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# India's decline on HDI is worrying

**T**he latest Human Development Index (HDI) for 2021 has come as a disappointment for India as the country's position has fallen by two ranks from 130 to 132 out of 191 countries. Its HDI value stood at 0.633 during 2021, which was lower than the world average of 0.732. The HDI score has declined for two consecutive years for the first time in three decades. That is a matter of concern because HDI is the best measure available now of human welfare and quality of life expressed in terms other than money and material possessions. It indicates the essential requirement of development as expressed by longevity, health, standard of life and education, and so the index gives a picture of the relative achievement of countries on these parameters. Life expectancy, years of schooling, expected years of schooling, and the gross national income per capita are used to calculate the index.

India's poor rank shows how the country's resources are not used well to promote welfare and quality of life of its people. The quality of life is best judged by life expectancy, health, literacy, etc., of the people. The quantum of national income and the GDP do not measure welfare, and their growth does not ensure betterment of welfare or real human development. It is only when resources



**India has fallen in rank; neighbours have fared better**

are utilised equitably to improve the quality of life that development gets a human dimension. India has lagged in this, and its position has slipped in the recent past. This is either because policy priorities have changed or policies, even if they are right, are not being implemented well. The country's position is also near the bottom on other indicators like the Global Hunger Index which have an impact on the HDI performance.

It is true that the drop in India's score is not exceptional. Most countries

have seen a decline in human development during the Covid period. Other reasons like climate change also had an impact. But India's position has seen a decline in relation to other countries. Countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka are placed above India in the index. The UNDP representative in India Shoko Nada has said that it only showed that other countries had done better than India. The report has recommended that India should prioritise and adopt policies that will help to improve its performance in human development. It also noted that there was a considerable increase in allocation for social protection in the last two years. But much more is needed to stop the decline and improve the country's position. India's poor performance sets the world back because of the large population of the country. 04/16/18



# Decoding PM-SHRI

The scheme seeks to arm-twist states to adopt NEP 2020 in its 'entirety'; worse, if implemented, it will create a hierarchy of schools

NAVNEET SHARMA

The National Education Policy is already 'revolutionising' the country's education sector, and whatsoever was lacking in this transformation will now be taken care of by the PM-SHRI (PM-Schools for Rising India). This scheme attempts to be the guiding force for the nationwide implementation of the NEP. Learning may be a gradual process but education as a sector is in a hurry. This hurriedly cobbled up scheme defies any understanding of the economics and sociology of education.

The scheme, announced with grandeur, as every scheme is these days, envisages that 14,500 schools across the country are to be developed as PM-SHRI schools to present a model for other schools to follow, and they would be mentored to showcase all components of NEP 2020. This large number of schools, although still only 1.4% of all the government schools in the country, is to present an example of 21st-century schooling. At this speed of upgradation of schools, by simple calculation, it would take at least another 72 years to upgrade all 1.32 million schools in the country, provided we do not open any more schools in that period.

The big economics behind this also makes it grand. It is asserted that the central government will spend 66% of this Rs 27,360 crore scheme; that is, the central government will spend Rs 18,128 crore on these 14,500 schools in five years. By simple calculation, it is stated that selected schools will get around Rs 25 lakh each per year from the central government's coffers as annual school grants, science kits, strengthening of infrastructure, etc. But therein lies a catch: it is that the 'participating' school will be eligible only when the state/UT where it is located signs a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the central government, agreeing to implement NEP in its 'entirety'.

Now, all the states/UT of the Union of India have not agreed to adopt the NEP in its entirety. There are 12 states, including Delhi, that have a non BJP government and these have very valid

apprehensions about the NEP, which any analytical mind would indeed have. These 12 states have almost 50% of the total number of 'blocks' in India, which is the basis for selection/geo-tagging of the school for PM-SHRI. These 3,000 blocks approximately, and the schools there, will not be able to benefit from PM-SHRI as the respective state/UT government is not willing to sign up to implementing the NEP in its entirety. This amounts to arm-twisting the states, which are always in need of funds for their schools. Education is still on the Concurrent List, and these kind of arm-twisting does not go well with the country's federal structure.



