेहतर बनाना होगा, जिससे छात्रों को केवल शिक्षा के लिए ही महानगरों का रुख न करना पड़े। विकेंद्रीकरण की बात तो आजादी के बाद से ही हो रही है। क्या अमृत काल में उसे फिर से दोहराने की जरूरत नहीं है?

(रेल मंत्रालय में सयुक्त सचिव रहे लेखक शिक्षाविद् हैं।)

25/1/23

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# ASER shows pandemic impact on learning

**T**he 2022 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), which was released last week, has important information and insights about the state of school education in the country. It is the first nationwide survey in four years and has shed light on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on learning. It has found that learning outcomes have been badly affected. Basic reading ability has fallen to pre-2012 levels, which shows that the gains made in the last many years have been eroded. There was a steady rise in learning outcomes between 2014 and 2018, and since then there is a downslide. The percentage of Class 3 students who can read a Class 2 book has fallen by nearly 7 percentage points since then. The loss is not that bad on numerical skills. The decline has been seen across all the states but is very steep in some states. This is the first confirmation by a credible survey of the damage done to learning by the prolonged closure of schools.

The report has noted the changes in school education brought about by the pandemic. It found that most schools, even those in rural areas, have "attempted to keep learning going with digital resources". The access to technology has been uneven. Many families reported lack of digital infrastructure and skills, especially in the initial months of the pandemic, but there was improvement over the months. Households with smartphones more than doubled from 36% before the pandemic to 74% in 2022. Nine in 10 households with smartphones had access to internet when the ASER surveyors visited them. A hybrid model of education has come into being in many parts of the country and there is awareness of it almost everywhere. The report also notes that the participation of parents and their contribution in meeting the challenges increased significantly during the period. This will hopefully sustain.

The findings have proved wrong apprehensions that the closure of schools would result in large-scale fall in enrolment. Enrolment has actually increased from the 2018 level, though marginally. Much of it happened in government schools. The share of government schools in the overall enrolled pool, which was falling before the pandemic, has increased to 73% from 66% in 2018. It is likely that low-cost government schools became more attractive to many households that were hit economically by the pandemic. The proportion of out-of-school girls declined to the lowest ever rate of 2% in 2022 but in three states — UP, MP and Chhattisgarh — as many as 10% of girls are out of school. The data from the report should be studied to form the right strategies to improve school education in the post-Covid period.

**Prolonged  
closure of  
schools hit  
learning  
outcomes**

5/1/23/6

# Skill, Upskill, Reskill: Edtech It Away



**Byju Raveendran**

A black swan event such as the pandemic, escalating geopolitical tensions and their effects on growth during the past three years has provided the global economy with challenges. India, however, has emerged as a model of resilience, having placed strong emphasis on its digital economy, innovation, skill development and sustainability, paving the way for India to lead the global economic recovery.

For India to continue its march, it would be prudent that the budget advances the Digital India mandate. While the budget will likely prioritise maintaining fiscal prudence, efforts must also be made to roll out measures that can help people leverage the power of 'digital', in education, finance, skilling, infrastructure, health etc.

While India has one of the world's youngest populations, the proportion of formally skilled workers is extremely low — 4.69% of the total workforce, compared to

24% in China, 52% in the US. GoI must introduce tax breaks to accelerate upskilling while also lowering cost of higher education. With edtech enabling uninterrupted learning during the pandemic and proving its mettle as a legitimate learning solution, a reduction in taxes on educational products and services would be most welcome in ensuring a cost-effective structure for businesses while advancing the cause of comprehensive education for all.

Hopefully, the budget will prioritise the improvement of digital infrastructure and internet penetration in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, thereby facilitating their emergence as future technology and digital talent hubs in India. Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) and the commercial rollout of 5G have already set the wheels in motion in this direction. These advancements have established India as a global leader in the field.

Budgetary allocations must be increased for talent development and digital skill-training in schools and universities while also allowing edtech businesses to offer online and hybrid learning and skilling programs in collaboration with international universities. While the finance minister alloca-

ted a record ₹1 trillion for education expenditures last year, one anticipates a similar allocation this year. The consistent flow of funds will aid in sustaining and expanding successful initiatives such as PM e-Vidya and One Nation, One Classroom.

Consumers would welcome lucrative tax breaks that help them reduce their tax liability by investing in education and upskilling services. A nation is only as good as its citizens, and such initiatives would further its education policy's objectives. Apart from

structural initiatives, the budget would be incomplete without an equal or greater emphasis on human capital.

The establishment of the National Digital University, as envisioned by National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, is innovative and has the potential to enable our youth to skill, upskill and reskill. According to external affairs ministry data, nearly 3 lakh students were studying abroad in 2022, and RBI estimates that ₹5 billion was lost in foreign exchange due to students studying abroad in FY 2021-2022. By making provisions for UGC's proposal to establish foreign university campuses in India, the budget can also pave the way for India to become a global destination for education while saving foreign exchange.

The budget cannot, however, be complete without collaborations between policymakers and stakeholders across the spectrum. One looks forward to GoI making provisions to foster deeper collaboration between edtechs, education institutes and technology providers to further scale learning offerings and enable an India where learning and skilling are continuous.



DALL-E 2

**Rewiring the knowledge economy**

The writer is founder, Byju's **ET/23/14**



**R. W. Alexander**  
**Jesudasan**

# Going international

With the UGC having released draft norms for foreign universities to establish campuses in India, what will be the potential impact on students and home institutions?

**E**arly in the New year, the University Grants Commission released a draft of the norms for foreign universities and educational institutions to establish their campuses in India. After taking feedback and opinions from various stakeholders, the final policy is expected to be published soon. This is in keeping with the recommendations for the internationalisation of higher education in the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). What will this mean for students and institutions in India?

## Affordability vs exposure

While students aspiring to study abroad may save on the cost of travel, stay and other incidental expenditure, they will miss out on the exposure to food, culture and other nuances that goes hand in hand with studying in a foreign country. While the draft norms state that foreign institutions will be free to fix their fee structure, the question of affordability has to be considered. Another aspect is the equivalence with Indian degrees so that students are able to find jobs in the government and private sector and take the various competitive exams for government jobs.

## New programmes

Will the foreign universities setting up campuses in



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India offer programmes that are not offered in this country? This will be a welcome approach as Indian students can develop expertise in domains that will enhance their knowledge base and their employment opportunity. With the UGC also allowing dual degree programmes, students may be able to pursue two programmes, of which one could be from a foreign university in India.

## Competition to home institutions

The presence of foreign universities in India will bring in an element of competition and increase

the standards and quality of Indian institutions. If foreign universities are going to offer the same programmes already available in India, it might cause a problem for institutions located in far-off or rural areas. As it is, many private institutions are closing down due to a lack of enrollments.

## Foreign collaborations

Many Indian institutions have overseas partners for short-term and long-term collaborative programmes. With foreign institutions opening campuses in India, what will happen to such programmes, which

have brought in substantial benefits to both partners in terms of student and faculty mobility, research options and cross-cultural experiences?

Overseas institutions setting up campuses in our country will pose difficulties in continuing with the study-abroad programmes. With the new arrangement, how will India be a chosen destination for overseas students to reciprocate, if our students get admission in a foreign university's Indian campus?

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1/24/23



# It's time for India's universities to join the world

**W**ith India assuming the G20 presidency, it is now time for it to join the world's academic community as a major player. Indians are well-known globally as top scientists and academics, university leaders, and key leaders in high tech, but little is known about the academic environment from which they have emerged. India's academic system is now the world's second largest. And, as articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020, the country is actively pursuing reform and improvement.

Opening to the world means making India more visible on the global academic scene and also learning about, and implementing, best practices from abroad. The G20 leadership is an excellent opportunity to do both. Further, one of the priority areas in education during India's G20 presidency is 'Strengthening Research and Promoting Innovation through Richer Collaboration'. India is in a particularly advantageous position – the world sees India as an increasingly important economy and geopolitical player. India also plays an important role in higher education – mainly as an exporter of students and talent in many scientific fields – and especially in information technology and related fields. There is a growing interest abroad in linking with Indian universities and research institutes, not only because of untapped talent but also due to disengagement from China by some Western countries.

## Unknown, complex system

India is not only the world's second largest academic system, but also one of the world's most complex and little understood academic environments. Its higher education sector is fragmented, inflexible with tight subject boundaries, and of uneven quality. The NEP's focus is on consolidation, with the goal of bringing flexibility and



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Opening to the world means making India more visible on the global academic scene and also learning about, and implementing, best practices from abroad

multi-disciplinary education and improving quality. While private sector colleges and universities will continue to fuel growth, high-quality government institutions such as the IITs and AIIMS are also expanding and improving, and will likely achieve good results if they are adequately funded and permitted to have appropriate autonomy.

India has set up the National Institutional Ranking Framework, which has helped fuel competition among institutions. India's global ranking in scientific publications improved from the seventh position in 2010 to the third in 2020. India ranks third in terms of the number of PhDs awarded in science and engineering. India's Global Innovation Index ranking has also improved significantly, from 81 in 2014 to 40 in 2022, although it lags significantly behind the U.S. and China.

Indian universities have not scored well in the global rankings. The highest-scoring Indian institution in the 2023 Times Higher Education ranking is the Indian Institute of Science, in the 251-300 range. Another 75 institutions are ranked lower. The best-known institutions globally are the IITs. These do not rank well because they are small, specialised schools and not comprehensive universities, but their quality is much better than their ranking scores. The recent announcement that IIT-Kharagpur will establish a branch campus in Malaysia will help. For India to catch up, both in the rankings and in reality, will take significant investment over a sustained period of time. In comparison, China over decades has invested billions of dollars to improve its top universities – and this shows in the rankings and in measures of scientific output.

## Distinctiveness

There are elements of India's academic environment that are distinctive and worth highlighting to an international audience. These include the emergence of

about a dozen top-quality non-profit private universities, mostly funded by philanthropically minded Indians. This elite sector is expanding and is focused on building an international 'brand' for Indian higher education. India uses English as the main language of science and higher education, which makes it much easier to interact with the rest of the world. India has more than 100 research laboratories in diverse areas sponsored by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and other Central government agencies. Some are outstanding in terms of their research contributions and their relationships with India's economy.

## Exercising leadership

India's universities and its scientific prowess are an important part of a soft power strategy. The internationalisation initiatives outlined in the NEP is an important start. India's G20 leadership is also an excellent opportunity to exercise leadership. Two interesting initiatives have been suggested. One is a conference in India of leaders of universities in the G20 countries with the aim of acquainting them with India's academic opportunities. Another is the creation of a prestigious scholarship programme, similar to the Fulbright programme, that would provide top Indian students and faculty time in leading universities abroad and funding to bring top academic from abroad to India. China's version of this is the China Scholarship Council.

Indian universities, researchers, and academics also need to involve themselves in the global scientific community through participation in joint projects, international meetings, and the like. All this will take careful planning, sustained resources, support from the Central and State governments and an expanded international consciousness in the Indian academic community. *h/t*



# Post-COVID-19, math skills of students in south, west dipped most

The adverse impact of the pandemic on arithmetic ability was more pronounced among boys in southern and western India

## DATA POINT

Rebecca Rose Varghese  
& Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The recently released Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2022 shows that the ability of schoolchildren to carry out simple arithmetic calculations was poor in most of the southern, central and western States compared to the children in many northern and eastern States.

While this observation is true both for the pre- and post-pandemic periods, the school closures forced by COVID-19 widened the gap further – the arithmetic learning outcomes of students from the south and west were impacted more than the learning outcomes of students in other regions. Notably, despite the pandemic, the arithmetic ability of children in the central States – Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh – improved markedly, though from a lower base. Moreover, in the south and west, the adverse impact of the pandemic on arithmetic ability was more pronounced among boys than girls.

The ASER survey's test of arithmetic ability consisted of four tasks. The first task was to recognise numbers 1 to 9. Those who completed this were asked to recognise numbers 11 to 99. Those who completed both tasks were presented with subtraction problems. And those who passed were presented with division sums.

Chart 1 shows the share of students in Classes V and VIII who could carry out all the four tasks successfully. Each circle corresponds to a State, and India's figures are depicted using a plus sign. The further a circle to the right, the higher the share of students who could carry out all the four tasks successfully.

Chart 2 shows the same for the year 2018.

Among the northern States, the

share of such students in Class VIII was above the national average in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana. Among the eastern States, Bihar's figure was much higher than the national average. On the other hand, except Andhra Pradesh, the share of such students was relatively low in the southern States. Among the western States, such as Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, the share of Class VIII students who were able to complete all the tasks successfully was even lower than in the southern States.

The trend of northern States (except Jammu and Kashmir) leading, closely followed by the eastern States of Bihar and sometimes Jharkhand, the southern States (except Andhra Pradesh) middling and the central and western States near the bottom was also observed in the arithmetic performance of Class V students – with some exceptions. This trend was also true for 2018, as shown in Chart 2.

Chart 3 shows the percentage of Class VIII children who completed all four tasks in 2022 and the change in percentage points from 2018. The States above the 0 mark saw an increase in the share of children who completed the tasks – all the central and eastern States are part of this group. The States below the 0 mark saw a decrease – all the southern and western States are part of this group except Andhra Pradesh. This graph shows that the pandemic had a disproportionately higher adverse impact on the arithmetic ability of children in the southern and western States.

And among the southern and western States, the adverse impact was higher among boys than girls, as shown in Chart 4. The chart shows the change in the share of Class VIII students who could complete division in 2022 compared to 2018 (in percentage points). For instance, the change was 6.4 percentage points among girls in Kerala and 8.7 percentage points among boys.

## Doing the math

The data for the charts are collated from the Annual Status of Education Report (Rural), published based on a survey conducted between September and November 2022



North East Northeast West Central South India

Chart 1 | The share of students in Class V and Class VIII who carried out all the four tasks successfully in 2022

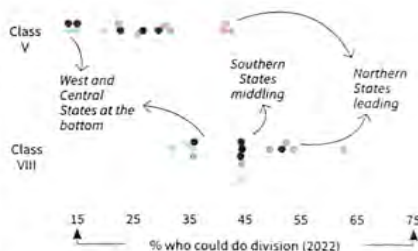


Chart 3 | The % of Class VIII children who completed all four tasks in 2022 and the change in % points from 2018

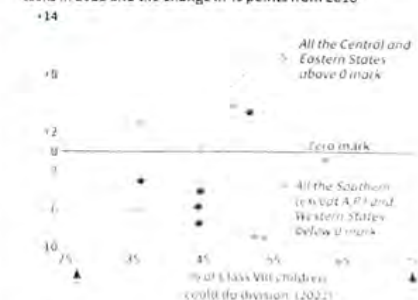


Chart 2 | The share of students in Class V and Class VIII who carried out all the four tasks successfully in 2018

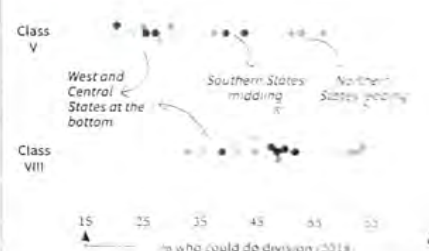
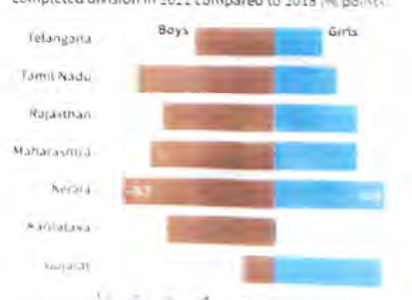


Chart 4 | The change in the share of Class VIII students who completed division in 2022 compared to 2018 (% points)



Aakar Patel



## Why getting our kids educated is a true sign of good governance

**G**overnance is defined as the system by which an organisation is controlled and operates, and the mechanisms by which it, and its people, are held to account. Ethics, risk management, compliance and administration are all elements of governance.

"Good governance" is said to have eight characteristics. It is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive, and follows the rule of law. "It assures that corruption is minimised, the views of the minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society." The most important function of government is governance, and in fortunate nations, this is often good governance.

ASER is a survey on education conducted across India since 2005. This year it covered 616 rural districts (which is more than 85 per cent of the total) and engaged 6.9 lakh children in the age group of three to 16. The survey is conducted by over 27,000 volunteers. It is simple and assesses three things — enrolment, reading ability and maths skills. Students are given a single sheet of paper with four levels of text: first, letters of the alphabet, second, common words, third, a short paragraph consisting of four easy sentences, fourth, a longer text con-

taining a slightly more complex vocabulary.

In Class 3, children are usually about eight years old. ASER's survey reveals that the number of Class 3 children who can read a text from Class 2 is 20 per cent. This means that four out of five children cannot read the text. The number has fallen from 27 per cent in 2018. In 2014 the figure had been 23 per cent, meaning that learning levels today are worse than they were a decade ago. The decline is across private and government schools.

The number of children in Class 5 who could read a Class 2 text was 48 per cent in 2014, 50 per cent in 2018 and is now 42 per cent.

In 2014, the proportion of children in Class 3 who could do subtraction was 25 per cent (meaning that three out of four children did not know how to do "this minus this equals to"). In 2018, the number who could subtract rose to 28 per cent. Today it has fallen to 25 per cent again.

Similarly, of the students of Class 5, who are about 10 years old, the number that could do simple division was 26 per cent in 2014, 27 per cent in 2018 and has fallen again to 25 per cent. If our children cannot read and cannot do simple maths, what kind of skills will they acquire as grown-ups? In Bengaluru's infotech companies, which together have some 15 lakh employees, nine out of 10 engineers who apply for jobs are rejected, not because the position is filled but because they do not have

the skills. We should not be surprised that a nation whose children are in school but illiterate also has engineers who are barely literate. It's not their fault.

We can acknowledge that the problem is not new. But we can't avoid the reality that the problem is getting worse. We have regressed 10 years on an issue where we were already in bad shape compared to the rest of the world. Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem. A survey a few months ago showed that during the pandemic only eight per cent of rural students studied online regularly. Most studied sometimes, and one in three students did not study at all. The ASER study shows another alarming thing. For the first time, government schools have seen an increase in children enrolled. This has gone from 73 per cent in 2006 to 65 per cent in 2018 back to 72 per cent today. Why? Have government schools suddenly become more attractive than private schools? No. The answer is that crores of Indian families have become poorer and can no longer afford private education for their children. The government's solution is to hide the poor when it conducts its G-20 gatherings. We can only solve problems after we acknowledge that they exist. When was the last time we heard this government speaking of the disaster in primary education, rather than Ganga cruises and cheetahs? Less money, ₹88,000 crores,

was spent by the Union government on education in its last Budget that has been allocated to the bullet train. This sort of thing is happening across the board. According to the World Bank's figures, India's spending on health has gone from 1.7 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 1.0 per cent today.

In another nation, the problems that get acknowledged then begin to be solved. Here the fact is that the government has given up. It knows or is convinced that it cannot solve the issue of education and health and has no idea how to solve it. The reason is that solving problems of this magnitude require governance, proper hard, everyday governance. Inaugurations, fancy dress and speeches do not solve such problems. Urban unemployment in December was 10 per cent. This is about three times what it was a few years ago. Employment in agriculture, which had been reducing all these decades, increased as people with no work in manufacturing and services returned to farms. This is a fact and the data comes from the government itself. That it is not being held to account for it is also a fact.

Getting our children educated so that they live fulfilling lives and can compete with the world's children is good governance. The rest is pageantry and drama.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar\_patel



# India's PhD burden

■ Mohammad Imtiyaz Khan

harat Ratna Prof C N R Rao lamented in a public lecture in 2017 at the Gauhati University, the falling number of takers of pure science subjects in higher education institutes (HEIs). The latest data released by the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2019-20) also highlights the same trend, i.e., India enrolled a total of 2,02,550 candidates into PhD programmes in 1019 universities and 1079 colleges (offering PhD), with majority of the aspirants opting for science and technology disciplines. The corresponding figures in AISHE 2014-15 were 1,17,301 enrolled in 740 universities and 517 colleges, with science as the major choice. The enrolment number was twice that of China's, according to an article in *Nature* journal that reported the number of enrolment into PhD programmes in China as 95,502 in 2018. Further, AISHE data indicated that only 0.34 per cent of those entering HEIs in India were progressing to the PhD level in 2014-15, but five years later it was 0.5 per cent. The increase in PhD enrolment is not because of any increase in recruitment, research/fellowship funding, or push for research (through post-doctoral opportunities) in general. This could be highlighted through some hard data. The recruitments to universities and colleges at entry level for Master's/PhD degree holders increased only by about 27,000 (2.6 per cent) in 2019-20 as compared to five years ago, although the number of universities and colleges offering MSc/PhD programmes increased by 37 per cent and 50 per cent respectively, as per AISHE.

Technical and support personnel of the CSIR have declined by half in

seven years since 2015, according to its website. Apart from these jobs, most graduates and postgraduates go for other options, like graduate-level government administrative jobs. In fact, these days, PhD programmes have become the last option for many. Many postgraduates and doctorates (or PhD holders) go abroad in search of research and other opportunities. Even then, thanks to shrinking job opportunity, there is a backlog of post-graduates. On top of that, there are factors, inter alia, like improving gross enrolment rate (27.1 per cent in 2019-20 from 24.3 per cent in 2014-15 as revealed by AISHE) and availability of more PhD seats owing to opening of more HEIs, contributing to more enrolment into PhD programmes. However, PhD aspirants are not having a good time either. They are hit hard by lack of fellowships and inordinate delays in release of fellowships. The major schemes run by the UGC for doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships have seen 26.3 per cent and 57.4 per cent decrease in terms of beneficiary numbers since 2016-17 respectively, as revealed by Rajya Sabha answers in February and August, 2022.

Furthermore, Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani mentioned recently in the Parliament that the Maulana Azad National Fellowship (MANF) which benefits minority community students, will be scrapped, the reason being overlapping of MANF with other schemes. MANF was initiated as a corrective measure for those students who could not compete in other

schemes because of lack of means. The troika of lack of jobs, decreasing fellowships and increasing enrolment is going to be India's PhD burden.

India's PhD burden is also partially because of academic inflation, which means higher level degree with expected technical/domain knowledge and critical thinking of lower level degree. The candidates worst affected by academic inflation are doctorates because they accumulate all the

**India's PhD burden is also partially because of academic inflation, which means higher level degree with expected technical/domain knowledge and critical thinking of lower level degree. The candidates worst affected by academic inflation are doctorates because they accumulate all the ills (or mediocrity) of academic inflation for more than 20 years of their academic journey.**

ills (or mediocrity) of academic inflation for more than 20 years of their academic journey. The foremost reason for mediocrity during the PhD journey is the lack of academic rigour. As a consequence, last year the news came from Madhya Pradesh where doctorates reportedly applied for peon-level posts. In Manipur and other states, many Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) teachers for lower primary schools are doctorates. Similarly, doctorates have often made news by applying for low paying jobs like clerk, peon and others that require secondary or graduation level education.

To reverse the academic inflation, both top down and bottom up solu-

tions are required. As part of the top down approach, firstly, the recruitment process should be free from 'isms' (e.g. favouritism, nepotism, cronyism, regionalism, communalism, corruption-ism and others) and favour open/merit-based competition. The present recruitment process is mostly administrative, with extensive paperwork and 10-15 minute interviews where the person's potential (or mediocrity) cannot be fully

appreciated (or pinned down). The process should be more robust with several rounds where teaching and/or research capabilities could be assessed in real classrooms. There should be a round in the recruitment to test the aspirant's psychological strengths and weaknesses, and interpersonal skills. Add to this a well-designed mechanism to sack underperformers to purify the academic pollution caused by the clutter of 'isms' and academ-

ic inbreeding, which former chairperson of the UGC Prof Ved Prakash categorically slammed because inbred products turn out to be neither real researchers/teachers nor do they infuse any new ideas and practices into the system. After following the above, if well-qualified faculty members are recruited, the investment in terms of research funding will surely bear fruit. Therefore, there should be increased research funding to expand the beneficiary coverage, and improve infrastructure and expenditure. Research expenditure has remained stagnant at 0.9 per cent of the GDP, including 0.2 per cent from the private sector.

The bottom up solution may be the Chinese model of limiting the number of PhD seats. This author learnt on an invited visit to the Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming in 2019 that, in China, not all universities/departments are allowed to offer PhD programmes. China has a voting-cum-recommendation system to accord permission for running PhD programmes at universities. Capping of the number of seats in India will further reduce the percentage of doctorates in the Indian population, which is less than 1 per cent and very low compared to countries like Slovenia where about 4 per cent of the population are doctorates (based on a World Economic Forum report).

A counter argument to this could be that it is better to limit the seats than to contribute to academic inflation of doctorates. In addition to the seat limitation, the PhD degree awarding process needs to be more stringent, as suggested recently by UGC Chairperson Prof M Jagadeesh Kumar. However, on the contrary, the UGC recently scrapped the mandatory requirement of publishing research papers by doctoral students before submitting their theses. The reason behind the move was to avoid publishing low quality papers so scholars can publish high quality papers. The other reason was, in certain disciplines, papers are presented at conferences and other such gatherings instead of being published in journals. This necessitated scrapping of the hitherto existing one-size-fits-all approach. However, both reasons are not strong enough as the push for quality publications could undoubtedly be strengthened through other means and conferences and others could be accommodated under research publications for certain disciplines, instead of doing away with research publication altogether.



# Panduranga Setty leaves behind a rich legacy in education

Y S R MURTHY

**“M**y Dear Rotarians, Each dialysis machine costs Rs 7 lakh. You could contribute in multiples of Rs 7 lakhs or even half of that amount. May I request that you please message me your willingness to support our club through this project? Thank you so much in advance,” wrote Dr M K Panduranga Setty, a Rotarian, in his appeal on December 6, 2022. He left for his heavenly abode on January 21, 2023. Till his last breath, Dr Setty was trying to raise money for a noble cause, notwithstanding his own advanced age and related health challenges. A philanthropist at heart, he strove all his life for the noble causes taken up by Rotary International.