The roadmap of the PM-SHRI schools to create and nurture holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with key 21st century skills is full of inconsistencies and inherent contradictions. The teachers, the curriculum, the textbooks of state-run/local bodies-managed schools are controlled by the respective SCERTs, school boards, and service rules of the respective state. How these will be manoeuvred and altered to abide by the NEP's stipulations is not spelt out in the scheme. How, for instance, will the 'one nation, one pedagogy' aspiration of the NEP be implemented without restructuring the different curricula that obtain in the states?

The scheme also stipulates that schools, during the process of selection and during implementing PM-SHRI, would be assessed with specific key indicators being developed by the School Quality Assessment Framework (SQAF). The Centre has turned a blind eye to the confusion and chaos caused by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) for higher education institutions. Schools are more vulnerable to giving in to the demands of SQAF. This will revive 'inspector raj' in the schools again.

This will also invariably create another hierarchy of schools within the

already fragmented public school system. Any brainstorming on education veers toward how bad the situation is -- from dilapidated buildings, absent teachers, irrelevant syllabi, to no separate washrooms for girls and so on. If we are to resolve these issues by picking up a selected few thousand schools for funding, we will end up creating islands within the school system, and we will tend to evolve more stringent 'checks' in the system. But as the rising number of private schools tells us, the moment the poor become somewhat less poor, they opt for private schools. The PM-SHRI will thus end up just creating another wedge, and the poor and the poorer will merely be left vying for admission of their wards in the respective economic category of schools.

The scheme promises to adopt a 'saturation approach' to develop the selected schools with all modern facilities, perhaps meaning to assert that these schools would be so developed that there would be nothing more left to do for their further development. However, in the discourse of education, educational saturation is not taken as a positive attribute. Of course, it is too much to expect that education policies being developed by bureaucrats and technocrats should be able to respond to the grassroots-level understanding of education and schooling.

The progressive National Curriculum Framework 2005, and state curriculum frameworks, already suggest more experiential, holistic, integrated, play/toy-based inquiry, discovery-oriented, learner-centric pedagogy. Similarly, the emphasis on the mother-tongue and on learning with the aid of ICT are other suggestions that have been there for years, if not decades, now. What new innovation and innovative pedagogy is now being brought about is hard to fathom.

What is to be new in these schools is that the students are to be rooted in the knowledge and heritage of India and are expected to be proud of (not analytical of) our civilisational ethos and to be aware of their responsibilities toward nation-building. Wouldn't this goal be served only if all schools across the country are treated equally, especially when these goals are already part of NEP 2020 and the upcoming NCF 2023? Picking and choosing a few thousand schools across the nation for showcasing and creating exemplars will only defeat the idea of common schooling and access to quality education for all.

(The writer teaches at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh)

09/16/23



Conducting the postponed 2021 exercise can only provide rich data to aid critical policy options

# Enough Delaying the Census



**Omkar Goswami**

groundwork. This is a gigantic operation that will involve nearly 30 lakh enumerators and supervisors to track some 135 crore people across the country. Yet, there seems to be none of the necessary underpinnings, such as we saw in 2001 and 2011. Therefore, one worries whether the census will be at all conducted in 2023.

Let me move on to a set of concerns:

his is an appeal to GoI to conduct the delayed 2021 census as soon as possible, with sound reasons as to why this must be done—not just for the benefit of demographers and social scientists, but for all citizens to numerically understand the significant changes that have occurred across India between 2011 and now.

First, some facts. The first synchronous decennial census of British India was conducted in 1881. Since then, this enormous task was carried out every 10 years: 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941 under the British raj. Note that the 1921 census occurred when India was still suffering from the after-effects of the great influenza epidemic that killed 12-13 million people, and the 1941 census was conducted despite World War 2.

## How Have We Grown

Decennial census continued after Independence with the first one in 1951, followed by six successive censuses ending in 2011. Understandably, Covid-19 delayed the 2021 census. However, we are now in September 2022 with no serious overhang of Covid.