He was responding to an appeal from the District Health Officer, Mandya, about the lack of such machines in Taluk General Hospitals for needy patients. The DHO pointed out that each patient required a minimum of three cycles of dialysis per week, and the waiting period for patients had been increasing due to a shortage of machines.

Dr Panduranga Setty not only gave Rotary a significant contribution from his personal funds but also guided its efforts as its director between 1991-93. He was an epitome of Rotary's ideals and spirit; Rotary brought out a special book, *Service Above Self: The Biography of Dr M K Panduranga Setty*. It was released on July 4, 2021 in a virtual event at which I was invited to speak. Before the event started, I saw the warmth with which Rotary members from across the world connected with him; he was fondly addressed variously as Pandu uncle, Pandu Sir and Dr Pandu. I could at once gauge the depth of his contribution to the Rotary movement and social service.

Bengaluru is home to prestigious public institutions like the IISc, IIM and Institute of Social and Economic Change. Dr Setty was associated with them in their formative stages as a representative of the industry. He steered the Rashtreeya Sikshana Samithi Trust for nearly five decades and helped establish 22 top-quality academic institutions in Bengaluru, in which over 20,000 students are currently enrolled.

The RV Educational Institutions have graduated over

400,000 students who are now working across the globe. The RV College of Engineering, an autonomous college, is among the most preferred institutions; the RV College of Architecture is at No. 4 in Outlook rankings. SSMRV Degree College for Men is among the top five colleges in India for best value for money in the India Today rankings. Each of the 22 institutions has many achievements to its credit made possible by the excellent infrastructure, financial resources, and other resources provided by the RSST.

Much before the Government of India established a nodal ministry for skill development, Dr Setty established RV Skills. It is India's first centre of its kind for skill development and training in emerging technologies. In its 12 years of existence, three million man-hours of skills training have been delivered.

His efforts have developed over 4,500 skilled engineers. RV-SKILLS has successfully completed corporate training programmes in low-power VLSI design for Qualcomm and Synopsys in India, San Diego, and South Korea. It also completed and delivered self-learning content in seven emerging technologies to the Karnataka Skill Development Corporation. As the Chancellor of RV University, he guided its efforts with great care. He also nurtured other RV educational institutions with passion. He was secretary for Karnataka Unaided Private Engineering Colleges and provided leadership. He was closely associated with COMEDK.

He collaborated with the former President of India, Bharat Ratna Dr Abdul Kalam, and co-created an incubation centre for bamboo composites in partnership with the Technology Information, Forecasting, and Assessment Council under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India (RV-TIFAC).

He was conferred the Bharat Ratna Sir M Visvesvaraya Memorial Award in 2016 by the FKCCI; he was a recipient of Karnataka Rajyotsava Award among several other awards. Dr M K Panduranga Setty is an institution-builder, industrialist, educationist and philanthropist par excellence. In his death, we have lost a great human being.

(The writer is Founding Vice Chancellor, RV University, Bengaluru.)

24/1/24



# An India chapter for foreign universities

**F**or a long time, proponents of the internationalisation of higher education have cherished the dream of foreign universities operating in India. For nearly two decades, they have emphasised the need to provide conducive conditions and an enabling framework for such institutions. But the idea failed to come to fruition due to the concerns of the regulatory authorities and governments in India as well as the foreign higher educational institutions.

## Concerns

Promoting excellence, preventing malpractices, safeguarding the interests of students and protecting national interests have been some of the major concerns. Many were wary of the cultural threat that this initiative posed. Some of those who were at the forefront of preserving the purity of Indian culture are now a part of the political dispensation. Policy planners and regulators have been particularly concerned about how to come up with a framework that attracts the best of the best and deters the fly-by-night kinds of universities.

On the other hand, the sought-after universities are concerned about the potential adverse effect of setting up offshore campuses with their accreditation, ranking and reputation. Truly reputed higher educational institutions operate on a not-for-profit basis and have no materialistic motives to go offshore. A few countries that have such offshore campuses had to hard-sell the institutions the idea by leasing land at almost no cost, bearing the bulk of infrastructure cost and promising them the academic, administrative and financial autonomy that they enjoy in their home country. India could hardly afford any such incentives. Whatever was offered was riddled with caveats and contradictions.

Past setbacks notwithstanding, the idea of having world-class universities establish and operate



**Furqan Qamar,**

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their campuses in India has been so compelling that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provided that "selected universities e.g., those from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India. A legislative framework facilitating such entry will be put in place, and such universities will be given special dispensation regarding regulatory, governance, and content norms on par with other autonomous institutions of India." Even though the NEP favoured a "legislative framework", the idea is being executed through a regulatory route by the University Grants Commission (UGC). There seems to be determination to get the idea going, even if it amounts to some dilution in standards.

While the policy prescribed "facilitation" and "special dispensation" for the top 100 universities of the world, the draft regulation seeks to lower the standards by extending the scope to the top 500 universities, overall or in any discipline. Further, for the "educational institutions", just being "reputed" in their home country would be a sufficient requirement. The draft regulation doesn't seem concerned about the subjectivity and scope of discretion in the above articulation as it believes that the standing committee constituted by the UGC would do an unbiased and thorough job in processing the applications and identifying only the best institutions.

## Contradictions

The initiative may still fail due to contradictions in the regulation. The draft regulation demands that the quality of education imparted by these institutions in India must be on a par with the quality of courses at their campus in the country of origin. Yet, it insists that they must not "offer any such programme of study which jeopardises the national interest of India or the standards of higher education in India". It promises academic, administrative and

financial autonomy to foreign institutions but takes that away by asserting that they abide by all the conditions that the UGC and the Indian government prescribe from time to time. The provision that the foreign higher education institutions must not do anything "contrary to the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality" might deter the best universities that most value their academic autonomy.

Leaving aside the issue of whether the idea would succeed, one wonders why India is so keen on foreign higher education. During a media briefing, it was stated that foreign universities in India would stop the outflow of \$28-30 billion in foreign exchange. This does not corroborate the data on outward remittances for studies abroad, as reported by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). During 2021-22, foreign outflow on account of studies abroad was no more than \$5.165 billion. Even if we add to it the outflows of \$3.598 billion for education-related travel (though these do not necessarily relate to studies abroad), the total education-related outflows would be \$8.973 billion. One could argue that even \$5.165 billion is a substantive sum and must be stopped from flowing abroad, but the idea of import substitution in higher education is complicated. Students do not go abroad for degrees alone; they also go for the experience, post-study work visas, income opportunities and better career prospects. Studying in a foreign university in India would offer them none of these. Most critically, as they are able to finance a good part of their education abroad through jobs, assistantships and scholarships, they find it more economical.

Still, India needs to have an enabling framework for the entry and operation of foreign higher educational institutions. It must, however, ensure that the best of the best set up their campuses in the country.

The initiative may fail due to contradictions in the draft regulation



# Science literature festivals boost scientific temper



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

If scientists and literary figures come together, we can expedite our mission of developing scientific temper

Scientific temper is a buzzword in the scientific community, and policymakers often use it to highlight one of the specialties of our Constitution and nation. Even before our Constitution came into existence, we had a rich tradition of following scientific principles in our daily life; be it in our architecture, health care, agriculture and music. Of course, this knowledge is kept in the hands of a few elite sections of society.

After independence, our policymakers realised that scientific knowledge and new scientific advances from the western world should be adopted. Accordingly, they envisioned world class institutions in the country and the fruits of which we are harvesting today through research and innovation. But even today, science is managed by the scientific and academic community. The science spoken by these elite communities is not digestible to the ordinary person, even though they are reaping the benefits in their daily life.

Myths and superstitions that affect human development are prevalent even in this 'Amrit Kal' when we are marching towards a global leader. Many educated people have an aversion to taking vaccines or believing in evolution. Only when all our citizens are scientifically literate, can our country progress in every aspect of human development. This is a challenging task in a country with diverse cultures and traditions. Many science popularisation programmes have been carried out in the country under the aegis of great institutions like Vigyan Prasara, CSIR-NIScPR (earlier CSIR-NISCAIR) and others. But still, achieving 100 per cent scientific temper seems to be a dream, the problem is that these institutions have their own limitations in reaching every nook and corner of the country.

Moreover, most of the science popularisation programmes are led by scientists who are from a science background. There are hardly any scientific institutions in the public sector where people from literature or fine arts backgrounds are recruited as scientists. This is one of the major drawbacks of our science communication activities. We need more science communication institutions having human resources trained in science, literature and fine arts, in different regions of the country. Based on the local cultural differences, we need to design different science communication strategies to develop scientific temper in the society.

It is here literature comes to the rescue. Every literate person will read story books, novels, fiction and poems at some point in life, even if they don't read scientific books or journals. Literature is one area that we have missed in our science popularisation activities. Even children who are not interested in science in the classroom would like to read sci-fiction books like the Star Trek series and similar.

Many ordinary people without any scientific background, have shown interest in reading biographies of scientists



WE NEED TO DESIGN MATERIALS THAT WOULD DIGEST EVERY CHILD, STORY BOOKS, COMIC BOOKS, NOVELS, FICTION, POEMS, ETC, THAT HAVE SCIENCE COMPONENTS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES. THIS WILL MAKE EVEN STUDENTS NOT INTERESTED IN SCIENCE LEARN SCIENTIFIC CONCEPTS INDIRECTLY

(The author is a science communicator and academic)



like "Wings of Fire" by our former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. Similarly, there are many takers for the sci-fiction books written by Fred Hoyle, Gregory Benford, Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Robert A Heinlein, Arthur C Clarke, Michael Crichton and others.

Even in our classroom, instead of textbooks, if science-based popular science books or literary works are included, we can generate interest in students. Studies have shown that creating connections with literary works will help engage students in science classes.

Students reported that they were immediately able to see and emotionally engage with the narrative. They might start to appreciate science for its creative potential. Students' self assurance in science improves when they see the relevance of scientific concepts to interests they already have. It encourages kids to broaden their horizons and think beyond the box when it comes to their science coursework.

Integrating readings about accountability in science is one way to help students grasp the material. They gain self assurance as they learn that science encompasses more than one narrow field. Students with a passion for science will find that the sessions push them to develop their critical thinking skills and open their minds to new ideas. They have also inspired many kids to pursue learning on their own time. Innovative ideas and technological advances in science and technology have been reflected by numerous well known and representative literary works. The important interactions between science and the cultural sphere (with architecture, religion, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, or literature)

throughout history demonstrate that science is a fundamental component of culture.

Jonathan Swift, in his work Gulliver's Travels (1726), depicts an island, Laputa, which is held up magnetically in the air, and inhabited by men who are totally dedicated to mathematics and music. Similarly, Jules Verne, in his novel The Mysterious Island (1874) explains the notion of man's controlling nature thanks to science and technology.

Science also influences the work of Arthur Conan Doyle. The investigation methods used by his literary creation, the detective Sherlock Holmes, are based on the positivist scientific methods taught to the author as a medical student. In recent times books by Prof. Yuval Noah Harari - Sapiens & Homo Deus - were the best-sellers lucidly, which explain science, even though the author is not a scientist per se. He recently came out with another book Sapiens: A Graphic History, a radical graphical adaptation of his best-selling book Sapiens, targeting children and the layman.

Realising the importance of literature in science communication, the government has included 'Vigyanika' (Science literature festival) as one of the main events at the mega science event, India International Science Festival (IISF), which has been celebrated since 2015. The 'Vigyanika' event will bring scientists, literary and fine arts personnel to a common platform. The event was first conceived by Dr Nakul Parashar, Director, Vigyan Prasara, on the lines of Jaipur Lit Festival for the first time and with the help of his colleagues Kapil Tripathi and Maanbardhan Kanth launched it in IISF 2019 at Kolkata.

This initiated a new becoming in taking science communication and science education to the next level. Our science students should be taught to read novels, poems, biographies, etc., to improve their creative skills. The beauty of storytelling and poems is that even an illiterate person who listens to them will enjoy and understand scientific concepts.

In this world, of trans-disciplinary learning, policymakers should open the doors of scientific institutions to people from a literature background. A good literary work, be it a novel or fiction, or poem, is a mirror of society. It can reflect problems the community faces, virtues of good values and teach people to dream higher. It can even help us document certain traditional knowledge that prevailed during the period. These values are essential for effectively bringing science to the masses. Even today, our policymakers give impetus to scientist-centric science communication. This should change to a collective teamwork of scientists, literary and fine arts persons. We must envision a nation where scientific temper is imparted to every citizen. For this, we must train our young minds, our school-going children.

We need to design materials that would digest every child, story books, comic books, novels, fiction, poems, etc, that have science components in different languages. This will make even students not interested in science learn scientific concepts indirectly. If scientists and literary figures come together, we can expedite our mission of developing scientific temper in every part of the country and make India a scientific superpower in the Amrit Kal. 8/1/7



# Areas of Study

The draft regulation by UGC brings a glimmer of hope for area study programmes to develop fully in India. Through this initiative Indian higher education will attract foreign students as well as academicians to do research in the country. Western scholars and academicians are always interested in studying and understanding the non-West, especially the Asian continent. Subjects such as South Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, Chinese studies, Japanese studies etc. can attract the West to establish their institutions in India



**T**he University Grant Commission (UGC) has recently published a draft regulation allowing foreign universities and educational institutions to set up campuses in India.

A foreign university with a global ranking among the top 500 institutions in the world or a respectable reputation in its native country can apply to the UGC to set up a campus in India.

The institution will be given full autonomy to administer its fee structure and admission process without any interference from the UGC or the Government of India.

However such educational institutions cannot "offer any such program of study which jeopardizes the national interest of India or the standard of higher education in India."

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) envisioned a similar academic future in the country with its firm advocacy for globalization of higher education in India.

Although the current draft regulation by UGC does not follow the NEP, it keeps the document as a pretext.

The spirit provided by NEP 2020 to make India an educational hub for foreign students and academicians is carried forward by the new draft regulation.

It would be interesting to see if UGC follows the words of NEP in the future and works out a legislative framework to facilitate the entry of foreign academic institutions in the country.

The new initiative is a radical one in terms of its potential to change the higher education scenario in the country, and it will several possibilities to several dimensions of academia.

One such example is the opportunity it brings to the table for the growth of area studies in India. Area studies programmes, sometimes known as regional studies, emphasize the analysis of a particular region characterized either by socio-political and historical phenomena or cultural diversities.

Area studies are typically interdisciplinary in nature, covering a more comprehensive range of issues in a particular

geographical location. The programme's heterogeneous character covers both social sciences and humanities to deal with political science, history, political economy, international relations, strategic studies, language, etc.

Area study has a long history in India. Area study programmes developed in India right after independence under mainstream disciplines like International Studies and Political Science. However, over the years it has created its own identity. Today, several Higher Educational Institutions in the country offer area programmes under their academic curriculum like South Asian Studies, South East Asian Studies, African Studies, European Studies, Chinese Studies, American Studies etc. to name a few.

These programmes try to understand a particular geographical area with its political, social and cultural dynamic. Area study programmes in a way try to understand the interactions between local cultures and how they leave an impact on global politics.

Though area studies programmes exist in Indian Universities, they have, from their earliest days, been handicapped by various conceptual fallacies and operational flaws, including the absence of a theory, lack of multidisciplinary perspectives, analyses that are based on macro-level research, scarce fieldwork, deficiencies in language skills, lack of quantitative research projects, event-driven research agendas, a predominant nature of secondary sources in research, and taught courses which are too broad in their formulation and too narrow in their subject matter (Sahni, 2009).

However, the new draft regulation by UGC brings a glimmer of hope for area study programmes to develop fully in India.

Through this initiative Indian higher education will attract foreign students as well as academic

ians to do research in the country.

International Studies and area studies are two major academic disciplines through which students from around the globe will be attracted to pursue their education in India.

Western scholars and academicians are always interested in studying and understanding the non-West, especially the Asian continent. Subjects such as South Asian Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, Chinese studies, Japanese studies etc. can attract the West to establish their institutions in India.

The draft rules provide a good amount of autonomy to foreign institutions in exploring the world's second largest higher education market. They promise autonomy in all sectors, including academic affairs, governance, admission policy and tuition fees.

Area studies came to the fore with the end of the Second World War as the cold war took shape between the US and the USSR.

Political scientists and scholars in the West looked for a way to understand and study the social, cultural, historical, and regional diversities in various parts of the world to cope with international politics' changing dynamics.

This paved the way for a new field of study under the banner of "area studies" that focused mostly on a region's contextual historical knowledge.

Private organisations in the US promoted the Area Study programmes to carry forward state propaganda across the world.

The active involvement of US government in academic programmes of area studies made the discipline a problematic one.

Today, area courses provide a unique view of the world and contribute handsomely towards growth of international studies across the globe.

Area programmes have

come out of their colonial past and today play an important role in global politics. They are independent or at best complementary to International Relations.

Area specialists across the globe are working towards a better understanding of global politics – giving each geographical location its due recognition.

One of the key benefits of having area programmes in a non-Western country like India is that the courses look beyond the Western gaze and give the non-West its separate identity without any bias.

India can take the lead in this direction through its area programs. At present, several institutions in India are providing area courses but they need proper funding and support from the state to flourish.

UGC's move therefore could be used as an opportunity as the students of the country could experience area courses of global standard. Although the draft regulation seems to be a perfect opportunity for Indian Higher Education to revolutionise itself, a lot will depend on implementation. The autonomy granted to Foreign Educational Institutions should be subject to check and all the activities should be kept transparent.

The area specialists should grab this opportunity and work towards the growth of area programmes in the country. Region-specific knowledge will help policy makers in India to keep their geostrategic advantage alive.

The challenge for foreign institutions would be to maintain the same global standard of their institutions while operating in India that too with a fee structure that Indian students can afford.

The burden lies with the government and the UGC to provide necessary resources to make the system work. It will be a new experience for Indian students to work with foreign institutions which will give them a unique perspective in academics.

The area specialists in India will be keen to take this platform and carry forward the region-specific knowledge to a new level to help policy makers understand global politics in a broader sense.



**SANTOSH MATHEW**  
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# Why higher educational institutions should incorporate entrepreneurship in their curriculum

**SAGAR WISHNOI**

In recent years, India has seen a surge in the number of entrepreneurs who are setting up their own businesses, despite the lack of resources. The supportive ecosystem and abundant opportunities in the country have encouraged more people to take the risky, yet rewarding venture of starting their own businesses. With the Indian startup sector booming and the companies entering the public equity markets, Entrepreneurship is gradually becoming a key element for an individual's success.

However, the young generation of India is yet to be introduced to the concept and its practical applications. The same is true for the higher education curriculum in India. In today's age, when the competition is fierce and the skills required to succeed in the futuristic job market are expanding exponentially, basic entrepreneurship should be taught at the higher educational institutions.

There are various reasons why higher educational institutions should introduce the concept of entrepreneurship in the curriculum.

## CULTURE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Firstly, it will create a sense of confidence among the students and assist them to come up with innovative solutions while they are setting out to build their own businesses. It will help them face the challenges associated with self-employment and help them secure their future.

Teaching entrepreneurship should be taught in school and college as it provides students with an invaluable opportunity to learn the fundamentals of starting and running a business. Not only are they able to gain a knowledge of the necessary steps involved in setting up and running a business, but they can also understand the significance of planning and understanding the financial implications of running a business. By teaching students about the potential risks and opportunities of a business, they are better equipped to tackle the

challenges that come with establishing and maintaining a successful company. It is essential for young people to be exposed to the fundamentals of entrepreneurship in order to foster innovation and creativity, both of which are essential to becoming successful in the business world.

In addition to teaching students the practical skills needed to start and run a business, teaching entrepreneurship in school and college also helps students develop a better understanding of the complexities of the business world. Students can gain an understanding of the different types of industries, competition within those industries, and the value of forming connections to achieve business success. Furthermore, students will learn the importance of creating and maintaining a detailed plan for their own business and understanding the critical components that need to be taken into consideration prior to launching. By

imparting greater knowledge and awareness of the business world, students can be better prepared to start and run successful businesses.

## TURN IDEAS INTO SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSES

Teaching entrepreneurship in school and college helps students develop a strong understanding of the various stages needed to turn an idea into a successful business. From identifying potential customers, to developing marketing and advertising strategies, to building a viable business plan and raising capital, students can gain the skills to create and manage their very own start-up. These foundational abilities are essential for developing a successful business, and by learning these through classroom education, students will be well-equipped to launch their entrepreneurial career path with confidence and success.

When students are taught the fundamentals of entrepreneurship through in-school and college curricula, the rewards can be significant. Not only will they learn to develop creative and innovative solutions to everyday problems, but they will also acquire critical leadership and communication skills that they can utilize when managing employees, customers, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, they will be better equipped to transition into the job market, armed with the knowledge necessary to confidently start their own business and thrive in the ever-changing entrepreneurial landscape.

In the United States, a number of universities offer such programs, among the most renowned being Stanford University, Harvard Business School, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Companies such as Google, Microsoft, and Dell are all success stories from these universities.

In Canada, the Uni-

versity of Toronto and the University of British Columbia both have highly-regarded entrepreneurship programs. Examples of successful companies that have stemmed from these universities include Hootsuite and Shopify.

In Germany, universities offer programs which aim to equip students with practical skills and hands-on experience. Notable success stories from these universities include companies such as Zalando and FlixBus.

In Sweden, universities provide entrepreneurship programs, with a focus on innovation and sustainability. Notable success stories from these universities include companies such as Spotify and Skype.

Universities in Israel offer Entrepreneurship programs that focus on technology and innovation. Some of the success stories that have emerged from these universities include Waze and Check Point Software Technologies. Similarly, universities in Singapore provide Entrepreneurship programs with a focus on technology and innovation. Companies such as Grab, Sea Limited have emerged from the universities in Singapore.

## CONCLUSION

The ability to create, innovate and become entrepreneurial is an invaluable skill that is beneficial to the future of a student's career. Teaching the basics of entrepreneurship to students of higher educational institutions provides them with a foundation to build upon. It gives them the confidence to pursue their own creative ideas, take calculated risks, focus on creating customer value and manage their resources effectively.





# Edtech courses become crucial tools to boost career options

JOHN KALLILIL

Technology is fast becoming a crucial tool for growth and development. Education technology, which includes everything from online courses to mobile apps, has never been more essential in boosting career performance. This holds true for both, on the job, where it has immediate, real-time applications, and over time, with things like online certification programmes. By automating both long- and short-term career progression and planning, technology is also assisting in bridging the skills gap. Thus, professionals are actively looking at possibilities to develop their career using predictive learning and analytics rather than just fulfilling the minimal job-specific criteria. In addition, the workforce is anticipated to undergo a revolution due to this evolution in training.

As technology helps people learn new skills more quickly, it assists learners to improve their careers more effectively and keep up with the demanding changes and evolutions in the industry. By integrating learning into daily job activities, employees can continuously develop their present abilities and pick up new ones, moving forward at their own speed or according to their requirements or goals.

## EDTECH COURSES: UPSKILLING PROFESSIONALS

Today, the target market is open to both online and offline programs. LIVE interactive sessions, and in-person peer and faculty interaction are great value adds that the target group finds aspirational. According to a study by KPMG, the category is predicted to keep expanding at a robust

rate of 38%, driven by the demand from new workers looking for a place in the industry and the need for experts to adopt new and emerging technology.

In order to keep up with this accelerated rate of change led by technology in the workplace, businesses are forced to rethink their hiring strategy. The business needs more qualified, digital-ready and forward-looking set of skilled professionals. Based on this need, the government is also promoting opportunities for skill development by incorporating cutting-edge technologies into its educational practices to increase access to superior education, certification, and degrees online.

By designing and curating a vast array of online courses that are specially tailored to the requirements of the workforce, edtech platforms are further improving access to high-quality and premium education. Edtech startups and companies are

leveraging cutting-edge technology, sophisticated platforms, immersive and hybrid learning approaches to streamline and accelerate learning.

## UPSILLING WILL BENEFIT THE WORKFORCE

In the modern-day world, professionals must become lifelong learners in order to succeed as continuous learning and education have become the norm to navigate the world of disruption. The benefits of upskilling or reskilling are enormous and not just limited to executives but middle to senior leadership. Moreover, learning technology and paradigms are also undergoing a sea change as a result of

EdTech. As technology and new pedagogical methods make it extremely easy to consume and understand complex subjects.

## FINAL TAKEAWAY!

Technology in education is crucial for improving performance. Instead of only meeting the bare minimum requirements for each employee, professionals are now actively seeking opportunities to advance their careers, utilizing predictive learning and analytics. To bridge the skills gap between the available and the existing workforce, EdTech platforms can be the driving force. This sector has the potential to play a significant role in achieving the goals, building an extremely effective ecosystem, and empowering the future generation with high-quality executive education programs for leaders.

The author is founder & CEO, XED





# Open IIT Gates

*More women are taking a crack at the JEE. Good, because this gender disparity was glaring*

**T**his year, for the first time, women make up 30% of the IIT-JEE applicant pool. This is entirely good news, because JEE results have long been grim advertisements for glaring gendered disparity. Girls routinely outperform boys in boards and medical entrance. That JEE has remained a hurdle was partly because many girls didn't even try. The reasons for this gender gap are complex. It is not differences in innate ability or a lack of interest in scientific and technical education. Implicit biases and the lack of role models might be central to the scarcity of women in science in the West, but in India, women make up 43% of the STEM education pool, one of the highest ratios in the world.



The government has made active interventions to spark girls' interest in STEM study, and institutions are assessed for their gender inclusion. IITs have tried to mend the gap too – the horizontal 'super-numerary' quota gives women who have passed the JEE Advanced an edge in courses of their choice and has taken the presence of women to 20% on IIT campuses, a visible improvement.

The reluctance to aim for the IITs, then, is not rooted in individual psyches as much as social constraints, and in the design of the high-stakes JEE. The exam, which usually involves years of intensive coaching in faraway locations, did not just filter out girls, it has also been skewed against students from rural and lower-income backgrounds. This year's jump in candidates from OBC and EWS categories is also heartening on that front. If the IITs are to be a magnet for India's brightest minds in science and tech, they must make sure that social disparities don't come in the way of talent.

*TS/20*



# Go's Job: Think Of Creating Jobs

*Employment recovery after Covid is modest. To change this, invest in India's small towns*

**Amit Basole**



The presentation of the Union Budget by the finance minister is an occasion to reflect on both short-term and long-term economic policy and prospects. India's economy as well as the global economy have been through a rough few years with Covid pandemic followed by the war in Ukraine.

In India, as per CMIE data, neither employment nor incomes have recovered completely in aggregate terms, from the Covid shock.

- Workforce participation rate for men remains, on average, five percentage points below the pre-Covid level.
- Household incomes are at 90% of their pre-Covid average in real terms, which was a low Rs 6,000 per person per month to begin with.
- In addition, household financial savings are at historic lows.

## Worrying growth trend

On the other hand, the 'K-shaped' recovery has meant historically high profit rates for the corporate sector. But high profits and low corporate taxes have failed to translate into higher investment rates. The burden of creating demand has fallen on the public sector, taking largely the form of capital expenditure on infrastructural projects. It is not clear yet if this strategy is working as envisioned.

**BUDGET  
2023-24**

Even prior to the onset of the pandemic, the Indian economy was experiencing a severe growth slowdown. The growth rate of gross value added adjusted for inflation fell from 8% in 2016-17 to 6% in 2017-18 and further to 4% by 2019-20, on the eve of the pandemic.

If we leave out the Covid-induced base effect which resulted in large bounce-back growth rates in 2021-22, and assume a real growth rate of 7% for the current financial year, we see that the economy will have grown at a compounded annual growth rate of just under 3% between 2019-20 and 2022-23. These are worrying numbers.

More pertinent to the ordinary person's concerns, while growth may pick up again, what the recovery will



The image is for representational purposes

do to help our long-standing jobs problem is an open question. Creating good quality, productive jobs has proved difficult for many countries, not just India. But, across the developing world, India stands out for its particularly poor performance in linking growth to jobs.

## Link between growth and jobs is missing

Cross-country data show that GDP growth is usually positively related to employment growth – in years in which the economy grows faster, more jobs are also created. For India, on the other hand, this relationship is almost non-existent.

That is, over the past 30 years, there is no correlation between GDP growth in a given year and employment growth in that year. Of course, this does not mean that employment has not risen over this period. But it does mean that we cannot bank on raising GDP growth to promote employment growth. We need a separate policy focus on employment itself.

Even the employment that the economy has managed to create in sectors other than agriculture has been largely of the precarious kind, mostly in construction and a few other services. Despite many years of con-

ted policy efforts via Make in India and more recently the Production-Linked Incentives scheme, the shares of the manufacturing sector in GDP and in employment have remained stuck around 17% and 11% respectively.

The rate of open unemployment among educated youth in India has reached alarming levels, and this does not even take into account women who tend to drop out of the labour force entirely.

## Persist with infrastructure spending

So what is the way forward? First, even though the pandemic itself may be receding from our memory, its economic effects linger on. Thus continued support for social safety measures such as MGNREGA remains essential to help vulnerable households cope with employment and income losses.

MGNREGA outlays have been reduced to pre-Covid levels since the last Budget. But, our surveys show that the programme is making a vital difference and demand for work far exceeds its supply, so raising the programme budget is imperative. MGNREGA only operates in rural areas. Hence, it is worth considering an employment guarantee programme for urban areas, as many states like Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and others are experimenting with.

Public infrastructure spending can be part of the solution since it not only creates direct and indirect jobs but also improves ease of doing business, helping the private sector to create jobs. But to really make a difference for micro and small businesses, investment is needed in local infrastructure in thousands of small towns and cities across the country, not in a few mega projects or metro areas.

Given large fiscal deficits, there is pressure on GoI to control expenditures. The solution lies, at least in part, in restructuring the revenue side. The pandemic has been good for larger firms and richer households. Reducing tax exemptions on these is called for, thereby increasing reliance on direct taxes at the expense of indirect taxes, which tend to be regressive. In this context, recall that cutting corporate taxes did not boost private investment.

The Budget is an exercise in balancing interests. The interest of workers in the unorganised sector and MSMEs should not be forgotten in the bargain.

The writer is with Azim Premji University.



# Craze for foreign varsities

We have systematically undermined the academic traditions of our institutions



**AVUIT PATHAK**  
SOCIOLOGIST

**I**N a mobile and globally interconnected world, the objectives and aspirations of higher education cannot remain confined to a fixed territorial boundary. Every sane educationist would concede that ideas, knowledge traditions, pedagogic practices and even research enquiries evolve and grow through continual cross-cultural/epistemological conversations and intellectual dialogues. Hence, there seems to be no apparent reason to oppose the idea of foreign universities establishing their campuses in India. As the latest draft law formulated by the University Grants Commission (UGC) indicates, the local campuses of foreign universities will be able to decide the admission requirements for both domestic and foreign students, the fee structure and the scholarship programmes. Moreover, these universities will have complete discretion over anyone they choose to hire as faculty/staff.

The members of the ambitious and aspiring class who love all sorts of international 'brands', and prefer to send their children abroad for higher education are bound to welcome this decision. And they would further argue that Indian universities are underperforming and incapable of nurturing the academic tradition of original thinking and research in science, technology and social sciences. And hence, if foreign universities among the 'top 500 global rankings' (I am not very convinced about the relevance of the mathematics of ranking, measuring and quantifying the value of education which is essentially a qualitative experience with politico-existential and philosophical connotations) begin to establish their campuses in India, there will be some sort of revolution in



**REBUILD:** Should we not nurture and encourage high quality and affordable Indian universities that decolonise our consciousness? TRIBUNE PHOTO

A nation can't be a 'vishwaguru' if it loses confidence in its institutions, and depends on foreign universities to teach us lessons in physics, history, philosophy, finance, etc.

India in terms of pedagogic innovations and quality of research. While I understand their concerns, a disturbing question continues to haunt me: Why and how did we come to this stage that we have to believe that only foreign universities can salvage us? Why and how did we allow the systematic degradation and devaluation of Indian universities? It is sad that even the UGC Chairperson seldom bothers to raise and reflect on this important question. A nation cannot be great or a 'vishwaguru' if it loses confidence in its own institutions or remains pessimistic about their performances, and depends on foreign universities to teach us lessons in physics, geology, history, philosophy, management, finance and engineering.

In this context, as an insider with some experience in the psychology and academic culture of Indian universities, I wish to raise three issues. First, I have no hesitation in saying that many of us as professors and researchers have continually devalued ourselves; we have chosen to live with some sort of inferiority complex. Many of us — including great profes-

sors in top Indian universities — have behaved like Thomas Babington Macaulay's children. We believe that everything 'foreign' — from publishing houses to academic journals — is good and preferable. As a result, we have never bothered to establish or nurture good Indian journals and publication houses. Not solely that. A foreign trip or a sabbatical at some Euro-American university seems to be seen as a mark of academic Brahminism. During the three decades when I was teaching, I never saw a professor from Yale or Cambridge or Harvard who bothered to come to our own university on sabbatical. Instead, here in India, our rat race is centred primarily on some trip to any foreign university at any cost. And these days, some of our glamorous private universities prefer young aspirants with foreign PhD degrees for recruiting as faculty. In a way, many of our top academics and intellectuals have often failed to decolonise their consciousness.

Second, an unholy alliance of the non-reflexive political class and corrupt/callous academic bureaucracy has

played a devastating role in undermining the academic traditions of our universities. Imagine the state of our universities, which, for all practical purposes, have been reduced into mere degree-manufacturing machines without engaged pedagogy, meaningful research and culture of debate and dialogue. The lumpenisation of student politics, the controversial recruitment of vice-chancellors and all sorts of associated scams have created a milieu that is not conducive to the growth of a flourishing academic tradition. Even some of our reputed Central universities have been destroyed in recent times. When the obsessively 'nationalist' political establishment and its hired academic bureaucrats begin to abhor the tradition of free-floating intellectual and politico-cultural debate, how will it be possible to encourage the culture of critical pedagogy and meaningful research in science, liberal arts and social sciences? Does the UGC Chairperson bother to reflect on this issue?

Third, see the way we demotivate, demoralise and discourage some of our bright young minds who want to teach and do meaningful research. There is no dignity attached to the entire brigade of 'guest lecturers' and 'ad hoc' teachers who are often humiliated by the academic bosses, and compelled to live with chronic job insecurity. How is it possible for them to concentrate, and devote themselves wholeheartedly to teaching and research? Neither the UGC nor the state is bothered about this tragedy — the organised annihilation of young minds.

Well, in the era of global market, foreign universities are bound to come. But then, the moot question that is seldom raised is whether we too can nurture and encourage high quality and affordable Indian universities that decolonise our consciousness, heal our wounded selves, embrace the bright and young students/researchers from the historically deprived sections of this caste-ridden and class-divided society, transform education as a life-transformative experience, and move towards an inclusive, egalitarian, decolonised and self-confident society.



# Need to raise standard of education in rural India



**PREM CHOWDHRY**

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Infrastructure in rural schools is far below the satisfactory level, with 82 per cent of the schools requiring renovation; books are often unavailable and teacher absenteeism tends to be high. A large number of teachers are unwilling to teach in rural areas and those who do are usually under-qualified.

Improvement is only possible if more schools are established and the basic infrastructure of the existing ones is upgraded.

**T**HE 2022 Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) sheds light on learning outcomes in schools in rural districts of India. Conducted every year since 2005, this survey is a key source of information about children's learning skills across the country. The current report, released after a gap of four years, records the impact of school closure on the studies of children during the Covid pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

A household-based, rather than school-based, survey, it includes children who have never been to school or have dropped out, as well as those who are in government schools or private ones. Around 7,00,000 children in the age group of 3 to 16 years, who are residents of these households, were surveyed across the country. In each rural district, 30 villages were sampled and in each village, 20 randomly selected households were surveyed. This process generated a total of 600 households per district, or about 3,00,000 households. Information on the schooling status was collected for all children living in sampled households who were in the required age group. Children in the age group of 5-16 years were tested to assess their basic reading and arithmetic skills.

Major findings of the report are not entirely negative, but they do underline the need to improve the standard of education in rural India. The national-level study shows that despite school closure during the pandemic, the overall enrolment figures, which have been above 95 per cent for the past 15 years for the age group of 6 to 14 years, increased from



**COVID IMPACT:** The ASER-2022 survey shows a severe decline in the reading ability and comprehension of the students. TRIBUNE PHOTO

97.2 per cent in 2018 to 98.4 per cent in 2022. Government schools have seen a sharp increase in children enrolled, from 65.6 per cent in 2018 to 72.9 per cent in 2022, reversing the trend of a steady decrease in student enrolment seen since 2006, when it was 73.4 per cent. The report also suggests that despite wide variations in how children accessed technology during the pandemic years, most schools, even those in rural areas, 'attempted to keep learning going with digital resources.' Some of the parents followed suit. This needs to be encouraged hugely.

The report also lays to rest apprehensions about the pandemic forcing families to withdraw girls from schools and push them into early

marriage. It finds that the percentage of girls in the age group of 11 to 14 years, who were out of school, declined to 2 per cent from 4.1 per cent. The decrease in the proportion of girls not enrolled in school is even sharper among older girls in the age group of 15 to 16 years, which stood at 7.9 per cent in 2022 as compared with 13.5 per cent in 2018.

However, the report shows a severe decline in reading ability and comprehension of the students. The percentage of Class III students in government or private schools who could read a Class II book fell by nearly 7 per cent from 27.3 per cent in 2018 to 20.5 per cent in 2022. This decline is visible in every state, and for children in both government and private schools.

States showing a decline of more than 10 percentage points from the 2018 level include those that had higher reading levels in 2018, such as Kerala (from 52.1 per cent in 2018 to 38.7 per cent in 2022), Himachal Pradesh (from 47.7 per cent to 28.4 per cent), and Haryana (from 46.4 per cent to 31.5 per cent). Large drops are also visible in Andhra Pradesh (from 22.6 per cent to 10.3 per cent) and Telangana (from 18.1 per cent to 5.2 per cent). Nationally, the proportion of children enrolled in Class V in government or private schools who could at least read a Class II-level text fell from 50.5 per cent in 2018 to 42.8 per cent in 2022 i.e. dropping to pre-2012 levels and reversing several years of improvement.

While families withdrew students from private schools to save money spent on tuition fees, they also invested in private tuition classes, which increased as the proportion of such students rose from 26.4 per cent in 2018 to 30.5 per cent in 2022 in both private and government schools. This may also be the reason why learning gaps are sharper in reading because students typically choose to study mathematics and science in tuition classes.

What is it that the ASER survey forces us to think without spelling it out in as many words? Directly, it deals with a lot of figures and facts, but indirectly, it compels us to critically analyse what exactly is wrong with our education system, particularly in rural India. With nearly 64.61 per cent of the population being rural, issues of quality and access remain areas of concern in the sphere of rural education. Children in rural areas remain

deprived of quality education owing to factors such as lack of competent and committed teachers, shortage of textbooks or teaching-learning material, among other things.

Infrastructure in rural schools is far below the satisfactory level, with 82 per cent of the schools requiring renovation; books are often unavailable and teacher absenteeism tends to be high. A large number of teachers are unwilling to teach in rural areas and those that do are usually under-qualified. Improvement is only possible if more schools are established and the basic infrastructure of the existing ones is upgraded. Also, by bringing innovative teaching methods like in private urban-based schools and promoting computer literacy, things can definitely be bettered.

However, due to the shortage of resources and lack of political will, this system suffers from massive gaps, including high pupil-to-teacher ratio, shortage of infrastructure and poor level of teacher training. Since 80 per cent of all recognised schools at the elementary stage are run or supported by the government, making it the largest provider of education in rural India, it is for the government to enforce these remedies as soon as possible and make the required changes.

As schools have reopened, the situation requires urgent thought, attention and immediate action. Things can definitely be improved if the required steps are initiated immediately. The ASER survey has clearly set the alarm bells ringing. The solution lies in accepting it and rectifying the shortcomings in education. *YH*



# परीक्षाओं से दोस्ती कराती परीक्षा पे चर्चा

**प**रीक्षाएं किसी न किसी रूप में मानव जीवन के साथ हमेशा से जुड़ी रही हैं। दसवीं या बारहवीं की स्कूली परीक्षाएं बच्चों की प्रतिभा का आकलन करने का एक माध्यम होती हैं, पर कई बार ये उनके लिए मानसिक दबाव का बड़ा कारण भी बन जाती हैं। चूंकि परीक्षाओं के बिना काम भी नहीं चलता, ऐसे में उनसे घबराने के बजाय दोस्ती करना समय की मांग है। कहने की जरूरत नहीं कि इस संदर्भ में प्रधानमंत्री नरेन्द्र मोदी पिछले पांच वर्षों से बच्चों और परीक्षाओं के बीच मैत्री कराने में एक ऐतिहासिक भूमिका का निर्वहन कर रहे हैं। परीक्षा पर अगली चर्चा कुछ ही दिनों में फिर होने वाली है। भारत जैसे विशाल और सामाजिक-आर्थिक विविधताओं से परिपूर्ण राष्ट्र में प्रधानमंत्री मोदी द्वारा 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' जैसे आयोजन की शुरुआत अपने आप में अनोखा और अत्यंत दूरदर्शी कदम है। स्कूल में खासकर परीक्षा के समय छात्रों, शिक्षकों और अभिभावकों को किन परिस्थितियों से गुजरना पड़ता था, यह किसी सरकार की चिंता का विषय नहीं होता था। जबकि यह सच्चाई रही है कि वर्तमान शिक्षा पद्धति में देश की आबादी का एक बड़ा हिस्सा वार्षिक परीक्षाओं के समय तनावग्रस्त होने लगता है।

परीक्षा में अंक एवं बच्चों के भविष्य की चिंता और साथ ही पारिवारिक-सामाजिक दबाव के चलते विद्यार्थियों-अभिभावकों को अजीब स्थितियों का सामना करना पड़ता है। लगातार बढ़ते शहरीकरण और एकल परिवारों में बढ़ोतरी के चलते समाज में स्थिति और भी भयावह हो रही है। कई बार इसकी परिणति डिप्रेशन या आत्महत्या तक में होती है। राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकार्ड ब्यूरो की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार पिछले 25 वर्षों में देश ने इस तरह से लगभग दौ लाख विद्यार्थियों को खो दिया है, जो कि किसी भी राष्ट्र के लिए बहुत बड़ी क्षति है। इनके कारणों में परीक्षा का भय, तनाव, माता-पिता एवं अभिभावकों की एक सीमा से अधिक उम्मीदें और आत्मविश्वास की कमी आदि पाए गए हैं। इनमें कई बार समस्याएं इस प्रकार की होती हैं जिन्हें समय रहते रोकना और उनका निदान किया जा सकता है, परंतु उचित मार्गदर्शन और सलाह के अभाव में ऐसा नहीं हो पाता, जिसका भूतान छात्र और उनके परिवार को करना पड़ता है।



अन्नपूर्णा देवी

**पीएम मोदी बच्चों और परीक्षाओं के बीच मैत्री कराने में एक ऐतिहासिक भूमिका का निर्वहन कर रहे हैं**



दूरदर्शी कदम है 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' का आयोजन • फाइल

ऐसे में हमारी भावी पीढ़ी को 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' के माध्यम से स्वयं प्रधानमंत्री मोदी का अनुभवों मार्गदर्शन प्राप्त हो रहा है। वह कहते हैं कि परीक्षाओं के महत्व से इन्कार तो नहीं किया जा सकता है, पर हमें यह समझना होगा कि क्या ये स्कूली परीक्षाएं हमारे जीवन की एकमात्र कसौटी हैं? क्या 10वीं एवं 12वीं कक्षा का स्कोरकार्ड ही किसी के जीवन का नियंता हो सकता है अथवा विद्यार्थी स्वयं भी अपना जीवन बिना स्कोरकार्ड के निर्मित कर सकता है? वह जोर देते हुए कहते हैं कि परीक्षा के गलियारों से निकली हुई जिंदगी ही जिंदगी नहीं होती है, उसके बाहर भी बहुत बड़ी दुनिया होती है। जीवन में सफलता प्राप्त करने, कुछ नया और अलग करने और एक आदर्श स्थापित करने के लिए स्कोरकार्ड का महारथी होना ही आवश्यक नहीं है। इसे वह अनेक सफल लोगों के उदाहरण देकर समझाते हैं। वह यह भी कहते रहे हैं कि परीक्षाएं हमारे जीवन का एक सहज हिस्सा होती हैं। हमें यह मानते हुए चलना चाहिए कि परीक्षा हमारी विकास यात्रा में एक और मील का पत्थर है। इसलिए तनाव न लेते हुए परीक्षाओं को उत्सव की तरह देखना चाहिए। प्रारंभिक तौर पर तो

यह आयोजन बच्चों का मनोबल बढ़ाने का प्रयास दिखाई देता है, पर वास्तव में यह स्वाभिमान और आत्मसम्मान से युक्त जीवन की आधारशिला तैयार करने में सहायक होगा।

'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' पीएम मोदी के 'सबका साथ, सबका विकास' मंत्र का ही एक हिस्सा है। इसमें प्रतिभागी किसी खास वर्ग, क्षेत्र, उम्र या जातियों और धर्मों/पंथों के न होकर भारत के सभी राज्यों, बल्कि विदेश से भी होते हैं। ये सभी एक लघु भारत का प्रतिनिधित्व करते हैं। दूसरी ओर प्रधानमंत्री के संवाद की व्यापकता विद्यार्थियों द्वारा पूछे गए प्रश्नों के उत्तर को केवल परीक्षा तक ही सीमित न रखकर उसे जीवन से जोड़ देती है। विद्यार्थी जीवन की समस्याएं किसी न किसी रूप में जीवन के दूसरे पड़ाव में भी जरूर आती हैं। प्रेरणा, आत्मविश्वास, एकाग्रता, आशा, उत्साह, समय और तनाव प्रबंधन आदि ऐसे अनेक विषय हैं, जिनका विद्यार्थी हो या आम व्यक्ति जीवन भर सामना करता है। जनता से जुड़े प्रधानमंत्री इसे अच्छी तरह समझते हैं। यही कारण है कि परीक्षा संबंधित प्रश्नों के उनके उत्तर में भी जीवन का फलसफा छिपा होता है। इस प्रकार 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' के माध्यम से पीएम मोदी देश की उस विशाल आबादी से भी जुड़ते हैं, जो आने वाले कल का आधार है। प्रधानमंत्री ने पिछली चर्चा में ध्यान और एकाग्रता की बात की। ध्यान हमें वर्तमान में उपस्थित रहना और कार्य को एकाग्रचित होकर करना सिखाता है, जिसका परीक्षाओं में भी लाभ होगा।

यह अनायास नहीं कि 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' आयोजन की लोकप्रियता लगातार बढ़ती जा रही है। 2020 में देश और विदेश से प्रत्यक्ष एवं परोक्ष माध्यम से जुड़ने वाले प्रतिभागियों की संख्या 30 करोड़ तक पहुंच चुकी थी। इसका प्रमुख कारण अभिभावक की भूमिका में स्वयं प्रधानमंत्री मोदी का होना और स्कूली तथा प्रतियोगी परीक्षाओं के बहाने जीवन की परीक्षाओं में सफलता का मंत्र देना है। इस आयोजन से किशोरों युवाओं समेत देश की जनता का जुड़ना निश्चित है। कई पीढ़ियों का एक साथ मार्गदर्शन प्राप्त करना है, जो दुनिया के किसी देश में आज तक नहीं हुआ है।

(लेखिका केंद्रीय शिक्षा राज्यमंत्री हैं।)

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# कब पता चलेगा आरक्षण का नफा-नुकसान

आरक्षण में आरक्षण की मांग अब लंबे समय तक नहीं टाल सकते। रोहिणी आयोग की रिपोर्ट पर हो रही देरी से लोगों में निराशा है। 2024 के चुनाव में यह रिपोर्ट भी एक मुद्दा बनेगी



केसी त्यागी

**सामाजिक न्याय और समता के सवाल पर एक बार फिर चर्चा गरम है।** 2017 में मोदी सरकार ने दिल्ली हाईकोर्ट की रिटायर्ड चीफ जस्टिस जी. रोहिणी के अध्यक्षता में एक आयोग बनाया था। आयोग को अन्य पिछड़ा वर्ग के तहत जातियों और समुदायों को आरक्षण का लाभ मिला या नहीं, इसकी जांच करनी थी। इस आयोग का कार्यकाल 13वाँ बार फिर 6 महीने के लिए बढ़ा दिया गया है। जहिर है, सरकार लोकसभा चुनाव से पहले इसे सार्वजनिक करने का जोखिम नहीं उठा सकती।

**जोखिम भरे फैसले :** सब जानते हैं कि 1978 में स्व. कर्पूरी ठाकुर और 1990 में वीपी सिंह की सरकार के फैसले कितने खतरों से भरे साबित हुए थे। 1977 में जनता पार्टी केन्द्र सरकार में आई और बिहार में कर्पूरी ठाकुर सीएम बने। कर्पूरी ठाकुर के पिछले मुख्यमंत्री

कार्यकाल (1971) में मुंगेरिलाल आयोग बना, जिसे आरक्षण को और असरदार बनाना था। 11 नवंबर 1978 को मुख्यमंत्री कर्पूरी ठाकुर ने इसकी रिपोर्ट सदन में रखी तो बवाल हो गया। सबसे तीव्र प्रक्रिया जनता पार्टी से आई, कांग्रेस समेत दलों में भी तूफान खड़ा हो गया। तब तक बिहार का विभाजन नहीं हुआ था। मुंगेरिलाल आयोग ने पिछड़ा वर्ग में 128 जातियों को शामिल किया था। इनमें से 94 जातियों को अति पिछड़ी की श्रेणी में रखा गया था। तब एक अनुमान के मुताबिक अति पिछड़ी जातियों की आबादी लगभग 38 फीसदी आंकी गई थी। आरक्षण में अति पिछड़ों के लिए 12 फीसदी, पिछड़े वर्ग के लिए 8 फीसदी, सामान्य वर्ग के गरीबों के लिए 3 फीसदी और महिलाओं के लिए 3 फीसदी का प्रावधान था।

**उत्तर भारत के पेरियार :** समता और स्वाभिमान से जीने का सपना सच में बदलने के प्रयासों के चलते कर्पूरी ठाकुर को मुख्यमंत्री पद से हाथ धोना पड़ा। फिर भी वह सामाजिक न्याय के संघर्ष में उत्तर भारत के पेरियार बनकर उभरे। महिला आरक्षण की प्रक्रिया भी उन्होंने ही शुरू की थी। अपने जीवन काल में अपनी और परायों का आक्रोश झेल कर वह आज पिछड़े वर्ग के आंदोलन के चेतना प्रतीक बन चुके हैं। 24 जनवरी यानी

Dall E 2 Image generator



कॉमन रूम

आज उनका जन्मदिन है, जिसे समता दिवस के रूप में मनाया जाता है। डॉ. आंबेडकर के बाद कर्पूरी ठाकुर ऐसी दूसरी शख्सियत हैं जिन्हें जीवन भर अपमानित होना पड़ा, मगर मौत के बाद वह सबसे ज्यादा माने गए।

ओबीसी की केंद्रीय सूची में विभिन्न प्रविष्टियों का अध्ययन करने और दोहराव, अस्पष्टता, विसंगतियों और वर्तनी की त्रुटियों के सुधार की सिफारिश या प्रतिलेखन और संशोधनों के चलते जस्टिस रोहिणी आयोग की रिपोर्ट आगे बढ़ती जा रही है। हालांकि आयोग ने 30 जुलाई 2019 को पत्र लिखकर सरकार को बता दिया है कि उप-वर्गीकरण

पर मसौदा रिपोर्ट तैयार हो चुकी है। लेकिन फिर संदर्भ की लगी नई शर्तों के बाद आयोग ने केंद्रीय सूची में समुदायों की सूची की जांच का काम शुरू किया है।

ओबीसी की केंद्रीय सूची में 2633 जातियां और उपजातियां हैं। 2018 में आयोग ने पिछले 5 वर्षों में 27 फीसदी ओबीसी कोट के तहत दी गई 1.3 लाख केंद्रीय नौकरियों के आंकड़ों के साथ ही पिछले 3 वर्षों में विश्वविद्यालयों, आईआईटी, एनआईटी और एम्स सहित केंद्रीय उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों में ओबीसी दाखिलों का विश्लेषण किया। इसका निष्कर्ष बताता है कि इनमें 24.95 फीसदी नौकरियां और सीटें कुल 10 ओबीसी समुदायों के पास गई हैं। 983 ओबीसी समुदायों का कुल 37 फीसदी नौकरियों और शैक्षणिक संस्थानों में प्रतिनिधित्व शून्य है।

जहिर है, आरक्षण के भीतर आरक्षण की मांग को अब लंबे समय तक टाला नहीं जा सकता। उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्यमंत्री रहते हुए खुद राजनाथ सिंह एक कमेट्री बनाकर आरक्षण की 3 भागों में बांटने की कोशिश कर चुके हैं। रोहिणी कमिशन की रिपोर्ट पर हो रही देरी से इन समूहों में निराशा है। 2024 के चुनाव में यह आयोग भी एक मुद्दा बनेगा, ऐसा अनुमान है।

(लेखक जेडोपू के पुत्र मामद हैं)

नका



# ASER: Lessons for Karnataka

**T**he findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 show that Karnataka has generally followed the national trend in learning standards of students and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education in 2022. But there are departures from the general trend in certain areas. The learning levels among Class 3 students in reading Class 2 level texts fell steeply to 8.6% in 2022 from 19.3% in 2018. The levels among Class 5 students dropped from 46.1% in 2018 to 30.2%, indicating that the recovery of learning after the pandemic has been slow. The decline was seen in numeracy levels also. Class 3 students who are able to do subtractions dropped from 26.4% in 2018 to 22.2% in 2022, and the proportion of children in Class 5 who can do divisions fell from 20.5% in 2018 to 13.3% in 2022.