For climatic and logistic reasons, the decennial census typically is conducted in February with a revisional round in March. For that to occur in 2023, one should already have witnessed a huge amount of pre-census

► Most importantly, there is a very strong reputational issue. Come hail or high water, we have conducted 14 successive synchronous decennial censuses since 1881. To not conduct the 2021 census in 2023 will be a serious negative signal for the government—one that will allow commentators to say that the census was not carried out because this government does not want such data to be made available. The government does not need this opprobrium.

► It is a sad fact that India—by far the fastest-growing large emerging economy today—has published no large-scale household and population data worth the name since the 2011 census. In November 2019, GoI decided to withhold results of the large-scale all-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES) for 2017-18. The last such survey that we have now is for 2011-12, which is more than a decade old. Yes, there have been two National Family Health Surveys (NFHS): NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-21). Though useful, these are not substitutes to the census, or even the HCES.

► There is absolutely no alternative to the nationwide census. Each individual of the country is enumerated, and data on age, sex, marital status, fertility, religion, whether scheduled caste or tribe, mother tongue, literacy and educational level, economic activity and migration are collected.

The household survey in the census provides the only comprehensive nationwide household data on housing and settlements, and assets and amenities available



**They're still waiting**

That is not all. The household survey in the census provides the only comprehensive nationwide household data on housing and human settlements, including various assets and amenities available to each household in India. This is a treasure trove of information to frame detailed government policy and interventions.

## The Picture in Numbers

Here is an example. The 2001 and 2011 censuses, as well as NFHS-5, have shown that while India is growing in terms of access to household assets and amenities, there are significant spatial disparities between northern, western and southern parts of India, on the one hand, and central, eastern and northeastern India, on the other. The censuses peg these to the level of districts and tehsils. This is rich data to aid critical policy options—for instance, on how to intercede in the relatively worse-off regions to bring these up to par.

► The United Nations recommends a census enumeration at least once every 10 years. As of date, over 150 countries or areas have conducted de-

cennial censuses. India has been one of the leaders in the field with 14 decennial censuses since 1881. Let this chain not break. Let us not be lumped with Lebanon, which has not had a census since 1932, or Afghanistan without a census for four decades; or the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uzbekistan, Madagascar or Ethiopia that hasn't conducted one since the 1990s. We don't deserve this ignominy.

At the cost of repeating, the reputation of this government is at stake. One doesn't want to be the dispensation that scrapped India's synchronous decennial census after a steady run of 130 years. And one shouldn't let all manner of Machiavellian reasons be ascribed to it for doing so. Moreover, there is absolutely nothing in the census results that can be detrimental to governance. Indeed, much of the data can help GoI focus better.

Therefore, let there be no further delay in the overdue 2021 census. It behoves neither this government nor India.