The fall was seen in other age groups also. This was only to be expected because the schools were closed for a prolonged period and most students had no access to learning. One welcome finding is the increase in the number of enrolments in schools. There were apprehensions that the pandemic would adversely affect enrolment and cause children to drop out from schools. But the overall enrolment has increased from 99.3% in 2018 to 99.8% in 2022. This is much above the national average and almost the maximum possible. The state also saw an increase in enrolments in Anganwadis, much more than the national average. Enrolment in government schools had declined during the period 2006 to 2014. But the proportion of children in the 6-14 age group enrolled in government schools increased from 69.9% in 2018 to 72.6% in 2022. The average teacher attendance and students' attendance in schools is better in the state than at the national level. There was improvement in infrastructure facilities like girls' toilets and libraries, but drinking water facilities declined.

It has been officially stated that the state's learning recovery programme was designed to deal with the situation and that it would have been worse if the programme did not exist. The government is planning to extend the programme for the next academic year in the form of *Kalika Chetarike* (learning recovery) 2.0. It will take time for the leaning gap to be bridged, but normalcy should be brought about at the earliest. Online learning has become an important part of schooling but access to it has to be improved, especially in rural areas. Government schools should receive more attention. The ASER data provides useful information, and policies can be formulated on the basis of the strengths and weaknesses pointed out by the report.

**Learning levels have dropped. Focus must be on learning recovery**

2023/1/25



# Vishwagurudom, via Macaulay

The self-proclaimed 'nationalists' who have for long derided 'Macaulayputras' have now opened up India to foreign universities

NAVNEET SHARMA

**T**he yearning to become *Vishwaguru*, a rechristened desire to be the world leader in the knowledge economy, may appear at odds with the contention that the nation must have Foreign Higher Education Providers (FHEP) to attain excellence in higher education or to stop a large number of students from going abroad for studies.

Yet, the awakening of the Indian society in the 19th century that led to the freedom movement and freeing people from the colonial mindset may be attributed to a great extent to those who studied and trained abroad in foreign higher education institutions and came back with the ideas of liberty and liberalism that were gaining ground there at the time.

Also, the rich and rigorous debate on decolonising knowledge and its production and distribution centres – universities and schools – and the debates about westernisation and modernisation of knowledge and people, the rift between universal and indigenous understanding and culture, and the response to each other, gathered around the iconography of Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Macaulay, the then president of the General Committee of Public Instruction (GCPI), argued in his 'Minute on Indian Education' in 1835 for English to be the medium of instruction and teaching western sciences to Indians, which he thought were much superior to Indian knowledge and languages.

He derided that "a single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." He believed that it was no exaggeration to say that "all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England."

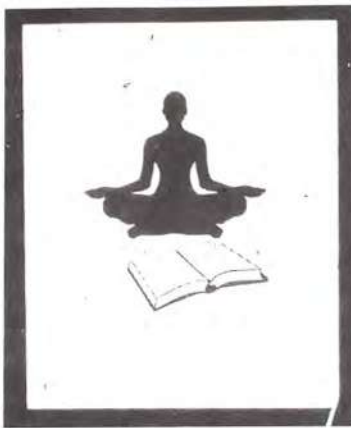
It was the infamous 'Minute' that charted the colonial effort to 'educate' Indians. Consequently, numerous schools, colleges and universities were opened during British rule, which replaced the indigenous centres of education, methods of knowledge construction and pedagogy.

These institutions were meant to produce men (and women) who would be English by the mind but brown by their skin, derided as *tody bucha* during the freedom struggle and *Macaulayputra*

post-independence.

The New Education Policy (NEP 2020) seems to believe that this mindset has been holding India back in its path of progress and seeks to reverse this onslaught on Indian minds and envisions producing 'Sanskritised' people, irrespective of the colour of their skin but with due respect to caste and gender in hushed tones.

Global economic compulsion has, however, compelled the government to pitch for the internationalisation of higher education. It is to this end that the



nation is now roping in FHEPs, mainly foreign universities. Promoted as a win-win strategy, it is expected to provide Indians 'foreign' degrees with 'quality' education at a lower price, without having to cross the seas in search of the same.

The higher education system in India is quite heterogeneous already, and adding yet another layer of heterogeneity must not be an issue. The worry is that it must not absolve the nation from the responsibility of improving the quality of Desi or Domestic Higher Education Providers (DHEPs) on the pretext that the same has been 'outsourced' now to FHEPs.

What possible justification would UGC proffer to the question of producing *Macaulayputras* afresh under an avowedly 'nationalist' regime? Will these FHEPs be required to alter their curriculum and pedagogy to suit and serve the cause of promoting the Indian knowledge system? But if they do that, how would they be able to show that their courses and programmes are the same that they offer on their main campuses abroad?

The requirement of reservations in admission and appointment would, however, pose no problem as they are not applicable in the case of even the private DHEPs. Accreditation and ranking would also pose no difficulty as FHEPs would be governed by their own standards. The regulation seems susceptible to making these institutions new-age *agraharas* for those who can afford them.

Made to integrate the Indian knowledge system, they might not produce Macaulays, but Max Muellers. This may again endanger our rich repository of knowledge where it is claimed that the *angrez* (Europeans) took away our knowledge and that is how they could invent airplanes and vaccines. Many disciplines like Indology, Indian Philosophy, and classical languages could also be missing under the new dispensation and may thus constrain their nationalistic appeal to the masses as dreamt up by the 'nationalist' government.

The foreign universities may not be able to spare foreign faculty and may have to resort to local recruitment. Chances are that they would prefer the indigenous *Macaulayputras*. Given the guarantee of freedom in the appointment of faculty, it may be assumed that would be insulated from political and bureaucratic interference. The fetish for 'white' teachers and 'white' degrees does not go well with the *Swadeshi* plank of the present government. Are we going to be a *vishwaguru* with the help of Chomskys and Michael Apples? Shouldn't India be imagining the locally born, bred and nurtured talents to become *vishwagurus*?

Students do attach value to degrees from a world-class university. Their decisions are seriously constrained by their access and affordability. But no one needs to worry on this count. India may be under compulsion to provide free food to over 62.5% of its population, but it has no dearth of dollar millionaires and billionaires who can afford such universities. But would they want to deny their offspring the cross-cultural experiences, global exposure, career prospects, income opportunities and possibilities of settling abroad?

Besides, a Harvard at Dantewada or Yale at Dharwad may not sound like an enviable proposition and these universities, if at all they come, may want to open their campuses only in the metropolitan cities. This would only create pockets of knowledge hubs in the country. It may also lead to the 'quality' shift of teachers from many Indian institutions who are stuck in remote areas. This may further aggravate the 'Macaulayisation' of Indian universities.

The pressure from the world political economy to open up social sectors like education and health for global players could undoubtedly be enormous. But India, with 5,000 years of history and tradition of knowledge institutions could have resisted the temptation.

The government could have shown faith in the abilities and capacities of Indian gurus and Indian higher education institutions to make India a *vishwaguru*. Alas! It has chosen the path of *Vishwagurudom* via Macaulays.

(The writer teaches at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh) 20/2/23



# Technology is a game-changer and leveller

Technological interventions have greatly eased the administrative and management aspects of teaching while freeing up time for teachers to focus exclusively on pedagogical improvements and advancements

**T**echnology is a game changer and a field leveller in more ways than one as far as learning and education are concerned. Its presence in our everyday lives is a testament to how it is a powerful tool. There are three prongs to the use of tech in education-related matters. The first is its contribution in managing school administration.

The second focus is on how technology can help the teacher utilize their time more effectively. And the third prong is about how tech can help the student with personalised learning.

Let me explain in detail.

When routine administrative work is handled by technology, it frees up more time for the teacher to focus on the teaching in the classroom. An effective administration consists of better management of finances, services, and data to enable better decision-making and the availability of several function-specific software has made all this easier. Complex administrative tasks and human resource management have successfully been taken care of by evolved technological systems. With the advent of AI, all these functions' efficiency will improve manifold which will allow principals and teachers to focus specifically on improving academic and co-curricular activities.

We all know that teachers work very hard and invest a lot of time in developing the lesson plan, in setting and checking homework assignments as well as managing examinations and evaluations. But not all of these tasks are currently being done using technology across the school community. But over the years, there have been instances of apps and digital tools to help assignment and management of homework submissions.

Teachers can also conduct evaluations online and submit the report instantly. Similarly, earlier teachers used to do lesson planning by hand but the arrival of learning management systems has made that an easier task. Teachers can use ready-made templates for better presentation and organisation which allows them to focus more on the pedagogical content and techniques. In fact, the layout allows them to integrate and include various materials that they can source from the online world and store it in a single location. This eases their trouble of having to carry several books or teaching aids physically from one class to the other.

In fact, across discussions with stakeholders, the need for a continuous assessment has always been pointed out in order to better gauge learning outcomes. The ease of access to these digital tools as well as their in-built assessment tools has made the process of continuous assessment more effective and efficient. The analysis is more granular with specific insights about the



areas of improvement for the students to work on. Additionally, tech allows one to offer system-generated assignments as well as feedback questionnaires which can better inform the teachers' plans. This definitely reduces the workload of the teacher while giving them a bird's eye view of the learning abilities of every student in their classroom. While these interventions are gaining popularity, the degree with which they are being used varies across schools.

But the pandemic has certainly accelerated the adoption of tech tools across domains including education. While a few tech solutions here and there have been adopted by all institutions, the need of the hour is to undertake large-scale integration of these solutions with all departments in a school. The advent of AI is a sign of the times to come and how much the learning community will stand to benefit from the extremely detailed insights it can offer. There has always been some hesitation in adopting new technologies and while it may not be the best way to deliver a lesson, it can certainly help improve the ancillary processes associated with teaching and learning.

With every leap such as the arrival of virtual reality tools, the classroom stands to evolve to become more than a place where classes are held. While sitting in the class-

room itself, the child can experience the entire length and breadth of the universe. They can examine the human anatomy in a 3-D format or experience the planets in the solar system. All of these activities were earlier being conducted using 2D tools such as charts but with VR the quality of the learning experience will transform in a way that is difficult to imagine. Technology allows one to experience a concept first-hand including objects and ideas that otherwise seemed distant and far away.

The other important aspect to consider is that technology allows students to access learning materials at any hour of the day. This allows them to engage with material with greater flexibility thereby easing some of the pressure of learning. It is an established fact that every student learns at their own pace. While the classroom cannot always account for these differences in pace, the online storage space allows students to pace lessons and assessments at a frequency that they are comfortable with. Apart from greatly improving the learning experience, this grants them a certain autonomy to manage their lesson cycle and to supplement with different learning tools. They can comfortably view the same lesson again and again without having to disrupt the class which is a great benefit.



{ **ADITI MISRA** } PRINCIPAL, DPS GURUGRAM, SECTOR 45

# 'Let students take ownership of their decisions in life'

**A**s an educator of nearly 40 years, one of my biggest regrets and laments is that children are often forced to study subjects that they are not interested in. This happens most often during stream selection in class 11 and sometimes even earlier when they are making language choices at the middle school level.

Mostly parents are at the helm of this enforced decision making for various reasons. One frequently cited reason by parents is that they didn't get a chance to study so-and-so subject when they were young. Hence, in a way, they want the child to accomplish those achievements that they couldn't. The other side to this tale is when parents force students to study the same subject that they did as they believe it to be the only right stream to study or the right career option to follow. Both these approaches are fundamentally flawed. I think it's high time we give students a voice so that they can express their opinions freely and make their own decisions. It's time to give them you know, what we call student individual agency and let them decide what they truly want and what works for them. It is important to acknowledge that today children are fairly mature and aware of what they want to do and what they do not want to do. They have already charted out the way of their lives in their minds. It's very important that all of us who are adults in their lives, whether it's parents or teachers to find a way to support their dreams. Of course, this doesn't mean that we support them in wrong acts or senseless decisions. But even in such a scenario, instead of chiding or scolding them, the way out is to hold a mature conversation and talk them out of it in a dignified way.

For example, one of my acquaintance's son wanted to be a singer. To be honest, he was a fairly average singer and his mother was upset that he wanted to take up something he didn't excel at. I asked her if he was aware of the fact. She wasn't quite sure so I warned her against being the villain in this conversation and instead suggested that he find avenues to perform at perhaps pubs or hotels, for a start. Once he was on a lookout for these opportunities, he realised he wasn't very good at it. In a way, by not opposing him immediately, his parent helped show him the mirror and allow him to develop self-awareness in a mature way. Instead of telling the child outright, don't do this or don't do that and music will get you nowhere, she had a conversation about how music could be a very serious hobby but not necessarily something he could pursue as a career.

The

most important conversation, which is often missing in a child's life, is where their parent talks to him or her and make them understand where they're going and what they're doing and why they're doing what they're doing. While both being fully aware of the child's freedom to make their own choice.

I've found that children who are forced to do something that they are not interested in do not fare very well in those activities.

In terms of academics, you see everybody chasing a certain threshold of marks which in turn leads to pressure on the students. As an educator, I feel bad that schools and curriculum is blamed for that pressure whereas it is emanating from a totally different source. And nobody talks about that.

Talking to students and knowing what is going on in their minds is very important. At home, conversations are important so that parents know what's brewing in the child's mind. The same is necessary in the school. Similarly, counselling is also important so that the child knows the many path s/he can take to fulfil their dreams. And after all this, leave it on the child to choose for themselves and just let them be. Sometimes we do not realise this but sheer lack of knowledge and presence of prejudices among parents really holds children back without parents realising that. I've seen children who have chosen very unusual subjects and done exceedingly well. And to my joy, parents then give the credit to schools and to teachers admitting that they weren't even aware of the said stream/combination which allowed their child to enjoy learning and experience success.

Things will only change for better if students are allowed to do what they really want to do. And that can only happen with more open conversations at home. If you allow a child to do what they want to do, I think it works better for everyone in the long run. The key players here are the parents and things can improve only if they decide to keep aside their prejudices and offer their child a patient hearing. Offering students a safe space and an open platform to share their concerns or aspirations can be a game-changer in building their self-image

and self-awareness. As adults, our main task is to not live their lives or ask them to live on our behalf by forcing our decisions, but to empower them with the right tools and knowledge that they can use to think and plan for themselves.

At the end of the day, we all have their best interests at heart.





{ SANGEETA BHATIA } PRINCIPAL, KIIT WORLD SCHOOL, PITAMPURA

# Demystifying the education juggernaut

**G**andhi's perspective on education was that "Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning." He went on to say, "By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in the child and man - body, mind and spirit."

I believe education fulfils its highest purpose when it makes the most of human potential, made up of the unique abilities, strengths and purpose of an individual. A curriculum is, in a sense, only a starting point and learning and teaching must take into account the gifts and promise of each and every child.

While the goal of economic independence or the ability to support oneself is an important outcome of education, it is not its only purpose or even its primary one. Education must go beyond to equip young people with the foundational knowledge, life skills and values that will make them responsible citizens, valuable members of

the community and productive members of society, empowering them to actualise their own potential.

## How can we instil the joy of learning among students?

First and foremost, we must reduce the stress that is endemic to our education system.

Our students deal with relentless stress. There is the stress to take exams, to compete, to score inflated, unrealistic grades and above all, to never fail! If we work to reduce the stress, children will rediscover the joy of learning.

A second area of focus must be to invest in teaching better. The onus for joyful learning rests with the teachers and mediocrity in teaching will lead to lacklustre learning, due to compulsion and force, rather than one's own intrinsic motivation.

Thirdly, and this is linked to my first point, there is a strong need to review our assessment systems.

While assessment is important, its purpose is to help a student evolve, rather than to call out failure and success. It is inevitable that the student will be wrong at times. As educators we must build safe spaces for students to fail, without any stigma, before they try again.

## Can happiness be the purpose of learning?

Schools and universities aim to prepare students for their future. Since a complete and holistic education must cover professional aims, academic and intellectual growth, emotional resilience, physical stamina and endurance, emotional well-being is certainly an important facet or dimension to imparting education.

Happiness and the ability to take life in stride - with all its ups and downs - is one of the purposes of education, though not the only one.

Again, it must be said that it is rare that

an individual can be in a happy state of mind at all times. However, the art of being able to bounce back with optimism and emotional resilience in the face of adversity is part of education. This is an area of particular importance, given the increasing incidence of anxiety and depression in the younger generation.

Beyond the language of reforms, it is important to review how we are engaging with children.

The idea of engaging children with learning is one that must be actively pursued. I would suggest two critical aspects of building student engagement.

The first is for every educator and teacher to see engagement with learning as an outcome that is as important (or even more so) than teaching the curriculum.

If we can inspire children to love learning, we set in motion a journey of learning that equips students not just for their first degree or job but throughout their life. Learning is to be seen not as an end in itself but as an enjoyable never-ending journey.

The second is a focus on student-centric learning or personalised learning, rather than teacher-centred approaches. Students must have a more active role to play in their own learning instead of merely being passive recipients of their gyaan or knowledge.

The individual context of every child is an essential part of the education at KIIT World School.

The same books, teacher and curriculum will still affect each child differently, and only when we build the student's context into learning can we truly educate.

Over the years, we have adopted practices such as micro-learning that help us to understand what each child has taken away from teaching and how we can continually enhance learning. Through a culture of innovation and experimentation in teaching-learning pedagogies, we build greater flexibility and greater ownership into education.





# vivo awards: Taking young India forward

**I**n this fast paced, tech-driven world, it has become imperative to encourage today's generation with new age skills and interests, such as using innovation and creative thinking to solve compelling social issues.

With that in mind, tech giant vivo introduced the long-anticipated vivo Ignite, Science & Innovation Awards with Hindustan Times as its knowledge partner. This programme is designed to provide the contestants with scientific tools and motivate them to create projects that provide ingenious and imaginative solutions to burning social concerns.

"At vivo, we are dedicated to bringing joy to the world through excellent yet straightforward products and experiences. Aligned with this thought through vivo Ignite, our goal is to encourage problem solving approach in aspiring young minds," says



Paigham Danish, Head, Business Strategy, vivo India.

vivo Ignite, Science & Innovation Awards is for all Indian students of grades 8 to 12. It is being conducted in three stages. In stage I, the registered participants submitted a 150-250 words synopsis of their project ideas in the form of a poster by 12th December 2022. In the synopsis, they had to mention whether their final submission would

be in a concept (a write-up expanding on their scientific idea) or a prototype (a fully-developed working model with a brief).

In Stage II, conducted from 24th December 2022 to 16th January 2023, 191 ideas were shortlisted from 1147 submissions received in Stage I. Here the participants further detailed out their ideas through videos.

From here, top 25 participants will be selected as finalists. They will be asked to submit a project display board explaining their idea on the official vivo Ignite platform from 20th to 27th January 2023. The top entries will be recognized as national winners and will be rewarded by a distinguished panel of jury on 3rd February, the day of Grand Finale. The national grand prize winners will win a cash prize of INR 5 lakh (prototype) & INR 4 lakh (concept) respectively.



# Why positive parenting in the digital era is key

**Shreya Sharon Kujur**

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According to statistics, half of children aged 10 to 12 and one-third aged 7 to 9 use social media. Thirty-nine per cent of parents don't have time to monitor their children's social media use, 21% of parents can't find information to set up monitoring at all. These were some of the insights that came forward in the recent discussion that took place in the latest episode of HT Dialogues.

The panellists of the session were Dr. Meghna (also known as The Therapist Mommy on social media), a clinical psychologist; Aditi Misra, principal, DPS Gurgaon; and Shikha Soni, a parent.

In the discussion, Misra spoke about the signs that tell whether a child is addicted to technology or not, "Social withdrawal is the most telling sign that suggests that a child is addicted to technology. Just after the pandemic when children joined schools physically, it was a challenge for the teachers to recreate a buddy system so that children open up to interact and participate in class. We encouraged them to participate in assemblies, introduced sports activities frequently and thus dealt with the technology

addiction in students," she said.

Interestingly, Soni shared her experience of being a parent who moderated her child's screen time and ensured that the phone was not being used for anything other than learning purposes.

Dr. Meghna shared her insights about how she, as a parent-educator and a parent herself, practices positive parenting. She said, "When children are exposed to the Internet at such a young age, there is a plethora of information that they come across. My suggestion to parents of the new age would be that always have empathy for your children. Never assume a superior or a moral high ground when having these conversations. Be interested, be tuned into your child's digital world. Discuss about online safety, digital footprints, cyber security, click jacking etc. Highlight the behaviour of online predators. These conversations should be frequent and relatable to the real-world instances," she said. It is important that the child also has a say in this so that they understand the importance of negotiation. The child also develops a sense of responsibility and they'll be more encouraged to comply by the contract, thus using the device responsibly."

All the panellists highlighted the fact that managing students' relationship with the internet would require a collaborative effort and ensuring there is an open line of communication for children and the elders. There is a consensus among stakeholders that constant exposure to the phone leads to psychological and physiological harm yet digital interaction cannot be cut-off entirely. While positive parenting has been a constant across all eras, the challenges of the digital era are unique and require parents to tackle these more sensitively. The focus of the webinar was to offer a starting point towards creating a safe space for students to share their concerns.



You can watch the webinar by scanning the QR code

**Panellists at the HT Dialogues**





# Education of women is key

A new petition in the SC shows why authorities must ensure that *hijab* rows don't hurt learning

A decision by a group of students from Karnataka to approach the Supreme Court has, once again, underlined the appalling cost exacted by the protracted row over *hijabs* on the lives and educational pursuits of thousands of women. The students approached the top court on Monday, seeking a directive to government institutions in Karnataka to allow them to appear for examinations wearing the *hijab*, which has emerged as a lightning rod in communally sensitive districts, irreversibly hobbling the education of women. Since the Karnataka high court upheld the state government's order on uniforms in colleges last year, reports have indicated that many women have pulled out of state-run institutions and attempted to continue their education in privately-run colleges, where the restrictions on headscarves do not apply. But as the lawyers of the women petitioners told the top court, examinations can be conducted only in government colleges, where *hijab*-clad women have faced stiff resistance time and again while trying to gain access to the campus.

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud indicated that he will consider setting up a three-judge bench to take up the matter, which has assumed urgency given that state-level examinations are scheduled to begin in the first week of February. While this is welcome, any relief in this regard is only likely to be temporary, given that the legal status of the case is still in limbo after a two-judge bench of the top court delivered a split verdict last year, and a new bench is yet to be announced.

In the long-term, though, the authorities have to ensure that the futures of young women in Karnataka, and indeed, across India, are not held hostage by competing political and religious interests. While the legality of the restrictions on the headscarf can only be adjudicated by the apex court, the government needs to ensure that fringe elements don't disturb communal amity or interrupt the education of young women, who battle strictures at home and outside in the pursuit of their dreams. Data shows that as a demographic group, Muslim women trail most other communities in educational standards; this gap must be bridged, not allowed to widen. Reports in this newspaper have noted how women have to deftly negotiate patriarchal and faith-based customs, and orthodox notions of women's honour, every day. It is the government's responsibility to ease their struggle.



# 'Every Exam Is An Opportunity, But Not The Only One'

Union education minister writes on the new year's first Pariksha Pe Charcha

Dharmendra Pradhan



The much-awaited sixth edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha is here and will be held at the Talkatora Indoor Stadium, Delhi on January 27 at 11am.

Crores of students, teachers and parents across the country and abroad will be participating.

Registrations have risen phenomenally to around 39 lakh, including students from almost 150 countries, teachers from 51 countries and parents from 50 countries. The massive increase of over two and a half times is primarily from students and teachers registered with various state boards, clearly indicating the soaring popularity of this unique initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In this edition too, participants will get a chance to directly interact with him.

## Is there an optimal stress level?

The PM has undertaken Pariksha Pe Charcha with the vision of a stress-free ecosystem for assessment which brings students, parents, teachers and society together to celebrate the uniqueness of every student and foster her holistic development. So his direct interaction with students, answering their queries on exam stress and related issues, is an important part of the initiative.

It is of course normal to feel some stress about upcoming tests and exams. Indeed, in the right amount, stress can challenge and stimulate you to work harder. But when it interferes with your ability to perform and achieve your academic and learning goals, parents and teachers have to play a crucial role. It is their responsibility to enable every child to follow her own dreams, rather than forcing through their own dreams.

The Pariksha Pe Charcha movement is aided by the PM's book *Exam Warriors*, which is now available in 13 different languages. It outlines a refreshing



The image is for representational purposes

approach to education, where holistic development of students is given utmost importance. It also urges everyone to see any exam in the right perspective, rather than making it a life-and-death situation, causing undue stress and pressure.

## What is special about your generation?

While addressing the issue of how students should handle the demands of competitive exams and board exams, the PM has often said that if one studies the syllabus with full attention, then exams really don't matter. Aim to master the subject rather than to clear the exam. Study for the knowledge.

As the PM has said, "You belong to a special generation. Yes, there is more competition but there are more opportunities too." So, treat competition as the greatest gift of these times. Treat learning as an enjoyable, fulfilling and lifelong journey. Indeed, "In a long life, an exam is just one of the opportunities to challenge yourself. The problem arises when you look at it as the end of

**In the near future NEP will change the whole syllabus and pattern for Classes 10 and 12. With the amalgamation of subjects and the crossover between streams, students will be able to study subjects as per their preferences**

all your dreams, as a life-and-death question. Take any exam as an opportunity. Actually, we must keep looking out for such challenges rather than run away from them."

A "repository of mantras and activities" he has shared this time can be accessed online, to help students beat exams. It covers several topics such as the right attitude towards exams; confidence in and out of the exam hall; time management; handling difficult subjects;

how to concentrate; making the most of memory; setting goals, and much more.

In view of the various challenges facing education today and the need for transformative reforms in this sector, our government has brought in the pathbreaking National Education Policy 2020, which has been formulated through intensive consultations with all stakeholders.

Among its various transformative interventions, the policy recommends flexibility in choice of subjects for the students. Students will have the liberty to take subjects of their choice, choose their own path, and pursue a profession of their own liking.

## Do you get to study subjects that you like?

NEP also focuses on continuous, formative and competency-based assessment, promoting learning and development of students, and testing higher-order skills which include analysis, critical thinking and conceptual clarity.

In the near future NEP will change the whole syllabus and pattern for the students of Classes 10 and 12. With the amalgamation of subjects and the crossover between streams, school students will not only be able to study subjects as per their preferences but also pursue higher studies accordingly. They will have an option to choose subjects such as arts and crafts and vocational studies along with the conventional ones. For example, a science student will be able to choose an arts subject and study both simultaneously.

In this process, an initiative like Pariksha Pe Charcha will play a major role by addressing the concerns of students, teachers and parents regarding time management, exam anxiety and other related themes. I invite all of you to join this movement and actively support the students so they can thrive in their respective fields and contribute to the noble cause of nation-building. I look forward to your participation in the upcoming Pariksha Pe Charcha.



# Slow subsidence of scientific institutions



**DINESH C SHARMA**  
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

(NDMA) issued a gag order on scientific institutions, telling them not to share any information or opinion on Joshimath with the public through the traditional or social media.

Among the scientific institutions asked to keep mum are not just the NRSC and ISRO but also research labs belonging to different scientific agencies — the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Water Resources, Indian Institute of Technology-Roorkee as well as the Survey of India and Geological Survey of India.

The NDMA order is unprecedented and brazen. Neither the NDMA nor the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) under which it functions is the parent body of any of the scientific organisations being gagged. It is a political decision since the NDMA order mentions that it was taken at a meeting chaired by the Home Minister. Even if it was so, scientific agencies like the ISRO and CSIR are autonomous bodies (at least, on paper) and they are not under the MHA.

Only a few months ago, the Home Secretary transgressed his powers by calling a meeting of secretaries of all scientific departments and abolished hundreds of awards given to scientists and researchers in one go. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research recently warned working and retired scientists against deviating from the official position on genetically modified food. Those not following the diktat were warned of action against them.

Discussions based on scientific observations and the sharing of that



Suppression of scientific information or expert knowledge has serious ramifications for the application of science for the public good. It is not a matter of the right of an individual scientist or researcher to express views or share data but is related to the role of science in public policymaking as well as shaping an informed public opinion.

**BRAZEN GAG:** Scientific institutions have been told to keep mum on the Joshimath situation. PH

information in the public domain should be encouraged. In many sectors, including remote sensing and earth observation, scientists routinely share data and publish findings in research journals, and present papers at conferences. The US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has portals where remote-sensing data are regularly shared. The data on earthquakes anywhere in the world is available in real-time on the website of the United States Geological Survey. There are genetic sequence databases accessible to researchers from all over the world.

A part of the assessment the NRSC put out is based on imagery from the Sentinel-1 satellite of the European Space Agency (ESA). This satellite has a Synthetic Aperture Radar which

helps it acquire data even through cloud cover and during day or night time under all weather conditions. The second part of the NRSC assessment is based on imagery from the Indian satellite, Cartosat-2S, which provides panchromatic imagery with a resolution of 0.65 metres. The NRSC must be complimented, not gagged, for coming up with the analysis using remote-sensing data from the ESA and ISRO. Shockingly, the NDMA finds the analysis as something that is "creating confusion among affected residents and also among citizens of the country."

The discussion on the usability of the remote-sensing data is taking place in the context of Uttarakhand because its capital, Dehradun, is the birthplace of remote-sensing studies in India. It was here that the Indian Photo-interpretation Institute (IPI) was founded in

1966 as a result of an agreement signed with the Netherlands during the visit of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957. The IPI functioned under the Survey of India and was subsequently transferred to the ISRO which was formed in 1969. It now functions as the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing under the ISRO.

The first Indian remote-sensing satellite to become operational was IRS-1A in 1988. Today, the space agency has four series of sophisticated remote-sensing satellites — Resourcesat, Cartosat, Oceansat and RISAT. A landmark contribution of the ISRO in the 1980s was using remote-sensing data for the preparation of a forest map of India which showed large-scale deforestation.

This finding was at variance with the maps produced by the Forest Survey of India (FSI). The ISRO and NRSC

(then known as the National Remote Sensing Agency), however, were not asked to keep shut. Instead, the FSI was made to incorporate the remote-sensing-based technique in its mapping process. This resulted in a far more accurate assessment of the forest cover over the years.

Suppression of scientific information or expert knowledge has serious ramifications for the application of science for the public good. It is not a matter of the right of an individual scientist or researcher to express views or share data but is related to the role of science in public policymaking as well as shaping an informed public opinion. Sharing of data, expert views or research papers can contribute to a healthy discourse on contested subjects, be it genetically modified foods, Himalayan ecology, substandard drugs, data privacy or antimicrobial resistance.

In a country like India with a vast network of research institutes, universities and academic centres with experts on a range of topics, differences of opinion are bound to surface. Such differences can be sorted out through healthy public debates on key issues with the involvement of scientists, academics as well as civil society.

In the 1980s, the Indian Institute of Science organised a debate between nuclear scientists and environmental activists at the height of the controversy on the Kaiga Nuclear Power Plant. Nowadays, research councils, academic institutions and science academies are shying away from such discussions. Their silence is encouraging the government to further erode their independence and autonomy.

THE Joshimath crisis has laid bare another equally serious challenge — the slow subsidence of Indian scientific research councils and academic institutions. Their foundational ground of rational and independent thinking, new ideas and scientific discourse is slowly sinking. Like Joshimath town, which has been experiencing a gradual subsidence, the crisis in our scientific research organisations has been in the making for some time.

A significant flashpoint came on January 11, with the Hyderabad-based National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) — an arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) — coming out with a preliminary assessment of the Joshimath subsidence based on remote-sensing data. It reported the truth as seen from space — the town had sunk up to 9 cm between April and November 2022, and more rapidly between December 27 and January 8. It was the first scientific report that pointed to the gravity of the situation in Joshimath.

Instead of acknowledging the seriousness and accepting that it had failed to act in time, the National Disaster Management Authority



# भारत के निर्माण की प्रक्रिया है 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा'

प्रधानमंत्री 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' के कार्यक्रम में स्टूडेंट्स, टीचर्स और पैरेंट्स की जिज्ञासाओं पर चर्चा करेंगे। जरूरी है कि स्टूडेंट्स सीखने की प्रक्रिया और अनुभव का आनंद ले सकें



संजय कुमार



जेपी पाण्डेय

सीबीएसई, आईसीएसई, राज्य बोर्डों सहित दूसरी सालाना परीक्षाएं शुरू होने वाली हैं। देश की स्कूली शिक्षा में लगभग 26 करोड़ स्टूडेंट्स हैं। हर साल की तरह इस बार भी सारा स्कूली शिक्षा परिवार प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के साथ परीक्षा को पर्व की तरह मनाने के लिए तैयार है। 27 जनवरी 2023 को दिल्ली के तालकटोरा इंडोर स्टेडियम में 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' का भी आयोजन हो रहा है।

**निर्माण प्रक्रिया :** कोमल बाल मन पहली बार की परीक्षा से ही तनाव जैसे हालात से रूबरू हो जाता है। प्रधानमंत्री ने जबसे 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' शुरू की है, तबसे परीक्षा से पैदा होने वाले तनाव और स्टूडेंट्स पर पड़ने वाले इसके प्रभाव

पर सार्वजनिक रूप से बात की जाने लगी है। इससे पता चलता है कि देश के नौनिहालों को इस तनाव से उबारने और उनके विकास को स्वाभाविक बनाने की कितनी जरूरत है। परीक्षा पे चर्चा का यह कार्यक्रम न केवल देश में बल्कि पूरी दुनिया में अपनी तरह का अनोखा कार्यक्रम है, जिसमें राष्ट्राध्यक्ष स्टूडेंट्स से इस तरह सीधे संवाद करते हैं। यह संवाद करोड़ों युवाओं में सकारात्मकता भर उनकी ऊर्जा से एक सक्षम और समर्थ भारत के निर्माण की प्रक्रिया है।

**ताकत को पहचानें :** आज देश में इतने अवसर हैं, जिनमें हरेक स्टूडेंट के लिए उसकी रुचि, योग्यता, क्षमता और प्रतिभा के मुताबिक काम करने और बेहतरीन प्रदर्शन करने के पर्याप्त मौके हैं। स्टूडेंट्स अपनी रुचि और क्षमता को पहचान उसे डिवेलप करेंगे, तभी उनका समाज और राष्ट्र-निर्माण में योगदान सुनिश्चित हो सकेगा। फिर अपने आसपास ही इतने उदाहरण भरे हैं, जिनसे स्टूडेंट्स प्रेरणा ले सकते हैं। फील्ड मार्शल मानेकशॉ ने जब नौनीताल में अपनी स्कूली शिक्षा पूरी कर ली तो अपने पिता से मेडिकल की पढ़ाई के लिए लंदन भेजने के लिए रिक्वेस्ट की। मगर किन्हीं वजहों से पिता ने उन्हें इंग्लैंड भेजने से मना कर दिया। मानेकशॉ इससे खफा हो गए और उन्होंने देहरादून में भारतीय सैन्य अकादमी का फॉर्म भर दिया। वह सफल रहे और सेकंड लेफ्टिनेंट



कॉमन रूम

के रूप में सेना में कमीशन हो गए। और उसके बाद तो जो हुआ, वह इतिहास है। 1971 युद्ध में उनके सैन्य नेतृत्व के लिए देश उन्हें हमेशा याद रखेगा।

**अलग है पैमाने :** राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति-2020, हर स्टूडेंट की खासियत, नैचरल टैलेंट और उसकी यूनीक क्षमता पर विश्वास करती है। स्टूडेंट्स को आकांक्षाओं और उम्मीदों के बोझ तले दबने के बजाय अपना रियल सेल्फ असेसमेंट करना चाहिए। सभी के लिए एक ही पैमाने नहीं होते। सभी 90 फीसदी से ऊपर नंबर पाएं, यह जरूरी तो नहीं। जो चीज एक के लिए ठीक है, जरूरी नहीं कि वह दूसरे के लिए भी ठीक हो। जब आप डॉक्टर के पास जाते हैं

तो वह एक ही बीमारी के लिए हर व्यक्ति को अलग-अलग डोज देता है। उसी तरह हर बच्चे को मापने का एक ही मानक नहीं हो सकता है। **टेंशन किस बात की :** जीवन बहता प्रवाह है। आत्मविश्वास, मेहनत और लगन से काम करते हुए बढ़ते रहना ही महत्वपूर्ण है। हर परीक्षा एक नई राह की संभावना है, न कि समस्या। स्टूडेंट्स को यह समझने की बहुत जरूरत है कि तनाव में होंगे तो अपने लेवल के हिसाब से प्रदर्शन नहीं कर पाएंगे। परीक्षा के वक्त माता-पिता, परिवार और अध्यापकों की जिम्मेदारी भी बढ़ जाती है। इनकी भूमिका बच्चों के उत्प्रेरक की होनी चाहिए।

प्रधानमंत्री 'परीक्षा पे चर्चा' के कार्यक्रम में स्टूडेंट्स, टीचर्स और पैरेंट्स से सीधा संवाद कर उनके सवाल और जिज्ञासाओं पर चर्चा करेंगे। स्टूडेंट्स को अपने सीखने की प्रक्रिया और अनुभव का आनंद लेना है। निरंतर प्रयास और विश्वास में ही सफलता की राह है। महान कवि रामधारी सिंह दिनकर ने उचित ही लिखा है :

यह प्रदीप जो दीख रहा है झिलमिल, दूर नहीं है,  
थक कर बैठ गए क्या भाई! मंजिल दूर नहीं है।

(संजय कुमार के केंद्रीय स्कूली शिक्षा एवं साक्षरता विभाग शिक्षा मंत्रालय के सचिव और जेपी पाण्डेय डायरेक्टर हैं। ये इनके निजी विचार हैं)



# Kerala decision gender-sensitive

**T**he Kerala government's decision to grant menstrual leave and maternity leave for female students in universities is intended to make the campuses more women-friendly and sensitive to women's concerns. The decision, which was announced last week, would benefit students across all the universities under the state higher education department. It was taken after the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) decided to grant menstrual leave to all its female students in response to a demand made by them. The required attendance percentage for female students has been reduced accordingly. Citing the Kerala decision, women students elsewhere have also demanded menstrual leave. The Kerala government has said that its decision would affirm the need for a gender-just society. It has been seen by many as affirmation of the need to show greater understanding and sensitivity to the difficulties faced by women during the menstrual period.

The decision recognises that women have rights which are specific to their bodies and which may be considered as part of the right to life. Many women suffer much discomfort during the menstrual period and find it difficult to attend classes or to work during those days. The availability of leave would certainly help them. It is not a new idea, though. The Bihar government granted two days' menstrual leave to all women employees in 1992. Some private companies in India have granted it to their employees. A private member's bill, which sought four days' leave for women and safe and healthy working conditions during menstrual period was introduced in parliament in 2017, but it was not discussed by the House. The Delhi High Court told the central government and other governments in 2020 to consider as a representation a petition seeking period leave for women employees. Some countries, including Japan and South Korea, are providing menstrual leave. Spain's parliament recently decided to offer three days of leave to all women employees every month.

There are concerns also over how the proposition would impact social attitudes, especially in traditional societies. The stigma around menstruation forces many women not to mention it in public. In Bihar many women who seek menstrual leave do not mention it in their applications. There is the fear it may lead to discrimination. In the private sector, it may work as a disincentive for recruitment of women. Some take it as repugnant to the idea of equality of women. It should in any case help to create better awareness about menstrual health and prompt the government and other authorities to offer facilities for ensuring menstrual hygiene for girls and women in schools, colleges, workplaces and offices. These are lacking in many places.

**Menstrual  
leave for  
students  
addresses  
women's  
concerns**

26/1/23



# What sport teaches us about nation building

Sport inculcates in us the spirit to fight back after a loss and never give up. This Republic Day, let us wish for a tomorrow where we value failures, and grow to achieve the best for us, and India

When neighbourhood parks resonate with the cheers of children playing a friendly (but serious) cricket match against the setting sun, parents take delight in watching their children play. When their child's team wins, they celebrate. But even when their child's team loses, they console and support them. In sport, it is not just success that matters. Equally important is how one deals with loss or failure — when one has to come back and play again the next day, with the same enthusiasm and energy.

Sport has always been an integral part of our country, with a history that goes back a thousand years. The precursors of chess, the ultimate game of strategy, are said to have originated in India. We have been world champions in disciplines as diverse as cricket, hockey, kabaddi, chess, wrestling, badminton, billiards, and more. But there have been times when we

have also lost, only to rise again and play to win another day.

This sense of not giving up in the face of adversity inculcates in us a fighting spirit, indomitable by failures. In today's hyper-competitive world where we are judged by success, we must not forget the importance of failure and the lessons we can learn from it. We all have a right to fail, and there cannot be a better domain to understand its significance than sport. Sport is the greatest teacher of perseverance and determination in the face of repeated failure.

Last year, India fell in love with a "new game", lawn bowls, as Rupa Rani Tirkey, Pinki, Nayanmoni Saikia and Lovely Choubey brought home the first Commonwealth Games medal in the sport for India. The four of them had started playing in different disciplines. They would have lost a few games in their career and won many times, but they never gave up. They got together to play a sport that was new to them and not known to many. It is this perseverance that helped them achieve success and emerge triumphant. It is this tenacity of spirit that sport brings to an individual.

In a society hardwired to succeed, it is difficult to stay motivated all the time. Everyone has their share of self-doubt and disappointment stemming from failures, but we need to understand that while success may not be

guaranteed, we still need to continue playing the game. We must recognise the value of trying without being afraid to try new things. Sport can help us change a fearful mindset to one that is open to any new challenge.

A Mirabai Chanu may fall short of lifting a medal-winning weight once, a PV Sindhu may miss a match-winning shot, a Bajrang Punia may find his grip slipping in a final, a Mary Kom may mistime a knockout punch, and a Virat Kohli may return to the pavilion without scoring. But each one of them returns to the arena, to the court, to the field, to the ring, to try once more, to give their best for themselves — for their team and for their country.

Every champion has their moment of doubt, the occasion for failure, and share of misfortune. However, what is important is their reaction and response to the situation and learning from it to come back stronger. In the end, this is all that counts. India has a large pool of talent

across different disciplines. With significant reforms and infrastructure development, the possibilities are endless as we groom the champions of tomorrow. The upcoming inaugural women's Indian Premier League, for instance, will give youngsters scope to prove their mettle on the world stage.

Tapping talent at the grassroots level and giving them a supportive



India has a large pool of talent across different disciplines. With significant reforms and infrastructure development, the possibilities are endless as we groom the champions of tomorrow

RAJ RAJ/HT PHOTO

environment where they can learn, try, fail and triumph are of paramount importance. The hunger for victory has to be balanced by the ability to accept failure with a positive attitude. The lessons that failures teach us to amplify the significance of the next big win and instil resilience. This value of accepting failures as they come, if inculcated at a young age, can open the door to a promising and sustainable future.

Sport is a great leveller. It gives us the freedom to find an avenue to express ourselves, choose to do what we enjoy, and utilise our capabilities to the fullest. Be it a narrow miss at the goal, an "out at 99" in cricket, a defeat in a World Cup final, or an early exit from a league, failures pre-

pare us for victories ahead.

This Republic Day, as we gather to honour our Constitution and the rights it gives us, let us also celebrate our journey through the years, moving forward despite the obstacles, trying, failing occasionally, but most importantly, bouncing back stronger with the collective strength of all citizens working together as a team. Let us wish for a tomorrow where we value failures, learn and grow to achieve the best for us, as well as for the nation.



Sachin Tendulkar

Bharat Ratna Sachin Tendulkar is former captain of the Indian cricket team.

The views expressed are personal

HT/26/22



# An act of upliftment

Nexus of Good



ANIL SWARUP

*ICDS centres, which form the bedrock of mother and child care, have been rejuvenated from a pathetic state to a lively one by SMSWRWS in the Sundarbans*

Those who live in the heartland of the country don't know much about Sundarban. Most of us have come to know about the area through books like "Hungry Tide" by Amitav Ghosh and "Midnight's Children" by Salman Rushdie. To the outside world, the region is known primarily on account of tigers and mangroves. The area, not very far from Kolkata, is covered by rivers and deltas. Hence, it is difficult to commute between various deltas and the only source of transportation is by boat. Development hasn't had an impact in most of the region. There is abject poverty. Consequently, the residents suffer various problems relating to health, quality education, livelihoods and daily basic needs etc.

Sandeshkhali Maa Saroda Women & Rural Welfare Society (SMSWRWS) has been engaged in North Sundarban of West Bengal since 2009 in the field of Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Drinking Water, Livelihoods, Environment, and Relief etc. Their volunteers are working at the grass root level to understand the problems facing the denizens of Sundarban. Post identification of such problems, an attempt is made to solve them despite limited resources and capacity. These problems relate to poor quality of education, inadequate healthcare facilities, and poor (on occasion, non-existent) infrastructure. These miserable conditions have been periodically reported in the media but have made no difference.

The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) launched country-wide in 1975 aims at the holistic development of children and the empowerment of mothers. It is a Centrally-Sponsored scheme. The scheme primarily runs through Anganwadi centres. The chief objectives of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme were to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age group 0-6 years; to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical



The persistent efforts of SMSWRWS have started bearing fruit in the remote and inaccessible regions of North Sundarbans

COURTESY ICDS

and social development of the child; to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout; to achieve effective coordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development; and to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education. Like many other schemes of the government, ICDS has also suffered in the Sundarban region.

Sandeshkhali-I block of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal has 351 ICDS centres but most of them have no building of their own. These centres are either being run in a rented house or an open place. Even for those that have their accommodation, the buildings are in a bad shape. Some of them have no roof, no water supply, no toilets and no electricity. For example, ICDS centre No-25 where the number of students, including mothers, is 86 has no safe room for reading. The only room available

is without a roof. There is no kitchen room or water supply. Water has to be sourced from a long distance to cook food for the children. This water too isn't fit for consumption. In the absence of toilet facilities, children go out in the open which is not healthy for them. Mothers and pregnant women face similar problems. The absence of appropriate lighting gets compounded during the rainy season. Not only does it impact reading, but it also creates additional hazards for cooking.

The dismal state of affairs at Sandeshkhali was brought to the notice of the local administration by the Society. The Society was informed that many ICDS workers had submitted a written report regarding the present position of their ICDS centre. However, on account of the paucity of funds, no action could be initiated. The Society then sought permission to take steps to undertake reconstruction. This permission was granted to them by the Child Development officer of Sandeshkhali-I Block.

On getting the requisite per-

mission, discussions were held with the Sub-Assistant Engineer of the Block Development Office of Sandeshkhali-I for making the layout and budget. He visited the area and advised the Society to construct a separate building for the kitchen. This was agreed upon. The Engineer also provided the details relating to the budget within 7 days. Inputs, including estimates, were also taken from a local mason for the construction of the ICDS main building as well as the kitchen, from a plumber for submersible deep bore wells, from a local painter and from a solar company. The estimate was revised accordingly. Thereafter, a hunt was launched for a funding agency. Some funds were contributed by Linde India Limited and the work was started. First, the old building was demolished. To reduce the labour cost, volunteers worked with skilled masons. The entire work was completed within 3 months and inaugurated for children and mothers. To attract children, walls were covered with pictures, sketches and paint-

ings. Writing pads, colour-pencil boxes, and other items were distributed among children. The ICDS centre was now alive once again.

The persistent efforts of society have started bearing fruit in this remote and inaccessible region of the country. The West Bengal government in its letter dated 22nd of April, 2022 recognised the pathetic conditions of ICDS centres and resolved to take up 100 such centres for renovation and for providing potable water. Thus, not only did the Society work on its own to demonstrate that the state of affairs could improve, but it also managed to create awareness and subsequent realization among decision-makers.

What has been accomplished by the Society under the inspired leadership of Subhashis Mondal, a Nexus of Good Awardee may appear to be small but is truly exemplary. It presents a wonderful example of Nexus of Good wherein a good initiative is getting scaled through a public-private partnership.

Views expressed are personal  
mid/2019

Sandeshkhali Maa Saroda Women & Rural Welfare Society (SMSWRWS) has been engaged in North Sundarbans of West Bengal since 2009



# Pariksha Pe Charcha deals with anxiety



PRACHI PANDEY



TARA NAOREM

Making career decisions is a crucial milestone at the secondary level because it helps students build their identities

Adolescence is characterised by significant psychological, physical, and social changes. Traditionally, a coming-of-age period, it should be a celebration of life. However, it is alarming how stressed and in the mental health crisis today's pupils are.