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# EDITORIAL

## A tangled tale

A constitutional bench of the Supreme Court, comprising Chief Justice UU Lalit, Justices Dinesh Maheshwari, S Ravindra Bhat, Bela M Trivedi and JB Pardiwala, is perhaps hearing one of the most contentious issues in the Indian socio-political discourse — EWS quota reservations. Though the matter is sub-judice, the arguments by senior advocates offer useful insight into the issue. It will be interesting to note how the court interprets the aspects of affirmative action, economic grounds for reservation, and violation of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, senior advocates Salman Khurshid, Ravi Verma, P Wilson, Gopal Sankarnarayan, among several others, argued against the 103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment — through which EWS quota was introduced. P Wilson initiated his argument by borrowing William Blake's words, "One law for lion and ox is oppression." Calling the 103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment a "mockery of affirmative action", he discarded the validity of EWS quota. Wilson also cited the violation of guided theory established in *Nagaraj vs Union of India*, as the amendment entirely leaves it to the "discretion of the state" to notify who will be EWS. Furthermore, given the fact that there is a lack of homogeneity in the EWS category, and that economic conditions of people may change from time to time, the ambit of EWS is loosely defined and is subject to fluctuations. There is a still broader question in this regard. One of the petitioners on Thursday argued that "the most fundamental requirement for any protective reservation is discrimination." Advocate Shardan Farasat echoed the same view saying that reservation, as an original idea, was based on "anti-discrimination" and cannot be granted solely for "anti-deprivation." This broadly sums up the inadequacy of economic parameters for reservation. On the constitutional side as well, P Wilson marked a distinction between reservation for backward classes and EWS quota. He argued that "as far as SC/ST/SEBCs are concerned, the constitution is overseeing their reservation by virtue of 366(24), 366(25), 338, 340 and 341. For EWS there is no one who would verify. It's left to the whims and fancies of the executive and the State. It will destroy the constitution." The most contentious aspect, however, has been the violation of the 50 per cent reservation ceiling, as established by the Indira Sawhney verdict. Referring to clause 6 — inserted after 103<sup>rd</sup> amendment — of Article 15, senior advocate Gopal Sankarnarayan remarked that the six words — "in addition to the existing reservation" — violate the basic structure of the constitution. Furthermore, petitioners also pointed out that the provisions of reservation were originally targeted towards upliftment of secluded groups. What the EWS quota seeks to achieve is micro-targeting at individual level. EWS is not a homogenous group. Through EWS quota, the focus is laid on upliftment of individuals — directly or indirectly. It is pertinent here to point out that economic growth of citizens is subject matter to economic policies and performances of the government. A failure on this part should not be passed over to the legal and constitutional domain. The missing idea of "historical injustice" puts EWS in an altogether different bracket when compared to backward classes. It is the failure of the Indian state that it couldn't, even after 75 years of independence, bring socially discriminated sections at par with "oppressors" and "bourgeois." This perhaps is the reason that reservation remains one of the most tangled tales of Indian democracy. What the Central government, through the 103<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment, did was to further compound the problem. Since the hasty passing and implementation of the amendment is a legislative matter, the Judiciary will avoid zeroing on this aspect. Also, the ground realities — wherein backward classes are finding themselves at the receiving end of disproportionate advantages appropriated by affluent classes by the virtue of easy to make EWS certificates — are likely to be overlooked. However, at the end of the day, it is left to the wisdom and interpretation of the Supreme Court to come out with appropriate solutions. 7



# Acting as a bridge

*By facilitating peer-guided learning, community virtual classes can plug the learning gap, and address inequalities; writes Liju Varkey Jacob*

Every child has the fundamental right to education, yet not many have the access to it. Around 35 per cent of the world's illiterate population resides in India. Much remains to be done to create a child-friendly environment that nurtures education.

In India, poor quality of education is rampant and it leads to poor learning outcomes. When children are pushed out of schools, being uneducated leaves them more vulnerable to early marriage, child labour, abuse and violence.

Children belonging to low-income families often cannot afford to take special guidance sessions, which may directly affect the child's academic performance, leading to an increased chance of dropping out of school and never re-entering the education system.

Peer tutoring, in such cases, can be a blessing for these children where their classmates, who perform well in academics, help them achieve better results. Peer tutoring is a proven technique supported by many areas of research.

Between 2014 and 2020, the percentage of students in Class 3 in government schools in Karnataka who could read Class 1 text dropped to 24.2 per cent from 41 per cent, according to a report by ASER, a research organisation.

The ratio of students who could recognise double-digit numbers slid to 60 per cent from 75 per cent, it added.

Quality deficiency is not limited to Karnataka. The learning levels of children are an indicator of the effectiveness and productivity of the education system.

There is little doubt that poor reading ability in primary schooling also reflects the below-par ability of children to understand textbooks of higher standards, as the curriculum becomes increasingly ambitious and texts become complex in more than one way.



Peer learning needs to be embedded into the pedagogy

During the COVID-19 pandemic, by September 2020, schools had remained closed for nearly six months. The first three months of the 2020 lockdown were perceived as summer holidays.

However, through the monsoon months of July, August and September, schools continued to be closed. Prolonged proximity forced families to consider how to deal with discontinuity in their children's education.

It is well established that home factors significantly influence students' achievements. Research shows that when family characteristics are controlled, most differences in outcomes between private and government school children disappear.

Family resources are strongly correlated to greater learning opportunities and support for children — choice of school, enrollment in tuition classes, access to more learning material and possible learning support at home.

In India, these inequalities are profound and widespread and over time have remained a chronic characteristic of the Indian social fabric.