Common sources of stress include interpersonal interactions, learning difficulties, and exam failures. Examinations, in themselves, are a cause of stress as they lead to anxiety about opting for higher education or career. Choosing a higher education and future employment is challenging due to the complex options available. The choice of a career among the many possibilities available is one of the major reasons that might cause stress and worry in youth.

Additionally, empirical data has demonstrated that late teenagers with career choice issues frequently have significant psychological issues. Therefore, it is now more crucial than ever to pinpoint the causes of the stress and worry that young people are experiencing.

The pupils' stress may be influenced by what their parents think about them and their prospects. Additionally, a youngster who is unable to express their thoughts, feelings, and plans to their parents may wind up keeping everything buried deep inside, which could be harmful to their health and wellbeing.

In fact, such questions have been raised in previous editions of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha', wherein one student talked about the "huge competition in each field", how at times "they were not selected in any exam due to high competition and pressure". Questions from a societal perspective as to "what can we do for them so that great talent of our nation will not be just wasted and will be useful for the nation?" have been raised.

The Prime Minister's response has, of course, been well-documented but he has also written, "Aspire not to BECOME something but TO DO something. Normally, the desire to become something is driven by the expectations of the family, fashionable professional trends, peer pressure or fantasies about fame, money and power. It distances you from your true potential and gradually snuffs out the innate passion you are blessed with."

When parents don't approve of their child's choices, such as choosing to major in humanities rather than science, the child may experience shame, disappointment, resentment, and despair. Getting influenced by the choices made by their peers and constantly making comparisons with them could add on to their stress.

While it is good to have focus and many children may be able to decide what they want to become, it is important not to let these choices, whether to become a doctor or pilot or civil servant, define our dreams. Rather let the dreams lead you to



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YOUR PASSION  
MAKES FOR THE  
BEST VOCATION"

(Prachi Pandey is Joint  
Secretary, Ministry of  
Education; Tara Naorem  
is Principal Chief  
Consultant, SS, MoE)

paths determined by how you can make a difference to your family, to society and to the world at large.

Lacking clarity about one's interest areas, aptitude, work preferences, etc. and having a negative self-image could substantially increase the magnitude of stress and anxiety experienced by the students.

Swami Vivekananda exhorted us, "...each soul is a manifestation of divinity. If you have faith in all the Gods...and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you." Thus, self-awareness is crucial, leading to identification of both strengths and weaknesses and resulting in increased confidence. This is why it is critical not simply to have a positive outlook, but rather to consciously weed out the negativity in our lives - negative thoughts, negative friends, negative information, etc. Negativity should not be removed by a false sense of superiority but by acknowledging that even our smallest strengths can help in different situations.

Life is a series of new experiences, environments, people, it is multi-faceted and a journey with many infinite destinations and possibilities. But everyone approaches it in a different way. While some are stifled by choices, others are overwhelmed by choices. At another end of the spectrum, some do not even know enough about the choices at hand. Lack of accurate understanding about numerous career options is another issue that stresses out students. This includes diverse work profiles, pay scales, potential for growth, future of certain industries, etc. One can make an informed choice only when they have all the required information. In such a case, not having access to information or

consuming content from unreliable sources (eg. making a career decision based on a random conversation with a friend) could prove to be quite harmful in these circumstances.

In Exam Warriors, PM has written, "Create your own opportunities. Be the master of your destiny. Today, there are tremendous opportunities in fields which were unimaginable even a decade ago. When you make these choices, remember your passion makes for the best vocation."

With these words as a foundation, practically, at the individual level, students can focus more of their time and energy in seeking information, having healthy conversations with friends, family, teachers, and resource persons. The cohort of adults in a child's environment can assist the students by encouraging open communication. They can guide, without being judgmental or forcing their opinions on children, and help children make decisions and become independent while selecting their subjects, colleges and universities.

Having an adult to speak with or discuss their career concerns or to ask questions and have constructive discussions could be significantly important for teenagers deliberating about their future.

Parents and teachers can also help the children by removing the taboo of going to a counselor and seeking professional help, if the need be. Having proper meetings with the parents, teacher and the child present would also be beneficial in discussing the concerns each of them might have, even concerns about resources, and come up with feasible solutions accordingly.

Such discussions could foster an environment of support, and understanding for the student. It is of utmost importance for the students to know that they are not alone in this journey, and that they will be able to figure things out gradually.

Lacking important life skills like time management, goal setting, etc., could further deteriorate their academic situation, and the student might start feeling incompetent leading to a negative self-image.

During PPC, PM Modi counseled students, "Every individual is blessed with unique abilities. These abilities are best channelled through quality time management. So, time management is nothing but ability management."

Life skills are built by taking constant care of yourself, mentally, physically and emotionally. The Prime Minister has said that "practising yoga with full awareness is the most effective way to achieve holistic development of the self....one who plays, shines." Physical exercise, whether in the form of individual games or team sports, not only keeps us physically fit but also helps us to learn life skills, value of team-work, the art of competing with oneself and achieving a better version of your own self. It instills a sense of discipline and also increases focus.

Making career-related decisions is a crucial milestone at the secondary level because it helps students build their individual identities in society and prepare for the workforce. The process of making these decisions can be both exciting and anxiety-provoking. This is, why, in this journey, Pariksha Pe Charcha has come to play an important role.



# India is degrading its public universities

## Notable decline

SAIKAT MAJUMDAR

Last December, Harvard University announced the appointment of Claudine Gay as its 30th president, to assume the position in the summer of 2023. It is a momentous appointment as Gay, an African-American woman, will be the very first black president to lead America's oldest university. Gay comes to the job after prestigious academic stints in the country's elite private education system, at Harvard and Stanford, where she also took her graduate and undergraduate degrees, respectively. What is equally striking is that Gay is the daughter of Haitian immigrants who came to the United States of America with very little, and in her words, "put themselves through college while raising our family", with her mother training as a registered nurse and her father qualifying as a civil engineer. And "it was City College of New York that made it possible," Gay says. If she built her impressive academic and administrative career in elite private universities, not far behind them, just a generation away, stands the founding college of the public and widely inclusive City University of New York, known throughout its history for giving lives and careers to poor immigrants, members of the working class, and other members of society for whom the nation's elite private university system remains distant for an array of reasons.

While the trajectory of Gay's family story is more recognisable, I have personally witnessed the opposite journey too. In 2013, when I was teaching in the English department at Stanford, my senior colleague, Jennifer Summit, left a full professorship in the department to join the public and inclusive San Francisco State University as Professor and Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The daughter of a pioneer of the online search engine and a former mayor of the wealthy Los Altos Hills in the San Francisco Bay Area, Summit left a life of elite scholarship to pursue her mission to champion public education in California at SFSU, where she now serves as the provost.

Society celebrates stories like Gay's family more than the kind of service narrative exemplified by Summit, but for me, the former brought up the memory of the latter as a reminder of the strong symbiotic current that runs between the public and private university systems in the US, notwithstanding the wide gulf between them. The American university, the product of a great historical serendipity in the 19th century, was brought about by the unexpected coming together of three very different institutions: the British undergraduate college, the American land-grant college, and the German research university. The popular, the practical, and the elite — that is how the education historian, David Labaree, characterised the three forces, respectively, identifying the



Jadavpur University: Deep cuts

populist nature of undergraduate social life, the community-facing nature of the land-grant college, and the elite global appeal of the research university.

Notwithstanding the serious crisis that the US university faces today in the face of declining student enrolment and skyrocketing tuition cost, since the early 20th century, it has been the global leader in higher education. The powerful symbiosis and wide, sometimes hidden, networks of relationship between the private and the public system, indicative of America's high social mobility — have contributed much to the overall excellence of a system that benefits as much from the achievements of its Nobel laureates as from the popularity of college football.

America's system of elite private universities is unique. Higher education in most other countries in the world is defined by their public universities. Even Oxford and Cambridge, notwithstanding the vast property and real estate holdings of some of their colleges, are public universities. This is the system where most people learn and work. As I had, before joining Stanford — in public universities in India and the US, and the beginning of a teaching career in Canada, where all research universities are public. Teaching at McMaster University in Ontario, I negotiated federal and provincial bureaucracy and grant systems before experiencing the freedom and the wealth that private capital brings to the American university and the costs it extracts.

Even though I now teach at an ambitious private research and liberal arts university in India, I cannot help but see the privatisation of higher education in this country as unsettling — at once bizarre and instrumental, creating very little of the philanthropic culture of academic excellence and none of the public-private synergy that exists in the US where they bolster each other in spite

of their differences. The vast public university system in India, much of which made the historical transition from a British colonial to a postcolonial socialist system, is now on the verge of destruction in the hands of unsympathetic governments at the Centre and in various states alike, including West Bengal. Classes are run by a hapless army of *ad hoc* teachers without benefits, State funding is drying up everywhere, including my *alma mater*, Jadavpur, while minority institutions such as Jamia Millia face disproportionate funding cuts by a hostile Central government. But with a booming youth population and an expanding middle class, higher education is big business that profiteers are keen to exploit, creating a host of private universities of dubious quality and distressing working conditions for its faculty and staff.

A few months before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, I spent a day speaking at the Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, in Gannaur in Haryana's Sonapat district. Many of the journeys scripted there, including those from Hissar to Sonapat, some of them *via* PhDs from Chandigarh and Kurukshetra, felt wider than continents — as did the trajectories of the students from remote corners of rural Haryana. But another trek also felt endless — that to nearby Ashoka University where I teach, an institution of genuine philanthropy in pursuit of global academic excellence that nevertheless cannot dream of doing a fraction of the kind of mass education BPS Mahila Vishwavidyalaya does with far scantier resources.

The sad truth is that to almost anyone in the middle-class and above, the public system of secondary education is already lost. This system is only left for those who cannot afford to send their children to private schools.

Please, as a nation, let's not lose our public universities as well.



# सख्ती की दरकार

दिल्ली में जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय (जेएनयू) के बाद अब जामिया मिल्लिया इस्लामिया में गुजरात दंगों पर बनी बीबीसी की प्रतिबंधित डाक्यूमेंट्री 'इंडिया: द मोदी क्वेश्चन' की स्क्रीनिंग शिक्षण संस्थानों को राजनीति का अखाड़ा बनाने का प्रयास है, जो अत्यंत दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण है। मंगलवार देर रात जेएनयू में वामपंथी छात्र संगठनों से जुड़े छात्रों ने छात्रसंघ कार्यालय पर एकत्र होकर यह डाक्यूमेंट्री देखी। विश्वविद्यालय प्रशासन ने प्रतिबंध के चलते स्क्रीनिंग रोकने के लिए छात्रसंघ कार्यालय के आसपास की बिजली कटवा दी थी और जैमर लगवा दिया था। लेकिन छात्रों ने फोन व लैपटॉप में पहले से डाउनलोड डाक्यूमेंट्री सामूहिक तौर पर देखी। जेएनयू प्रशासन छात्रों पर कार्रवाई के लिए सीसीटीवी कैमरे की फुटेज देख रहा है।

ऐसा माना जा रहा है कि छात्रों पर जल्द कार्रवाई हो सकती है। इन विश्वविद्यालयों में शिक्षा की गुणवत्ता का स्तर और बढ़ाए जाने के प्रयास होने चाहिए और छात्रों को अपनी प्रतिभा से इन संस्थानों का नाम रोशन करना चाहिए। यह निराशाजनक है कि ये विश्वविद्यालय अक्सर नकारात्मक मामलों के लिए अधिक चर्चा में रहते हैं, जो कतई स्वीकार्य नहीं है। यदि प्रतिबंध के बावजूद वामपंथी छात्रों ने डाक्यूमेंट्री की स्क्रीनिंग की है या इसके लिए प्रयास किया है तो उनके खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई की ही जानी चाहिए। प्रशासन को सख्ती बरतनी चाहिए, ताकि भविष्य में कोई भी छात्र इन संस्थानों को देशविरोधी गतिविधियों को अंजाम देने का स्थान न बना सके। ये शिक्षा के केंद्र हैं, इन्हें राजनीति का गढ़ बनने से रोकने के हर संभव उपाय किए जाने चाहिए।

विश्वविद्यालय शिक्षा के केंद्र हैं, इन्हें राजनीति का अखाड़ा बनने से रोकने के लिए प्रशासन की ओर से हर संभव उपाय किए जाने चाहिए

20/26/10



# Towards stress-free exams, holistic education in India

**O**ur education system has a learning and evaluation process to test the learning levels of students. Competitive exams were designed for these levels, and provided feedback. However, over time, the toll of writing these competitive exams led our students to fear them. Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, having understood this fear, launched *Pariksha Pe Charcha* where he interacted with a group of students and taught them how to become exam warriors, not "exam worriers".

When I recall my school days, I remember how anxious the mathematics exam made me. When I sought guidance from my teacher, he gave me a simple piece of advice that enabled me to score 100% on the exam; this, thereafter, became my mantra. He said, "Revise once before submission." PM Modi goes a step further and, much like a *guru*, gives tens of thousands of students critical advice through his interactions.

The previous editions of *Pariksha Pe Charcha* have seen tremendous participation from students, parents and teachers. The use of interactive activities not only motivates participation, but also allows for thought-provoking and enjoyable activities, moving from theoretical to practical learning. PM Modi urged every student to change their perspective on examinations by moving away from seeing them as life-and-death situations to looking at them from a positive, stress-free lens. For teachers and parents, the discussion centred on the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and how NEP will help empower students and pave the way for a "Naya Bharat (New India)".

We must also remember the *Panch Pran* (five pledges) of *Amrit Kaal* on the road to India at 100: One, advance with greater conviction and determination towards a developed India; two, liberate ourselves from any traces of colonial mindsets; three, take pride in India's history; four, understand the power and importance of unity; and five, inculcate a sense of duty in all citizens. This is how students can affirm their resolve to attain the goal of *Viksit Bharat* (developed India).

The dynamic and inclusive NEP outlines a refreshing approach to education in which knowledge and holistic development are given primary importance. In his book, *Exam Warriors*, PM Modi writes about innovative methods for knowledge and all-around devel-

opment that are emphasised through his mantras. This is a must-read for India's young. Instead of stressing about the results of the exam, focus instead on working hard, and the results will automatically be in your favour.

PM Modi goes on to describe the importance of being creative by saying: "Give a creative way to your thoughts, to express your emotions. Sometimes, the scope of knowledge is limited only to what is available to you, which is around you. But the scope of creativity takes you far beyond knowledge. Creativity can take you where no one has ever reached before. In our country, there is a saying that poets reach where even the sun cannot."

To encourage creativity in students, the ministry of education has organised a nationwide competition on the day of *Parakram Diwas* (Day of Courage/Valour) in 500 Kendriya Vidyalayas with 50,000 students (100 students per school) as participants across the country. Be it any form of art, creativity is forged.

This is furthered by NEP, which offers a broad perspective of learning that stretches beyond the academic achievements of an individual, to consider the holistic development of the student. It emphasises the importance of education beyond the classroom and moves the concept of a child-centred educational approach to a much more comprehensive education programme.

To provide psycho-social support to students, teachers, and families to overcome the stresses of examinations, an initiative by the ministry of education, *Manodarpan*, was started during the Covid-19 outbreak. PM Modi said that if there is no pressure from the outside world — which includes family, the school system, society and so on — then the pressure of the exam will never be felt by the student. This will create confidence among students and pave the path for them to truly flourish.

Along with millions of students, teachers, and parents across the world, I, too, look forward to joining PM Modi's master class on January 27 in this edition of *Pariksha Pe Charcha* 2023 at Talkatora Indoor Stadium, New Delhi.



Subhas Sarkar

Dr Subhas Sarkar is Union minister of state for education  
The views expressed are personal

27/1/23



# Buckling under pressure!

Education and awareness are the apt tools to relieve youngsters from the torturous peer pressure they are usually put through



**RAJKUMAR  
RANJAN SINGH**

Teachers could play an important role in educating the students about peer pressure and bullying, and help them acquire life skills that would empower them in dealing with difficult situations

Peer pressure can be understood as the push experienced by an individual from a peer group to follow the standards and expectations set by them. Since adolescence is a critical developmental stage where children undergo various changes, such pressure could result in detrimental effects on one's physical or mental health. Adolescence comes with a certain amount of peer influence. The urge to blend in with the group and have a social identity makes teenagers vulnerable to peer pressure. They experience pressure or could be coerced to participate in harmful activities by the more "popular" kids at school. The youngsters could feel trapped in such situations, and might not be able to figure another way out than to participate. Peer pressure could also convey to the teens that if they do not follow the rules and behaviours of the peer group, they would be isolated. All this could generate immense stress and worry among the students. However, as opposed to popular belief, peer pressure is not always harmful. It can be constructive as well. By looking at their peers doing well, students could get inspired to focus on academics, and take part in co-curricular activities too.

#### Underlying reasons

- **The need to 'fit in':** Adolescence is also a period where individuals usually seek company, popularity, and attention. The fear of being rejected and isolated from others makes the teens give in to peer pressure.

- **Social comparison:** Comparing one's circumstances and social standing to others might also convince the students to engage with peer pressure.



There is a need to be accommodative, receptive and supportive to the teens going through peer pressure

- **Bullying:** Being forced by the majority or popular groups to participate in activities one does not want to, or those which are unhealthy or harmful like using substances (drinking alcohol, smoking), engaging in sexual acts/relationships, committing crimes, late night partying, overspending, harassing or abusing others.

- **Lack of healthy and supportive relationships:** Not being able to confide in parents or friends about what they are going through could be another stressor for the student.

- **Low self-esteem:** Not being sure of themselves, lacking the confidence to take a stand for themselves, and say-

ing 'yes' to everything are other factors contributing to them being influenced by peer pressure and its consequences.

- **Acceptance:** Peer pressure is a fact and its existence needs to be accepted. Be accommodative, receptive and supportive to your teen and use your experience and intelligence to deal with situations.

#### Dealing with peer pressure

There are multiple ways in which students can handle peer pressure. For example, developing a positive view of themselves, engaging in positive self-talk, being aware of what they wish to achieve and the various ways in which they could do that, embracing their differences and unique qualities, practising and say-

ing "NO" to situations and conversations which are uncomfortable or harmful for them.

Parents could try being more open to conversations with their children. Instead of setting boundaries and using harsh words, they should listen, and try to understand their child's situation. Together, they both can discuss and set some ground rules for the child's own good. It is crucial to not judge your child, but rather understand them and gain their trust. Creating an atmosphere of trust and warmth at home is also important.

Teachers could play an important role here in educating the students about peer pressure and bullying; and in

having sessions with them on developing important life skills (like assertiveness, critical thinking, healthy coping techniques, etc.) to help students feel empowered in dealing with different situations. Encouraging dialogue about such concerns in the classrooms and society is essential for raising awareness to battle the pressure healthily.

Peer pressure might look like an inevitable situation, nonetheless, we can educate and empower our children and ourselves on dealing with it effectively.

*The writer is the Minister of State for External Affairs and Education, Government Of India.*

*Views expressed are personal*



# East meets West for fusion of learning in NEP2020

It will be good for aspiring students to study in premier institutes of the world without leaving their homeland

It is a well-established fact that India is essentially a welfare state and has shown exemplary commitments for inclusive development. Apart from reservation in education and employment, India has been successfully implementing several other welfare measures aimed at raising the quality of lives of the underprivileged sections of the society.

The Narendra Modi Government has added many new schemes to the kitty of welfare measure bonanza. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, Shramik Jayate Yojana, Atal Pension Yojna, Gramoday, Se Bharat Uday are only a few to name. Such schemes have ensured that



RAGHAVENDRA P TIWARI

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the poor sleep under a roof with at least a square meal. The education sector is no exception to this trajectory of development.

Students of all levels from the underprivileged sections of society enjoy reservations in admissions to various professional and traditional programs of study, apart from enjoying various types of scholarships and fellowships. People from such sections have also been beneficiaries of reservations in teaching and non-teaching recruitments. While such reservations and facilities have ensured inclusivity, the net impact of these in the quality of education is a point worthy of serious discourse.

Some sections of the academia, especially in the Modi

era, are strategically engaged in a debate detrimental to the Indian learning ecosystem. Today's youth live in the era of 4.0 Version of Education which is outcome-based and can be realised through quality education only.

Moreover, we urgently need to develop global competencies in our learners to empower them with skills to face the challenges of the highly uncertain and volatile future that 21st Century has in store for them.

A recent case in point is the draft document of the University Grants Commission on 'Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India Regulations'. This regulation stipulates a standard

operating procedure for maintaining and operating campuses in India by the top 500 foreign universities. A major bone of contention in this context is the lack of provision for social equity especially with regard to reservations to the underprivileged.

Moreover, it is alleged that such campuses will essentially serve the cause of the affluent sections of Indian society. However, even if only some so-called upper sections of the social strata were beneficiaries of the education system prevailing from the dawn of the Indic civilization, the majority of them were as poor as the others, and they got enlightenment under extreme poverty in thatched huts in forests, strictly adhering to the doctrine of 'Less is More'. They cre-

ated a plethora of doctrines of a supreme quality, such as the Vedas and the Upanishad, which have relevance across time and space.

If human civilization progresses along the contours of these doctrines, its longevity, quality, vitality and health can be ensured. The moot questions, thus, are: Can we recapitulate and recapture this supreme quality in sharpening minds for the creation of abstract knowledge again? Should we not desist from criticism and downplaying of such policies which aim at restoring much-needed universal quality in education? Should we not exclude such policies from the basket of policies in vogue for the uplift of the underprivileged sections?

Why should affluent sections from our own society be deprived from access to quality education merely on the grounds that the underprivileged sections will be left behind? The quality bars and the rigorous process of recruitment of faculty and staff, pay-package and amenities, admission criteria, infrastructure, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment tools, skill development and campus placement initiatives, etc., on such campuses should be similar to the main campus of foreign universities. These campuses should be allowed to offer new-age programmes only.

It will be good for aspiring students to study in premier institutes of the world without leaving their homeland. This may also work as a stimulus to

Indian institutions.

Moreover, this may also discourage our youth from studying abroad at an exorbitant cost and avoid eventual half curriculum, brain and cultural drain. Lastly, the argument that our educational system is foreign money in these campuses holds no water as it encompasses Indian culture in its ethos through embracing other cultures and yet maintain its unique traits.

After all, one of our national traits is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (Yantu Shikshayam). To ensure this regular and wholesome fusion of learning systems of the East and the West in Modi's India and pave the path for the internationalization of education are the key elements of New Education Policy of NEP2020.

Ref: 2077



We are squandering the demographic dividend at our disposal by giving schools short shrift

# India, Learn Your Lessons



**Sukanta Chaudhuri**

It is an article of faith that a country should spend 6% of its GDP on education. In 2020-21, only 32 of 200-plus countries in a Unesco estimate fell within 0.5% range of this figure either way. They included Britain, the US and Australia. Some spent more: Botswana 8.7%, Sierra Leone 9.1%, Namibia 9.6% and Samoa 14.7%. Others spent less: Canada 5.2%, Germany 4.7% and Japan 3.4%. In a large economy, even that means a lot of money, and India is now the fifth largest. But, needless to say, India has vastly more students to provide for.

The Union education budget is currently 3.1% of GDP. Adding the states' share, public spending on education amounts to 4.5%. But, shockingly, just 0.1% is spent on early childhood care and education (ECCE) for 3-to-6-year-olds. Our Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is the world's largest. But it benefits only one child in three. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) covering 2019-21 reports 36% children as stunted and 32% as underweight. ICDS' own website contains uniformly blank entries for 'physical progress'. These are children beyond the compass of Digital India.

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 had a promising proposal to merge anganwadis and classes 1-2 of primary school in an integrated ECCE programme. We have heard nothing of this thereafter. In fact, NEP endorses in so many words that all children will not attend regular full-time

schools, and all such schools will not have the mandatory resources.

Health, nutrition and education cannot be separated in the very young. Yet, the 2022-23 budget for ICDS and the mid-day meals scheme (renamed PM Poshan) saw virtually no increase. (Mid-day meal grants may increase after a hike in per-capita allocation.) Astonishingly, in the pandemic year 2020-21, actual expenditure on 'Umbrella ICDS' was less than two-thirds the allocation, and the budget for 2021-22 revised downward. The glib explanation is that anganwadis were closed. But the children were there, and the state neglected them in the hour of greatest need.

Anganwadis are staffed by a single 'worker' with one assistant. In 2019, over 97,000 centres had no workers, and nearly 98,000, no assistants. 23,000 sanctioned centres did not exist. The situation is unlikely to have improved, as funding has not increased. Anganwadi workers have 28 duties, two being to 'make [children] school ready' and 'conduct non-formal pre-school activities'. Just five out of 26 days' training is devoted to these two tasks.

## Call It Blankboard

In 2021-22, government-run primary schools had 2.8 teachers on average for 5, sometimes 6, classes. Over 1.1 lakh, or 7%, had only one teacher; an indeterminate number, none at all. A single Haryana district had 111 teacherless schools in 2021. In UP, 77% primary school posts are vacant. In West Bengal last year, an upper primary school had 744 students and one teacher. Corruption in teacher recruitment is rife, erupting in major scandals in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and now West Bengal.

What can children learn in this scenario? The indispensable Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 2022 has one reassuring conclusion: the pandemic has done less damage than feared. A sample survey in three



'Still life', 2023, artist unknown

states shows a modest recovery between 2021 and 2022. We have slipped back to 2014 levels nonetheless. Most children likely to return to school have probably done so, while the rest are lost for good — to employment, housework, marriage or even trafficking — adding to the total gap in basic education.