As the country was bracing itself to navigate through the pandemic's impact on edu-

cation, World Vision India focused on ensuring that the education of the vulnerable children does not suffer.

World Vision India collaborated with Global International School (GIS), Singapore and piloted Community Virtual Class Learning (CVCL) for 20 students of Classes 4 and 5 aged 8-13 years from two schools in Agra and Chennai.

One class per week for two hours commenced from October 7, 2020 to December 30, 2020.

Through the ZOOM video conferencing platform and following proper social distancing and government-enforced COVID-19 protocols, classes were initiated with the support of the school management using laptops and projectors.

For CVCL, vulnerable students from less-privileged communities were identified for age-appropriate learning and skills. Then, the best ways to tutor and help them improve were outlined.

GIS students from Classes 11 and 12 facilitated CVCL and tutored the students in English and mathematics. The English language topics taught ranged from alphabets, nouns and tenses to poems, letter writing and storytelling.

Mathematics topics ranged from simple addition and subtraction to profit and loss, area and perimeter, among others. Most sessions were in the children's regional languages, to begin with, until they were able to comprehend the study material in English.

The result and impact after three months were quite progressive. The outcome demonstrated a 70 per cent increase in students who could read and comprehend the English language. Around 35 per cent of them were able to read the newspaper and 70 per cent improved their competencies in simple arithmetic.

This goes a long way to show how the right platforms and guidance can help students improve their skills.

The success of this pilot intervention was due to peer learning. It allowed students to use their knowledge for a meaningful social experience and enabled the tutors to reinforce their learning by reviewing and reformulating their understanding.

Tutees gained one-on-one attention. Both tutors and tutees gained self-confidence, the tutor by seeing self-competence in their ability to help someone and the tutee by receiving positive reinforcement from peers.

Students in India also interacted with their in-house peers and learned from each other without much supervision, creating an environment of open communication that is important for learning.

This type of learning process tends to enhance 'deep learning'. In this, information is retained in memory for a longer term, rather than 'surface learning', where information tends to dissipate quickly from memory in the normal way of class teaching.

Based on this successful pilot programme, the project was scaled up to include more schools in 2021. Approximately 200 children from 10 schools in Agra, Chennai,

Delhi, Gurgaon and Kanpur were selected for the second phase of CVCL.

The initiative of peer learning is aligned to the National Education Policy 2020, which mentions establishing innovative models to foster peer-tutoring and volunteer activities. It also mentions launching other programmes to support teachers in this urgent mission to promote foundational literacy and numeracy during this learning crisis.

During the school closure due to the pandemic, community virtual learning has been an innovative method to ensure continuity of education for the most vulnerable children who do not have access to online devices for education.

It may be reasonable to conclude that peer learning has an important role to play in primary school education. There is a need to ensure that peer learning is more effective in classroom contexts and that education is not just an activity that takes place in a group but as a group activity.

To have maximum impact, it is clear that peer learning needs to be embedded into the pedagogy and planning in school curriculum areas. Therefore, there is a need to include professional development programmes to enhance teachers' pedagogy in using peer-learning strategies.

A key advantage of CVCL is that self-learning and teacher / peer-guided modalities can be combined within the same model.

There is an enormous yearning for education among many children and their families because they are deprived of quality learning.

We need to remember and plan for these vulnerable and marginalised children. The post COVID-19 recovery period presents an opportunity to make education systems more equitable and inclusive. Hope lives on.

Views expressed are personal

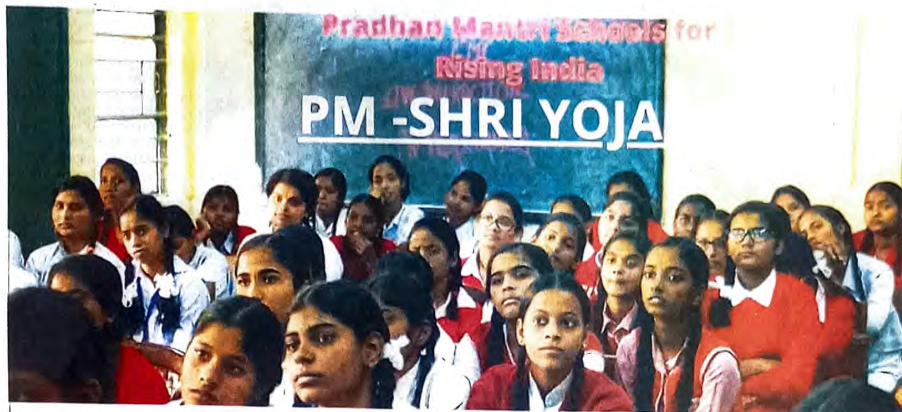
During the pandemic, community virtual learning has served as an innovative method to ensure continuity of education for the most vulnerable children



# STATESMAN (P-6), 16 SEPTEMBER 2022

# Government Schools

A fundamental flaw in our education system is the lack of a well-defined purpose. Ideally, the education system should turn out well-qualified individuals, who would effortlessly slip into their assigned roles. Sadly, in India, students get degrees, not accompanied by any specific skill set, rather, our education system churns out a crop of literate, but not educated, graduates and post-graduates



A few days ago, on Teachers' Day, in a welcome departure from the usual empty sermonising, Prime Minister Modi announced that 14,500 schools across the country will be developed and upgraded in the next five years, under the Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM-SHRI) Yojana, at a cost of Rs.27,360 crore. This initiative has not come a day too soon; recent assessments by National Achievement Survey and Annual Status of Education Report, have found the level of learning of primary and middle students to be extremely poor. Assessments by states such as Assam confirm this finding.

But by some unexplained miracle, despite poor learning in primary and middle schools, hardly any child fails in the tenth and twelfth Boards. Rather, millions of children score more than 90 per cent marks. Board results of 2022 were inexplicably better than those of pre-Covid times, even when there was no classroom teaching.

However, examinations like the JEE-Advanced, show the mirror to such stellar performances; the cut-off marks for JEE-Advanced 2022 were a mere 15 per cent, and only the topper got 90 per cent. The IITs started admitting students with low marks in 2018, when they had to reduce cut-off marks by 10 per cent, at the command of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, so that available seats could be filled up. Such instances reinforce the conclusion that educational standards have been deliberately lowered to conceal the rot in the educational system.

The reason for poor learning outcomes is not far to seek; Government schools which teach the maximum number of students, are in terminal decay. According to the UNESCO report, "State of the Education Report for India: No Teachers, No Class," 1.1 lakh schools had only one teacher, and 11 lakh teaching positions were vacant. Government schools, particularly in villages, were miserably understaffed with a single teacher teaching two or three classes of disinterested children, in a single classroom.

Additionally, the British-era buildings of most Government Schools were no longer habitable and most village Government schools have no running water, electricity or toilets. Probably, the Government should have accorded the same priority to construction and improvement of village schools, as it did to construction of village toilets.

Unfortunately, a no-holds barred political debate has broken out over the PM-SHRI

Yojana. First off the mark was Delhi CM, Arvind Kejriwal, who questioned the upgradation of only 14,500 schools out of the nearly 10 lakh Government Schools in the country, pointing out that at this rate, it would take 100 years to reform all Government schools.

As a counter-offer, the Delhi CM volunteered his government's co-operation for country-wide reform of school education on a shoe-string budget. In response, the Union Minister for Education pointed out that Delhi schools lagged behind the national average in the National Assessment Survey. Last heard, the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) had issued a notice to the BJP-controlled Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), seeking an explanation for the "poor" performance of primary schools. For good measure, DCPCR also ordered an inquiry into the "poor quality of education" in MCD schools. Meanwhile,

the Tamil Nadu CM, who has grave issues with the National Education Policy (because of language), launched the Schools of Excellence and Model Schools Scheme, which is broadly based on initiatives of the AAP government of Delhi.

Probably, electoral compulsions have forced politicians of all hues to promise educational reform, which may be good news for the common man. However, voters should never forget that neglect by successive governments was responsible for the rot in the educational system.