It is a daunting gap. ASER states near-100% enrolment in rural primary schools, but attendance dips from 88.6% in Tamil Nadu to 54.6% in Bihar. Only 20% of children in Class 3, and 70% even in Class 8, can read a Class 2 textbook. Just 25.9% Class 3 students know simple subtraction; 44.7% in Class 8, simple division. Except the last, all figures have declined since the pandemic.

Many states have moved notionally to close the gap. Their learning material varies in quality; workforce and monitoring are uniformly inadequate. Gol's NIPUN Bharat scheme, to impart foundational skills to all children by Class 3, offers a meticulous roadmap — without enhancing human resources and infrastructure. Hence, learning skills are acquired piecemeal and forgotten, items ticked off a list.

All these measures keep within the administrative comfort zone; radical progress demands that we move outside it. At this rate, we are unlikely to have a fully literate nation in the 100th year

of Independence. That may or may not cause shame; it should certainly cause profound economic concern. We are squandering the demographic dividend at our disposal till mid-century. We are also dissipating the human resources to 'make in India', and the advanced resources for a true knowledge economy.

## Un-chalking History

It is folly to think the latter can ride on the back of a restricted network of elite schools and the minuscule group of private universities that take learning seriously. No less misguided is a superstitious faith in robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) to transform the manufacturing sector without a skilled and alert workforce. If ever technologically possible, such a reform could never be socially operational in India.

India cannot prosper until we develop human resources with the same urgency as physical infrastructure, as reflected in budgetary increases. We dream of India making economic history. But it will not happen while so many undernourished children miss out on proper schooling.

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ET/8

It is folly to think India can ride on the back of a restricted network of elite schools and the minuscule group of private universities that take learning seriously



# Ease pressure on students

Longstanding issues with education have pushed many young people to the brink. As the PM's event highlights, this must be fixed

Since the turn of the millennium, India has transformed. Brisk growth has deepened aspirations, pulled millions out of poverty, and imbued a new generation with the hope of mobility through salaried jobs in the formal sector. But, unfortunately, the expansion in higher education opportunities, especially quality ones, has not kept pace, prompting crushing competition among hundreds of thousands of students for a handful of seats in elite institutions. This has led to young people crumbling under the weight of expectations, even as stress and anxiety have blighted the high school experience and soaring scores have come to mean little.

This is an alarming situation, especially in a country emerging from the shadows of three pandemic-struck years, where the absence of classroom instruction decimated learning levels, where the number of students opting for private tuition is burgeoning, and where signs of distress among marginalised communities are evident. These structural problems, coupled with decades of underfunding and neglect, have left many State-funded institutions moribund, causing a further mushrooming of coaching centres.

The jostle for a once-in-a-lifetime shot at prosperity has claimed scores of lives in the past decade in India's coaching hubs. A report by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in 2018 found many students depressed, ill, anxious, and unable to deal with the breakneck pace of coaching. Still, parents pour into these hubs with the hope that their sons — and yes, it's still mostly sons — will succeed in some of the world's toughest exams and pull their families out of low-income drudgery.

The dangerous phenomenon is affecting the health and futures of India's young, as exemplified by a number of questions asked at the *Pariksha Pe Charcha* event helmed by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi. Since 2018, when he first began interacting with students, many have asked for advice on dealing with stress and fatigue, and the pressure of competing in an increasingly intense academic environment. On Friday, for example, Mr Modi told students that the difference of two to three marks in a particular examination didn't matter in the long run. Importantly, he spoke on criticism that comes towards exam-bound students, and said it was important to know the source of criticism. "There is a very thin line between criticism and obstruction. Parents must criticise in a constructive and positive way," the PM added.

The easing of pressure is indeed the need of the hour. Two caveats are important. One, it is not a call for students to not work hard or apply themselves. As is evident, in a deeply unequal society with multiple fault lines, educational achievements are often the one ladder of mobility available to the generationally underprivileged. And two, fixing such an intractable problem will need urgent and sure-footed responses from the government, policymakers, educational institutions, and society. Bolstering the school education system, investing in teachers, and better designed exams can address aspiration without deepening inequality or pressure. Ensuring that quality universities thrive and creating more education hubs can ease pressure on top metropolises. Some young people give their best in high-pressure environments, and some wilt. Parents and teachers must be counselled to ensure that students on the cusp of adulthood are not burdened with unreal expectations, and not pushed to the breaking point. It's not worth it. 25/11



# Misplaced priorities of Indian education

**T**wo recent developments in the broad sphere of Indian education threw light on the paradoxes in its thought processes. One revealed the status of school education and the other, the aspirational strains of higher learning.

At one end of the education spectrum, the recently published Annual Survey of Education Report, 2022, found marginal improvement in school enrolment but underlined the sorry state of infrastructure and underscored how school-children in many states showed a decline in basic features of learning like reading.

At the other end of the education horizon, the country saw the recent UGC proposal to allow foreign universities to set up campuses in India. Of course, these two phenomena were disparate. The former was a set of unsettling facts about our education and the other was an entreaty of our aspirations. Their apposition showed how out of joint our thinking about education is.

Why would top-line global universities invest in an environment where primary education is poor and whose existing higher education itself has needed augmenting? And why would they, when the number of Indian students going abroad keeps increasing every year? The UGC seems muddled over the way forward for higher education.

Still, let's examine some cases from elsewhere, where something similar transpired. Universities, especially from the US and UK, set up some campuses in the richer countries of West Asia, South-East Asia, and the Far East. Some have prospered while some have shut down. It's a chequered record but those investments took place with many cultural and political restrictions in place (especially in West Asia) and, more importantly, where a general level of standard quality existed in all tiers of education there. The existing systems ought to be robust for top-line global educators to feel invested.



**Rahul Jayaram**

the Vidyashilp University academic believes we are living through the apocalypse

@rajayaram

So, allowing foreign campuses into India might look promising, but it's arriving in a climate, with mostly wearied educators often struggling for career advancement and stability in their existing workplaces. As recently as December 2022, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan stated in the Lok Sabha that 11,000 assistant professor and associate professor positions were vacant in our central universities and the many IITs and IIMs combined. This is uninspiring and hurtful for Indian educators and academics, many of whom have been alumnae of these institutions and aspire to work there.

The second aspect is even more fundamental. Our education ministry proposes a fillip for international universities to set roots in India, but what if we considered international primary and secondary education in the same way? Yes, we have international schools and school systems in India, but they tend to be elitist enclaves. Is there a way to democratise primary and secondary education even more? Imagine, the kind of high-calibre input in terms of infrastructure, pedagogy, learner and educator empowerment for lakhs of schools in India? Imagine partnerships over a long period between our schools and those abroad finding a beautiful meeting ground to bolster our primary and secondary education.

Really, in our situation, should paving the way for foreign universities to collaborate in higher education in India be the priority or should it be taking up the much more challenging work of strengthening existing primary education systems and consolidating existing higher education institutions?

The third point: As per our Constitution, education is a subject within the purview of the states. How much of a say do they have in conversing with a central body like the UGC over framing the entry of foreign universities? Has there been a discussion? It looks increasingly like Indian education has misplaced its fundamental priorities.

20/29/11



# Afghan Students Who'd Planned To Return Home After Finishing Their Studies In Indian Universities Are Enrolling In New Courses To Prolong Their Stay

## Studying On In India As Taliban Wait At Home

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

They are a few thousand kilometres away from their motherland, but the hundreds of Afghan women enrolled in India's universities are not complaining. With the Taliban government back home barring girls and women from schools and universities, these students have been extending their stay by enrolling in different courses. Though they miss the comfort of home and the warm embrace of family most are not keen to go back.

"Two years ago, I was planning to return to Kabul and start working there as I would have easily secured a government job. But not anymore. I do want to support my family but I do not know when I can see them again," says 26-year-old Razia Muradi, one of the roughly 14,000 Afghan students enrolled in more than 70 Indian universities.

Muradi came to India in 2019 to pursue a master's in public administration at Veer Narmad South Gujarat University (VNSGU) in Surat. Four years on, she has decided to stay put in Surat by enrolling in a PhD programme.

Then there's Dewa Safi, a 22-year-old student of political science at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi. "The Taliban regime has reversed all the gains our country made in the past few decades," she says. "All

While women have borne the brunt of the Taliban government's regressive policies, male students from Afghanistan say their families also want them to stay put in India. "The situation for men isn't promising either," says 22-year-old Najjullah Sarifi, a former student of GD Goenka University in Gurgaon.

my friends have been locked inside homes, their names have been struck off from universities, employment opportunities have dried up."

Zainab Sayed, a 26-year-old from Herat who is doing her practical training in nursing and midwifery at Sharda Hospital, Greater Noida, had also planned to return to Afghanistan after her studies, but she has dropped the idea. "The situation back home is very bad. Women are not allowed to study at all. Girls can study till class 6 and after that they are to stay at home," says Sayed, who has four sisters and three brothers.

Sayed does not know what she will do when her visa expires in June. "If I go back I will be homebound. My elder sister, who is married in Afghanistan, cries all the time. She is worried for her children's future." Sayed says she might move to the US or Canada like two of her sisters. She is counting on her brother, a US citizen, to move her entire family to the US.

Rumana Nasary who is also 26 and has four sisters, has enrolled for a PhD in mathematics at VNSGU. "One of my sisters is studying in Bangladesh and another in Russia. All three of us have been postponing our stay due to the situation in our home country. These are our hopes, our future and I worry if our

### School of International Studies & Diaspora

भारत शोध संस्थान



**TURNING THE PAGE** Afghan students (above) who are pursuing degrees at Gujarat University. (Below) Zainab Sayed, a 26-year-old from Herat undergoing nursing and midwifery training in Greater Noida, had planned to return to Afghanistan after her studies but has dropped the idea

family will ever get together again," she says, adding that her family supports their choice to stay abroad, knowing they are in countries that promise a better future. "Our parents want us to remain where we are. They miss us but sleep well at night, knowing that we are in safe hands."

When the Taliban overran Afghanistan in 2021, Afghan women had hoped they would maintain people's freedoms. "On the contrary, they have barred women from universities claiming that the institutions allow boys and girls to mix freely," says Mohammad Gulafroz, a PhD candidate at VNSGU. "Over the past 20 years the women have nurtured ambitions and many of them are highly educated. But they cannot work there."

"We are fortunate that we get to study and chase our dreams. It breaks my heart when I think of the bright, young women trapped in Afghanistan," adds Shukriya Naved, 24, who is doing her MBA at VNSGU.

Ayesha Humaira Ayubi, a student of BA in Journalism and mass communication at Sharda University - that had over 25 Afghan students till last year - found this out the hard way when she returned home after her final year. She's unable to fly to India to get her degree and sees a bleak future. In an email to Nitin Kumar Gupta, international division head at the university, she writes: "Women... are completely banned from stepping out. They cannot go to the park, gym, school or college."

Sariha Sultanzada, 27, narrowly escaped Taliban rule. She had returned home in 2018 after completing BCom from Gujarat University (GU)

in Ahmedabad, but returned in 2021 to pursue her master's in commerce "as there is no scope of higher education in my country". She says if the situation improves she will go back, otherwise she will enrol for a PhD here.

Gupta says India is now denying entry to Afghan students with valid visas, and only US and UK nationals living in Afghanistan can enter the country. However, the country has been supportive of Afghan students who are living here. They have been allowed to extend their stay if they meet the admission criteria for higher courses. India has also granted 1,000 Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships to Afghan students to take care of their tuition fees and hostel rent, and put a monthly stipend of up to Rs 20,000 in their hands.



Najida Ahmadi at Vadodra's Maharaja Sayajirao University's (MSU) faculty of education and psychology is one of the beneficiaries. She came to India on the scholarship in 2021 after completing her bachelor's in Afghanistan. "My parents and my 15-year-old sister are in Afghanistan. My sister does not go to school anymore because of the ban on girl students," she says.

Rahana Azizi also has an ICCR scholarship and is using it to do her PhD at MSU's department of management. She had planned to go back after finishing her MBA from Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University, Andhra Pradesh. "I thought a post-graduate degree would be enough for me to find work in my country," she says, "but by the time I completed my MBA, the Taliban had taken over. My hopes were dashed when they began imposing restrictions on women."

The students have diverse backgrounds. Kandahar girl Salma Kakar's father is an engineer and her mother a doctor. "When they sensed that the worst victims of the regime change were going to be women, they ensured their children left the country. My siblings are studying in the US, Sweden, Portugal and Germany. We are all scattered now. I worry for my parents all the time and miss being home."

After finishing her master's in international relations from GU, Kakar has now enrolled in a PhD programme and her thesis is about Afghan immigration. In contrast to her, Naseema Ibrahim's parents were labourers who emigrated to Iran in the 1990s for their children's education. "They returned after the Taliban were overthrown by US troops in 2001. We are seven sisters. One is a doctor and another an engineer. My other sisters are younger. With the Taliban back, my sisters are deprived of basic education. All the hard work my parents put in to raise us as independent women has come to naught."

Ibrahim worked as an English instructor at a coaching institute in Herat before moving to India. She is now doing her PhD at GU.

While women have borne the brunt of the Taliban government's regressive policies, male students from Afghanistan say their families also want them to stay put in India.

"The situation for men isn't promising either," says 22-year-old Najjullah Sarifi, a former student of GD Goenka University in Gurgaon. "Since women have been bound to their homes, several posts of teachers are vacant and colleges have become lifeless. Our past has been washed away and the future is uncertain."

Saifullah Rahimi, 25, who is pursuing PhD in natural language processing at GU, says, "Two of my sisters are teachers and one a doctor. They are jobless because of the new laws. My parents have been telling me to prolong my stay in India as returning home would mean losing my motivation and interest in pursuing a career as a data scientist."

*(Nagmesh Mehta, Prashant Rupera, Bharat Yagnik, Mennakshi Sinha and Siddharth Tiwari contributed to this story)*



# Learning from unschooled life



**IMMORTAL FOR A MOMENT**  
**NATASHA BADHWAR**

Unschooling is not about the absence of academics. It is about creating a space and pace for children to have free play and open-ended learning experiments. It is not about rejecting money pursuits, but about developing one's own intimate relationship with livelihoods that bring money to fulfil personal needs.

THERE were many good things that happened last week at the four-day residential meet of families of unschooled and homeschooled children in Belgundi, near Belgaum, in Karnataka. Nearly 300 persons had come together at Shoonya Farm Retreat, a 60-room property on a 40-acre estate, to mingle, play, connect and exchange learnings on making unconventional life choices. The Swashikshan Annual Meet or SAM 2023 was a brilliant example of how synchronicity and serendipity can emerge when we are willing to embrace uncertainty and depend on trust rather than control to make things happen. Despite the hectic socialising, late-night music and games and early morning sessions, we returned rejuvenated and refreshed as individuals.

All days were divided into various 90-minute slots between meal times and participants were invited to offer simultaneous sessions on topics of their interest and expertise. Some shared skills like origami, sketching and crochet, others offered discussions on universal challenges like raising teens and toddlers and many others facilitated games, workshops and healing sessions. Often, we reminded each other of the two feet principle — feel free to walk in or out of any session based on your immediate need. Honour each other, but first be alert to your own consciousness.

Overwhelmed by recent events in my own life, I found that I did not have the energy to offer any sessions, even though in previous meets I have conducted workshops on writing — and discussions around civil society's response to communal polarisation. This time I needed rest. I wanted quiet and solitude and often chose to go on long walks towards the nearby village to restore my balance. I paid attention to trees, admired the miracles of nests and resting cats and had random conversations with people in shops and bus stops outside the campus.

As my mind tries to sift through the experiences of participating in the SAM sessions, I am amazed at the evenness of my memory. The first session I attended on January 22 was hosted by parents, Pashwa and Jim, and titled 'Conscious Parenting'. The last one on January 25 was hosted by Upasana, a young adult, 'Understanding Neurodiversity'. In between, there were sessions by Niom, another young adult on his own unschooling journey, an introduction to elements of music and



An impromptu choreography lesson at SAM 2023.

PHOTO BY THE WRITER

on his venture titled 'Let's Play.'

Sharmila, a parent of three school-age children, hosted meetings on the differences between unschooling and homeschooling and the various creative choices available for those who choose to sit for school board exams without being enrolled in regular schools.

Sanjeevani facilitated sessions on healing via access bars and journaling. Hema shared her family's journey of leaving the city and living in a rural community. Abhi, a 19-year-old, invited peers to talk about drugs and other temptations of their age. Manish organised opening and closing circles and never failed to wave his magic wand, making everyone dance and laugh, despite their inhibitions. The football ground always had players and the swimming pool was forever inviting. There were impromptu choreography lessons and karaoke sessions.

One of the most heart-warming sights was observing volunteers like Shweta, Tejas and Pashwa, who had organised the logistics of this mega get-together, respond to the needs of individuals with calm and generosity despite their exhaustion and the stress of others. Teenagers walked into the session where parents were sharing challenges and strategies about parenting teens. Parents gathered around young adults talking about their choices and experiences. I walked in and out of sessions based on what I felt called to do in the moment and nearly everything I heard and paid attention to has stayed with me like a separate layer of sediment in a jar of precious memories.

As an introduction to the idea of living a life based on autonomy, free play and self-directed learning, an excerpt from 'The Power of Myth' by Joseph Campbell comes to mind.

"One evening, I was in my favourite restaur-

ant, and at the next table, there was a father, a mother and a scrawny boy about 12 years old. The father said to the boy, 'Drink your tomato juice.' And the boy said, 'I don't want to.' Then the father, with a louder voice, said, 'Drink your tomato juice.' And the mother said, 'Don't make him do what he doesn't want to do.' The father looked at her and said, 'He can't go through life doing what he wants to do. If he does only what he wants to do, he'll be dead. Look at me. I've never done a thing I wanted to in all my life.'

In his conversation with Bill Moyers, Campbell goes on to say, "That is a man who never followed his bliss. You may have success in life, but then just think of it — what kind of life was it? What good was it — you've never done a thing you wanted to do in your life. I always tell my students, go where your body and soul want to go. When you have the feeling, then stay with it, and don't let anyone throw you off."

To quote Dola Dasgupta, a Pune-based parent, who writes and shares magnanimously about her learnings and experience with unschooling, "Many people think Unschooling is about the absence of academics. That is not true. Unschooling is not opposed to academics, curriculum and college. It is about creating a space and pace for children to have free play, free range explorations, open-ended learning experiments... Unschooling is not about rejecting money pursuits but about developing one's own intimate relationship with livelihoods that bring money to fulfil personal needs."

"Do parents have the patience and tenacity to slow down, to wait, to work on their own fears and insecurities around money and livelihoods? That is the real question and the real work for parents."

Get-togethers like SAM and the annual Learning Societies unconference, where like-minded families find a peer group and become role models for each other, are like a sacred space for creative incubation. Sometimes, it can seem overwhelming, as if too many things are happening at the same time. Yet, it is also a great place to practice autonomy, to reclaim one's uniqueness and restore boundaries. Just as we had laughed freely on most days, many of us cried freely as well. We all returned with light and freshness in our soul.

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# Make public libraries accessible to children

SNEHA PRIYA YANAPPA

**I**t is time to reassess whether these public spaces are accessible to young readers, who visit libraries not just for reading books but also for lifelong learning and skill development.

Children's libraries are spaces where books are curated for young readers. These libraries aim at creating comfortable, inviting, and safe spaces for children to encourage them to build and nurture the habit of reading through various activities. In India, where the public school system often sees poor attendance from students, public libraries catering to children's developmental needs can play an important role in the increase of literacy rates and social development.

Public libraries in Karnataka are set up and maintained under the Karnataka Public Libraries Act, 1965. However, this Act makes no mention of children, indicating that they are not considered to be primary stakeholders. On the contrary, states such as Goa and Kerala discuss children's libraries in their respective legislation.

Many of the children's libraries in Karnataka, particularly in Bengaluru, are privately managed and cannot be accessed without a fee. The Department of Public Libraries has incurred huge expenses for the renovation of the Indira Priyadarshini Children's Library, which came under the scrutiny of the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights for its lack of even basic amenities like toilets. As of September 2022, young readers had to use public toilets outside the library.

While public libraries try to cater to all sections of society, certain private libraries focus on specific groups and communities, ensuring access to their needs and demands. For instance, 'ThinkBox' is a private library in Bengaluru that specifically caters to the needs of children. Hasiru Dala, a private social impact organisation working with waste collectors in Karnataka, started the Buguri Community Library in Bengaluru, Mysore, and Tumakuru to create and nurture spaces for the children of waste collectors. During the Covid-19 lockdown, these libraries created WhatsApp groups to contact parents of young children and shared books.

Such targeted approaches ensure the better utility of funds specifically meant for its user base. Public libraries can take inspiration from such models to attract specific groups of children with differentiated needs, such as libraries for students preparing for competitive ex-

ams and libraries for children of migrant workers.

The revival of rural public libraries in Karnataka after Covid-19 was undertaken by the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department. Oduva Belaku, or "the light of reading," was a programme initiated to help children stay connected to reading and build a culture of library use in communities. The Government of Karnataka also sought to revamp the children's sections of 5,600 panchayat libraries, which included stocking picture books, textbooks, comics, encyclopedias, and dictionaries in Kannada and other languages.

These initiatives continue to aid in bridging the learning gap caused by the pandemic-induced school closures in rural areas. The Oduva Belaku programme thrives due to its collaborative nature, as it involves various NGOs that actively work with children. Such collaboration in an urban context with existing private children's libraries can help the Department of Public Libraries understand the specific requirements of children in public libraries.

As per the *Annual Status of Education Report, 2022*, that was released recently, only 30.8% of the schools in Karnataka house books in a library. This is below the national average of 34.3%. Where they are present, most of these libraries are dysfunctional, with dusty, termite-ridden shelves and books that are not appealing or appropriate for children.

Tamil Nadu and Delhi have already taken initiatives to link public libraries with schools. Public libraries in Karnataka can also step in by acting as centres for education and providing access to books, and by tying up with public schools, they can support students in formal and informal education.

The Department of Public Libraries must survey and audit the existing public libraries to ensure that each of them is equipped with basic amenities. Each public library in urban and rural areas of Karnataka should have a section dedicated to children's books, with free enrollment and activities conducted to encourage reading among children. Where possible, the department should strive to establish libraries exclusively for children. These libraries must be rethought as inclusive spaces for community engagement, reinvented to provide specifically for children, and re-envisioned as spaces that children will want to visit one day.

(The writer is a Research Fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.)

SN/30/7



# The Indian university is in a free fall

**A**t a time when the political discourse in the country is taken to a different level of absolutism, the pursuit of a more encouraging democratic ethos is the need of the times. Academics must learn to be reliant on spirited discussions. They must be the radiant examples of a field where diverse opinions underwrite a robust critical conversation.

As Marcellus says in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Why else would the government invite universities from overseas to open campuses in India? A sense of competitiveness with international universities of repute would unquestionably retard the free fall of our universities. But there is one fear. The new initiative could make India the new global education destination, but it could also further worsen the problem. Outstanding teachers may seek positions in the various branches of the foreign universities. And we could be left with mediocrity, which would lead to further decline. The University Grants Commission must take cognisance of the possibility of such a fallout. To the dismay of many, there is no desire or exercise to find some mechanisms to retard the socio-academic decline of the university.

## What ails universities?

Before this debacle becomes a reality, let us examine what ails our universities. The abyss between the public intellectual and the stubborn establishment stands wider than ever. Universities are sliding towards self-deluding and bureaucratised governing bodies that lack the ability to handle views alternative to the retrogressive decisions of the academic leadership that has lurched to the Right. To say that India is the third largest economy is of no value when it has miserably failed to give its citizens a world-class university system. The budgetary allocation for education is abysmal.



**Shelley Walia**

has taught Cultural Theory at Panjab University

There is no desire or exercise to find some mechanisms to retard the socio-academic decline of the university

The point that is often blatantly overlooked by governing bodies of universities is the crucial importance of an academic environment with the understanding of new pedagogical practices. The present state of affairs exposes the valorisation of mediocrity that has resulted in belittling those who accomplish their responsibility with impartiality and have the requisite credentials and talent. This is in keeping with the current practice of side-lining many distinguished academics and vice chancellors and instead making appointments arbitrarily on the basis of ideological allegiances. It is, indeed, a mockery to be subjected to the arrogance and incompetence of a handful of pushovers who conduct the course of higher education not in the interest of rigorous culture of learning and teaching, but for the mere award of coveted positions.

Governing bodies that have worked efficaciously over the years are being sabotaged by an ideological belief. They are unmindful of the structure rotting at the core, especially with the insouciant acceptance of mediocrity as the norm. Inviolable traditions get bludgeoned to submission, if not annihilation. Until this stops, our institutions of higher learning will remain absent from world rankings.

Our universities have become deeply sclerotic. Spouses of civil servants find easy entrée to university positions. I once mentioned the name of F.R. Leavis, one of the most prominent critics of the last century, during a discussion. A colleague asked who he was. As a joke, I told her that I was speaking of the captain of the English cricket team. She believed it and still remains blissfully ignorant. Most universities abound with such poverty of knowledge.

## Ubiquitous discrimination

The free fall of universities in the hands of such teachers results from the infraction of the basic structure of the university

constitution. There are procedural irregularities. The indifference of the establishment resonates with the political leadership, which is oblivious of the requirements of building an empowering milieu and an affirmative academic outlook. Instead, we have a disposition that internalises sluggishness, lack of work ethic and ineptitude. Selection committees constituted by university heads find the same faculty members repeated as experts or vice chancellor's nominees, thereby ignoring far more qualified and much senior teachers. Systems that suggest less-than-honourable intent are permitted to flourish with the patronage of the powers that be.