Government Schools, which all political parties are suddenly trying to reform, were established by the British, in Commonwealth countries, including India, in the late nineteenth century. Those schools named, after British monarchs like Victoria, Edward or George, were modest by modern standards, but provided excellent education, and till the early nineteenth seventies, were the best in any district.

Despite its many shortcomings, the much-reviled British-era education system was successful in promoting upward mobility, on a truly large scale. Many icons of modern India like President Abdul Kalam came from disadvantaged backgrounds, had their education in Government schools and went on to excel in their chosen fields.

The system ran smoothly. In small cities, all children right from the Collector's son to his

peon's son, went to the same Government school, where practically no fees were charged. The same was true of universities, medical colleges and engineering colleges; once you got admission, the least of your worries was paying for your education.

Slowly, the system disintegrated. The first casualty was primary education. Almost unanimously, in the 1960s, all State Governments decided that English should no longer be taught in primary schools. English, however, continued as the language of high society, business, and finance, as also of prestigious examinations like IAS and NDA.

Quite naturally, many parents pulled their children out of Government schools. Secondary education was the next victim. Initially, each State had a Secondary Education Board and there was healthy competition between various State Education Boards. Slowly, the system degenerated with the education ma-

fla displacing genuine educationists. Consequently, examination malpractices became rampant; Bihar Board achieved widespread notoriety when photographs of parents scaling walls to "help" their wards were published. This notoriety was reinforced when videos of Bihar toppers fumbling to answer basic questions, went viral.

The once respected UP Board did not lag behind; one sixth of the examinees dropped out when the Government got tough with the copying mafias. Moreover, most State Boards are prone to change their syllabus and teaching policies with a change in Government. Because of such deficiencies, educated parents are wary of admitting their children in State Board schools, resulting in a decline in the quality of Government Schools/State Boards.

The problems facing Government schools are aggravated by the tyranny of local administrations, which commandeer Government school teachers whenever the Government needs extra manpower. Government school teachers are called for census operations, elections of all kinds, spreading awareness about Government schemes etc. Government school buildings are regularly requisitioned for police deployment, elections and other contingencies. Students are called in to swell crowds at all manner of Government programmes. No one in Government is both-

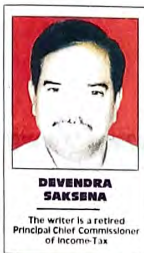
ered about the adverse impact on teaching or the teaching hours lost. Till now, the only significant step for reform of education, taken by the Government was the Right to Education Act which was vociferously resisted by private schools. Resultantly, no significant benefit has accrued from the Right to Education Act, even after twelve years. Ours is a leading economy of the world; surely, we can hire ad-hoc volunteers to carry forward Government schemes and leave teachers for teaching or establish some good schools.

While committing thousands of crores for the development of PM-SHRI schools, the Government may be well-advised to ensure that Government schools are not used for extraneous purposes. This would automatically raise the standard of Government schools. Also, most schools reflect the personality of their principals, a measure worth trying is to appoint able and motivated persons, with sufficient financial and administrative powers, as heads of Government schools.

A fundamental flaw in our education system is the lack of a well-defined purpose. Ideally, the education system should turn out well-qualified individuals, who would effortlessly slip into their assigned roles.

Sadly, in India, students get degrees, not accompanied by any specific skill set, rather, our education system churns out a crop of literate, but not educated, graduates and post-graduates. Resultantly, we have a large number of "educated" unemployed who are a problem for themselves, as well as for the society at large. One often comes across the unedifying spectacle of hundreds of post-graduates and MBAs vying for menial Government jobs; many young men go abroad for education only because education in other countries provides jobs.

Education not being a priority for any Government, beyond lip-service, budgetary constraints have held back educational reforms; Central and State Governments spend only 2.6 per cent of the GDP on education, as against a goal of 6 per cent laid down in the 1990s and reiterated by NEP 2020. Hoping to reform the education system at a limited cost, the Government wants PM-SHRI schools to be exemplars of excellence, inspiring betterment of the remaining schools. However, results may be contrary to expectations; PM-SHRI schools are likely to become islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity, with parents adopting all means, fair and foul, to ensure admission for their children in PM-SHRI schools, thus teaching the lesson of corruption to young minds.