It is disenchanting to note that the teaching fraternity chooses to remain silent on significant issues on which depend the stature of academic excellence. The university's adversarial approach to principles of seniority and merit threatens the stability and academic reputation of not only the university, but also the furtherance of ethical practices. Reform is always welcome and necessary, but destroying age-old and tested institutional practices deeply wedded to democratic traditions is retrogressive.

Ubiquitous discrimination strikes a blow at the very core of academic culture where the teaching community is directed to submit to governing bodies, which in turn are answerable to an overbearing patron seemingly lacking a broad progressive policy that encourages debate and disagreement. The conflict apparently is between viewing a university as a seat of diversity and learning and a seat of conformity and indoctrination.

Such a regressive milieu deepens the sense of distrust. In the present quandary there are few signs of initiating a level playing field or even a public debate on the decline of the university. In such a state of affairs, conscious academics can at least highlight the depth of the rot.



# Enforcing the Patent Bargain

Sensitivity towards intellectual property rights should not be at the expense of public health obligations and long-term national interests



THE SIDEBAR

By J SAI DEEPAK

IN MAY 2016, the then Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (now known as the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) under the Ministry of Commerce released the 32-page National IPR Policy. The overall purpose of this document was to spell out the government's comprehensive vision for the IPR ecosystem in the country towards shaping a more innovative and creative Bharat. To this end, seven broad objectives were spelt out, of which three are relevant to the discussion at hand. Under the head "Legal and Legislative Framework", the goal was "to have strong and effective IPR laws, which balance the interests of right owners with larger public interest"; under "Administration and Management", the objective was "to modernise and strengthen service-oriented IPR administration"; and under "Enforcement and Adjudication", the focus was "to strengthen the enforcement and adjudicatory mechanisms for combating IPR infringements".

Following this, over the last six years, the IPR ecosystem in this country has witnessed both structural and legislative changes. For instance, the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB) was dissolved in April 2021 as part of tribunal reforms, and its jurisdiction was re-transferred to high courts. This was followed by the establishment of dedicated IP benches ("the IP Division") by the Delhi High Court, arguably the country's leading court on the IPR front, for speedier disposal of IPR disputes. These steps have gone hand in hand with a conscious effort to improve the infrastructure and strength of the Indian Patent Office. Such measures, one presumes, are intended to convey to investors and innovators that Bharat is an IP-savvy and even IP-friendly jurisdiction without compromising on national interest and public health commitments. This is evident from the very same National IPR Policy which, among other things, expressly recognises "the contribution of the Indian pharmaceutical sector in enabling access to affordable medicines globally and its transformation to being the pharmacy of the world".

However, it appears that the patent establishment of the country has drawn a very different message — it has gone on an overdrive to prove its patent-friendliness, rather patentee-friendliness, in the pharmaceutical sector at the expense of public health and national interest respectively. This is despite the presence of legislative safeguards in the Patents Act which were introduced between 1999 and 2005 to secure national interest and to balance Bharat's decision to grant product patents for 20 years for "substances intended for use or capable of being used as food, or as medicine or drug". Provisions such as Sections 3(d), 53(4) and 107A of the Patents Act were expressly introduced between 2002 and 2005 to prevent the mischievous practice of "evergreening" of patents, which pharmaceutical "innovator" companies had successfully resorted to in patentee-friendly jurisdictions such as the United States. Despite the foresighted engrafting of these provisions in the Indian Patents Act to prevent a repeat of such ever-



C R Sastikumar

greening behaviour, "Evergreening patents" on drugs which relate to treatment of diabetes, cancers, cardiovascular diseases and other serious conditions continue to be granted to pharmaceutical innovator companies by the Indian Patent Office. Worse, they are regularly enforced through courts at the expense of the statutory rights of generic manufacturers and to the detriment of patients.

What is also disquieting is the non-application of the Supreme Court's verdict in *Novartis AG v. Union of India & Others* (2013) wherein the apex court shed brilliant light on the legislative intent behind the insertion of Section 3(d) in the Act — to prevent the evergreening of a patent monopoly on a drug by making inconsequential additions or changes that in no way enhance the drug's therapeutic efficacy. Disappointingly and disturbingly, the Supreme Court's imprimatur to such legislative safeguards, and clear and binding guidance on the manner of their application in the grant of pharmaceutical patents, have not yielded mature outcomes both from the Patent Office and subordinate courts. The direct consequence of this is the delayed entry of generic versions of off-patent drugs. This, in turn, affects adversely the availability of affordable medicines to patients in a lower middle-income country such as Bharat where most middle-class families and below are only a hospital-visit away from dipping into their hard-earned savings.

It must be understood that IP legislations such as the Patents Act do not exist for the sole benefit of IP right owners. The intended beneficiary of the *quid pro quo* underlying the Patents Act, better known as "the Patent Bargain", is the society which is expected to benefit from dynamic innovation-based competition between market players. Simply put, patent monopolies are granted to innovators in the hope that they disclose something new, inventive and of industrial value to the public which the public may use without the need for a license from the patentee after the expiry of the patent monopoly. This *quid pro quo* between patentees and the society, in theory, increases the general

pool of knowledge in the public domain. The other economic assumption behind the Patent Bargain is that it is expected to trigger innovation-driven competition between market players which results in increasing the basket of quality options for the consuming public. However, when an evergreening patent is granted by the Patent Office and enforced by courts, the Patent Bargain becomes a Faustian bargain since it results in the illegal extension of the twenty-year term of the monopoly. This, in turn, undermines competition in the market and enables patentees to extract more from the society than permitted.

Clearly, there are four stakeholders under the Patents Act — the society, government, patentees and their competitors. Each of these stakeholders has rights under the statute which makes all of them right owners. To interpret, apply and enforce the Act to the exclusive benefit of patentees, and that too evergreening patentees, is to abridge and reduce to naught the legitimate rights of other stakeholders, leading to sub-optimal and worse, anti-competitive market outcomes.

It is one thing to operate under the understandable belief that Bharat needs to add layers to its IPR ecosystem to attract investment. However, it is entirely another to equate IPR-sensitivity with a pro-patentee position at the expense of public health obligations and long-term national interest. Bharat's confidence in the realm of foreign policy, where it places national interest first, must equally inform its IPR-push. To cut a long story short, "Make in India" must be reconciled with "Atmanirbhar Bharat", and in the event of conflict between the two, the latter must prevail for Bharat to retain its position as the pharmacy of the world.

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**FIRST COLUMN****EXAM ANXIETY IS BIG ISSUE FOR STUDENTS**

A sound mental health depends upon multiple factors



DR JYOTI KAPOOR

**A**nxiety is one of the major mental health issues that students face just before their board and competitive examinations. Anxiety stems from the unrealistic expectations of family members and parents. In India, success is often measured in terms of outstanding grades.

A student often goes through anxiety, stress and in extreme cases depression. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his bestselling book 'Exam Warriors' talked about examinations and has outlined a refreshing approach, urging everyone to celebrate the tests like a festival with enthusiasm. Mental health experts across India have opined that every year before and after examination sessions, they have been getting a lot of youngsters suffering from anxiety and stress. Most of them have been victims of burnout due to long preparation hours and uncertainty about the future. They need counselling and medicines to deal with stress post their examinations.

The stress becomes all the more over-powering when the student appears for competitive exams, which are highly competitive, rigorous, and target-oriented. A recent study showed that among those preparing for medical entrance exams, 72.2 per cent experienced high levels of stress interfering with their day-to-day functioning.



The most common complaints of such students are poor concentration level and lack of focus. Fear of failure keeps it going. In most of the cases, students hardly consult a mental health expert or talk about their issues with peers/parents. No recreation, continuous study for most of the day, parental pressure and fear of failure aggravate their condition. Such preparations are time-consuming and tedious, and students frequently sacrifice other aspects of their lives to focus on one test. One should not forget the fact that our brain needs to break. It cannot function 24/7. The scenario becomes worse when results for competitive exams or board exams are not according to their expectations.

A sound mental health depends upon multiple factors and the most important one is emotional support. If somebody has that, it ensures a healthy growth of mind, body and soul. Many students stay away from their parents (in a different city to prepare for exams) or if at all they are staying with their parents, they hardly interact with them due to their busy schedule. At times, dealing with such a stressed environment with no emotional support, students start to feel lonely. They get addicted to unhealthy practices, including excessive alcohol consumption, gambling, overeating, participating compulsively in sex, shopping or internet browsing, smoking and substance abuse.

Unfortunately, our education system doesn't prepare us for failure. Nobody tells us that if plan A fails then what would be plan B. That's the reason when a student experiences failure, they feel that it's the end of the world for them. They get exposed to enormous stress both physically and mentally. In many cases, a student might not want to appear for a competitive course and he/she is just doing it because of certain family and societal pressure. These young children have known their entire lives that this one exam will determine how long they live. They have no time for extracurricular activities, socialising, or sports, which prevents their personalities from developing.

The coping mechanism is incumbent upon creating a schedule that enhances the performance of body and mind, while refreshing with short breaks. Consuming wholesome foods and at least eight hours of sound sleep each night also help. Long study sessions reduce the amount of time available for exercise and the body becomes lethargic, and the mind begins to react negatively, which calls for taking time out for physical activity. Discovering a calming exercise is also important. Speaking to loved ones frequently for emotional support also helps along with staying away from unrealistic expectations.

*(The author is Founder and Senior Psychiatrist, Minasthal)*



# A problem of science at the Padma awards

**S**ince the Government of India began conferring the Padma awards in 1955, the work of laureates in the 'science and engineering' category has most often been related to mechanical engineering, materials science, metallurgy, aeronautics, space science, agriculture, plant breeding, mathematics and theoretical physics. Scientific work in these fields is typically identified by scientific papers, but plant breeding may be a notable exception.

The work of a plant breeder can be evident as a paper or in the form of a plant variety that many cultivators adopt, which has beneficial properties and/or which is being preserved. This in turn raises a useful question about the popular perception of science.

## Perception of science

Science is distinguished in practice by following the scientific method and the rituals of academic publishing, among other things. But its social identity is of an activity that only a highly and specifically trained group of people is allowed to practise, whose language and texts are unintelligible to the people at large, and whose findings are presumed to be implicitly superior to knowledge that isn't uncovered and organised by the same rules.

Successful plant breeders defy the latter, but they also deviate from the former. So, perhaps they should be rewarded under a category called 'agriculture and seeds', separate from 'science and engineering', if only to indicate that a success in question may not be a scientific success per se.

The work of two recipients of this year's Padma awards shows what can happen when we take the lack of adherence to science's rituals to an extreme. Cheruvayal K. Raman was awarded the Padma Shri for having conserved more than 50 rice varieties on a modest farm in Wayanad. He wasn't formally trained as a botanist or scientist, nor does he appear to



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have published scientific papers. Yet Mr. Raman has been recognised "for conserving plant agro-biodiversity" and for preserving seed varieties that could strengthen India's food security in the face of the climate crisis.

Over the years, agricultural scientists have understood the scientific basis of the work of those like Mr. Raman, which long predates the emergence of science itself. That there is in fact a scientific basis is probably why successful plant-breeding efforts are recognised in the 'science and engineering' category. However, as stated earlier, such a basis alone doesn't make something science.

But then, what explains the Padma Shri in 'science and engineering' for Khader Vali Dudekula? Mr. Dudekula has been credited with popularising the dietary benefits of millets, but his prescriptions also include scientifically dubious elements such as homeopathy; consuming millets to "prevent" or "cure" various cancers, diabetes and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS); and avoiding the consumption of milk, eggs, and non-vegetarian food.

Like Mr. Raman, Mr. Dudekula doesn't appear to have published any scientific papers demonstrating the efficacy of these claims. But unlike Mr. Raman, scientists haven't unearthed a scientific basis for

homeopathy or millet-based cures for cancer, diabetes and PCOS; and unlike Mr. Raman, Mr. Dudekula's claims undermine important, time-sensitive dietary and medical interventions.

Through clinical trials, we know how and why these interventions work, we can reproduce their effects, and there is (at least on paper) a process by which we can hold errant practitioners accountable. We also know, thanks to the efforts of experts like Dr. Abby Philips, what we risk when we overlook the almost inevitable side-effects of 'traditional' medicine and delay tested treatments. Dr. Philips has documented several instances of people consuming 'natural cures' because they tend to overestimate the cures' therapeutic effects while downplaying their ability to be harmful and/or to be impotent against their condition. Milk and eggs are also important and cheap sources of minerals and proteins, while a part of Ayurveda, which Mr. Dudekula has espoused at large, is devoted to the benefits of non-vegetarian food.

## Compromising trust

We shouldn't celebrate alternative systems that compromise trust in scientifically tested medicine in the midst of a pandemic and several epidemics (including tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS). Increasing access to and consumption of millets could help India reduce its frightening prevalence of anaemia, but going from here to claiming prophylactic and therapeutic effects against cancer is a big leap and certainly requires scrutiny.

Before conferring any Padma award in the 'science and engineering' category, the Indian government must ensure a claim has been scientifically validated and, in general, encourage the systematic validation of all such claims before they are lauded. Otherwise, the action insults the purpose of science, the civilian laurels, and the government's own public healthcare apparatus.

Before conferring any Padma award in the 'science and engineering' category, the government must ensure a claim has been scientifically validated



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# Foreign varsities in India: Pros and cons

**While the impact may be zero on public universities, private ones will be hit hard, writes John J Kennedy**

**O**n January 5, 2023, the University Grants Commission (UGC) released the draft guidelines allowing foreign higher educational institutions (FHEIs) to set up campuses in India. The idea is not entirely new. At least three such attempts were made in 1995, 2006, and 2010. But owing to a lack of support, the proposal was shelved. Today, the idea has more takers and is almost reaching fruition because of its alignment with the National Education Policy 2020.

The UGC has invited responses to the draft guidelines. An honest deconstruction of it must reveal both the advantages and the disadvantages. Many believe the move will be a game-changer and provide a fillip to healthy competition among universities in India. But, will it be easy, given the complexities involved in the Indian higher educational ecosystem?

One must also admit that Indian universities must up their standards to compete

globally. The absence of Indian universities in the top global rankings is a concern. So, will this move by the UGC help Indian students and nudge Indian universities to upgrade themselves? Or will it prove counterproductive?

## Promises, a mixed bag

The draft proposes that only institutions which have secured a place within the top 500 of overall or subject-wise global rankings are eligible to apply. Given the Covid impact and loss on revenue generation, not many reputed foreign institutions may express interest unless offered a subsidy. For instance, Dubai, Qatar and Singapore governments provide substantial grants to foreign universities operating from their countries. The draft is entirely silent on this critical point.

The draft grants total freedom to FHEIs in student admission, decisions on fee structure, scholarship schemes, faculty recruitment and service conditions. The danger in granting complete freedom on fee fixation is that revenue generation could acquire undue prominence leading to more commercialisation and commodification of education which is against the tenets of NEP 2020. Indian universities are denied even half the autonomy granted to FHEIs. Without a level-playing field, strengthening Indian universities is unthinkable.

The proposal has fixed a 90-day limit for approval, perhaps to overcome the bureaucratic tangles. It is a positive step. The draft states that the approval is valid for ten years but extendable subject to fulfilling the re-



quired conditions. One such condition, for example, is to allow the Commission set up by the UGC to inspect, monitor, and review the institution's progress. But will this Commission possess expertise and resources for an unbiased assessment and intervention wherever needed?

The draft demands that degrees awarded in India should have equivalence with those awarded in the country of origin. In addition, foreign faculty recruited shall stay on the Indian campus for a 'reasonable' period. Regarding imparting quality education or faculty qualification, there cannot be variation between the Indian campus and those in the country of origin. Many experts support these and say

that FHEIs will offer world-class education at a lower cost, thereby reducing foreign exchange outflow.

Besides, through international curriculum and pedagogy, FHEIs can increase students' global competencies and prepare them to face global challenges. The downside, however, is that such institutions will be exclusivist, a haven for the rich and the elite, further accentuating socioeconomic inequalities in the country.

Hence, the claim that foreign universities will increase access to higher education is tenuous. Yet another significant concern is the extent to which these institutions will focus on the local, regional, and national needs and cultures.

## Impact on Indian universities

FHEIs will pose little challenge for public universities as students from disadvantaged sections would still flock to them. Adherence to the reservation system may not be a mandate for the FHEIs. However, 'elite' private universities will be hard-hit. The difference in tuition fees between private universities and FHEIs may not be huge. For instance, the fee for a BA programme in public universities is a few thousand rupees, while it runs into a few lakhs in private universities. Who wouldn't want a foreign degree for the same fees or a little more?

In addition, the poaching of the best faculty talents is likely to increase. The lack of resources in Indian universities, poor infrastructure, unattractive pay perks, insufficient research facilities and the absence of conducive work culture may result in an exodus of capable faculty to FHEIs.

Thus, catering to the needs of a small minority of Indian students, FHEIs can further widen the educational disparity among students. The proposal acknowledges the failing standards of the current educational landscape in the country, which is essentially the government's failure. The announcement of investing 6% of the GDP in higher education remains a non-starter.

FHEIs, on their own, cannot bridge the gap. The government and the UGC must explore avenues to invest more in new and existing universities to make them globally competent.

*(The author is the dean, School of Arts and Humanities, Christ (Deemed-to-be) University, Bengaluru)*



# Bring back ancient power of knowledge sharing and wisdom

**SATYA MULEY**

Vasudev kutumbakam and Vishva Vidyalaya, both these concepts originated from ancient India. About 75 years of post-independence, it is being cherished that ancient India was the fountainhead of knowledge sharing and development and therefore enjoyed the status of being a Vishva Guru.

Even today, Education is looked upon as a powerful tool for nation building. Historically the ancient India education system was comprehensive, but an area monopolised by the elitist to a large extent. Currently India sees a mix of traditional and British principles infused education system, methodologies. And even our national and state education policies revolve around the same, with very small progress towards evolving with the modern times and current needs.

## PROGRESSION IN EDUCATION POLICIES IN INDIA

After independence, Education was looked upon as a tool for modernization of the country. With this view, 2 committees (The Central Education Commission and the Mudaliar Commission) were set up which suggested restructuring of the education system with the assent of the Indian constitution. It was then that reforms for Higher secondary schemes, along with 3-year degree courses were introduced. Education was made the responsibility of both the central and the state government.

Since then, various policies like, Radical Restructuring, Special Focus on The Removal Of Disparity were introduced in 1968 and 1986 respectively, which proposed equal educational opportunities, especially for women and scheduled castes, creation of Rural Universities was encouraged.

In 2001 and 2002 the government through Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan and amendment in the Indian Constitution made education compulsory and was declared a fundamental right for the children of age 6 to 14. The Right to Education Act 2009 mandated private schools to reserve 25 per cent of the seats for the poor.

A major transformation in the Indian education system is underway by the way of National Education Policy 2020 which will replace the structure of '10+2' with '5+3+3+4' and aims to reduce the curriculum contents and focus on enhancing essential learning, critical thinking.

## CURRENT STATUS OF INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Indian education system is known to be one of the best education systems in the world even with all the present policies and implementations it is ranked 33rd amongst all the countries in the Education Ranking of 2022. The current curriculum followed by India's education system is known to be the toughest in the world, which mostly weighs on the Sciences and mathematics known to be the career-oriented subjects but unfortunately ignoring the inherent talents of the youngsters.

Soft skills and morals are ignored too. Gaining knowledge through education is one thing and using it to be productive in the Society is another. More efforts and change in perspective are needed in order to enhance the education system which will lead to the development of a child in a more comprehensive manner.

## POLICIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

The efforts being put by the government in areas of education are seen through implementation of various policies the question of whether the policies are effective arises.

In the case of Shyam Sundar VS state of Tamil Nadu (2011), Hon'ble Supreme Court stated that "right of a child should not be restricted only to free and compulsory education, but should be extended to have quality education, without any discrimination on the ground of their economic, social and cultural background."

There is a huge gap due to the lack of resources in effective implementation of policies like the compulsory education for children of age group of 6 - 14 years, which is a fundamental right under article 21 A of Constitution of India. But the constitutional guidelines go a step further and direct the state under article 45 to provide early childhood care and education for all children till age of 14 years is completed and it made this a fundamental duty of parents to provide educational opportunities to their children. These provisions were added by 86th Constitutional

Amendment act, 2002 which is crucial to uphold children's right of education.

Inadequate infrastructure, lack in quality of education etc. are very visible and most common problems with the current education system. The Private schools can be seen as another hurdle, the commercialization for providing quality education and facilities has changed the people's perspective regarding government schools.

On one side where the private schools are required to reserve 25% of the seats for the poor and on the other side these private schools are being shut down for reasons like irregularities regarding certain permissions, instead of offering them help in getting regularisation. Thus, increasing the number of schools and number of children getting educated. Even when there is an exemption from the fees, the fear of not fitting in with the environment and economic divide between peers discourages poor children from taking advantage of such policies. The harsh reality is that such private schools are also unwilling and unwell-

coming to these children in a view that they will taint the high kept image of such schools by their humble backgrounds.

The government has implemented policies like Sakshar Bharat Mission, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana for female literacy, at the same time majority of parts in the society still does not believe in educating women. Whereas educating women is required in order to bring more uniform development in the society.

If the country truly believes that education is the key to development and modernisation, then steps towards it should be taken. Though the government has from time to time taken efforts in improving the education system the effects of it are not very visible. The government must not only implement policies but also check its effectiveness and take actions accordingly, proper regulation and inspection of the working of the schools is needed.

The author is an advocate at Bombay High Court.





# We need to move away from marks-based education assessment system

KADAMBARI RANA

The purpose of assessment is to thoroughly examine age-appropriate learning milestones, to review the student's capabilities and capacities, to inspect the student's fortes and limitations and to scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching methodologies adopted by the educators.

Unfortunately, the simplistic marks-based assessment system is incompetent to sketch a multidimensional picture of this kind and offer solutions thereof. Often schools, educational institutes and independent educators overlook the fact that the purpose of an assessment is to holistically examine what worked and what did not work, make rectifications, and then step up to find missing blocks.

The state-of-affairs of the assessment system in our country can be compared to an incompetent medical practitioner's one, who at best is able to ambiguously suggest a problem but is entirely incapable of concluding specific diagnosis and offer an effective treatment.

Mark-based assessments do not give a wide-ranging representation of where the students are in terms of learning milestones, in terms of aptitude, in terms of fault lines and deficiencies in the teaching approach and in terms of making optimistic recommendations to achieve full inner potential.

To examine the student's response to the teaching and learning atmosphere, the educators need to have an insight into the various dimensions of the student's mind, heart, behaviour, and spirit. When the sole objective of student assessments is limited to grasp over the course content, then under most likelihood schools will misinterpret the student's potential.

## UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' NEEDS

Academic institutions, globally, need to appreciate that the needs of the students are not limited to academic work nor is the impact on students' well-being necessarily stemming out of only academic deliberations.

Some basic needs of the students can be broken down into physiological needs, safety needs, need for love and belonging, need for socialization, need for intellectual stimulation, need to discover, freedom to explore and make errors, need to participate and communicate and even spiritual needs.

When the learning trajectory is drafted taking into consideration the learning needs of its learners, considering the learning potential of the learners and considering the scope of rectification then the results of such teaching-learning efforts are positive. A marks-based assessment system fails to consider the manifold factors that are simultaneously working in favour of or against the students. Therefore, it is imperative to understand student needs and potential and weave this into assessment methods.

## TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

Generally speaking, assessments can range from class tests, unit tests, exams, entrance tests, open book tests, assignments, project work, grades for community service, oral tests, reading tests, class participation, peer review, self-marking, flip-class, class observations,

social engagement, extra-curricular participation and so on.

Specifically speaking some structured assessment methods are; assessment of learning, assessment for learning, assessment as learning, summative assessment, formative assessment and so on.

Assessment of learning also referred to as summative assessment, inspects where the students stand in their understanding as against the defined course curriculum. This can take the form of standardized class tests, unit tests, project work and exams. Then there is assessment for learning also referred to as formative or diagnostic assessment is primarily conducted with an intention to support the student fill up learning gaps.

Here the educator is focussed on examining the students' core take-



common errors and examining the efficacy of the teaching strategy.

Then there is assessment as learning which aims at making students active participants in their own learning journey.

This process makes them aware of their strengths and weaknesses, assists them in developing strategies to achieve their goals. This takes the form of critical thinking assignments, problem solving assignments, self-assessment, peer assessment and so on.

## MAKE WAY FOR FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Formative assessment is conducted with a primary purpose to support the student pull in learning gaps rather than cruelly testing them against textual content. Here, the

teacher is focussed on investigating the students' core takeaways, common errors and in examining the efficacy of the teaching strategy.

This is also referred to as diagnostic assessment. Formative assessment helps are effective in evaluating the learning needs of students, both during normal circumstances as well as special circumstances (break in learning due to natural disasters, loss of family member, health issues). Formative assessment provides better solutions for learner progress and unfinished learning.

Some of the ways in which schools can transform their assessment styles are; cutting back on length of exam and test papers, giving additional writing time, replacing tests and exams with class presentations, case studies and project work, introducing open book examinations, introducing class-room debates and discussions, community service, cutting back on volume of academic course, focussing

on basic concepts rather than advanced knowledge, more activity-based learning and research work.

## PROS AND CONS OF MARKS BASED ASSESSMENT

Marks based system of assessment is widely used because; it is a simplistic and easy form of checking student's progress, it is easy for making comparisons with other students in the bracket, easy to establish baseline standards, it simplifies decisions with regards admissions and promotions to next level. However, it plagued with several shortcomings such as; it cannot measure effort, it cannot measure aptitude, students who are not able to put in long hours to memorize and reproduce lengthy concepts feel punished and discouraged under this system, it is not a holistic measure of overall academic excellence.

The author is an educator, who advocates principles of child-centric holistic education.