**DEVENDRA SAKSHENA**  
The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax



# Reforms, Not Quotas

*Addition of castes to reserved categories means more claimants for a shrinking govt pie*

**T**he Centre's decision to grant ST status to the Hattee community in poll-bound Himachal Pradesh and the in-trouble Jharkhand government's decision to expand OBC reservation to 27% are part of a long list of additions to official backwardness classifications. These additions don't always go smoothly, and they are also piling up. Hattees' demand for ST status in HP is resented by Dalits in the region. Gujjars in Rajasthan agitated for ST status, driven by the grouse that Meenas benefited from it. Now they are slotted as MBCs in a 5% bracket. Meanwhile, Maharashtra's OBC quota in local body elections has been ratified by SC after the state satisfied the triple test laid down by the court to grant reservation. In the south, Tamil Nadu has mastered this dubious game.



From the earlier formulation of reservation as an exception to the norm, the exception has begun to dwarf the norm. EWS quota, currently before a constitution bench, tips central reservations well over the 50% line. And it's not just that 77% of Jharkhand's government jobs will now be in the reserved pool, many states are similarly inching towards the 100% mark, leaving little for merit.

Many see quotas as avenues easing their access to higher education, employment and official schemes. That's true in a limited sense – because the number of government jobs, seats in government education institutions and even welfare schemes face hard budget constraints, and relative to demand their availability is going down. So, more and more castes end up fighting for a shrinking pie – while the one big truth about India's socio-economic change in the last three decades is that reforms have pulled millions out of poverty. In fact, an IMF study recently estimated that absolute poverty is history in India. Yes, there are pockets of relative deprivation and there is a persistent jobs problem at the lower end of the labour market. Neither are there enough seats in higher education. But reservations solve none of this. Social groups that agitate for quotas must understand this basic fact.

10/3/22



# स्टूडेंट्स को तंग न करें

रूसी हमले के बाद यूक्रेन से वापस लौटे भारतीय मेडिकल स्टूडेंट्स की समस्याएं जैसे खत्म होने का नाम नहीं ले रहीं। बीच में ही पढ़ाई छोड़ आने को मजबूर इन स्टूडेंट्स के सामने सबसे बड़ी चुनौती यही थी कि वे अपना कोर्स कैसे पूरा करें। उसके बगैर उनका कोई करियर नहीं हो सकता। लंबे इंतजार के बाद इस महीने नैशनल मेडिकल कमिशन (एनएमसी) से उन्हें यह इजाजत मिली कि वे



यूक्रेन : विश्वविद्यालयों की गलती

यूक्रेन के विश्वविद्यालयों से अपना ट्रांसफर दुनिया के किसी भी विश्वविद्यालय में करवा सकते हैं। यह उन स्टूडेंट्स के लिए एक बड़ी राहत है। लेकिन सिर्फ कागजों पर। इसे अमल में लाने के लिए जरूरी है कि यूक्रेन के विश्वविद्यालय इनका ट्रांसफर करें और उन्हें उनके ओरिजिनल दस्तावेज सौंपें। मगर इन विश्वविद्यालयों का रवैया न सिर्फ बेतुका बल्कि अमानवीय है। कई संस्थानों ने इन स्टूडेंट्स का

ट्रांसफर का अनुरोध सीधे तौर पर खारिज कर दिया है। उनका कहना है कि अब देश में हालात ठीक हैं और इसलिए उन स्टूडेंट्स को वापस आकर कॉलेज जॉइन करना चाहिए। जिन यूनिवर्सिटी और इंस्टिट्यूट्स ने ऐसा मनमाना आदेश जारी नहीं किया और इच्छुक स्टूडेंट्स का ट्रांसफर करना सैद्धांतिक रूप से स्वीकार कर लिया है उनकी तरफ से भी ऐसी ऐसी शर्तें लगाई जा रही हैं जिन्हें पूरा करना मौजूदा हालात में लगभग नामुमकिन है। उदाहरण के लिए, कई यूनिवर्सिटी कह रही हैं कि इन स्टूडेंट्स को तब तक उनके ओरिजिनल पेपर्स नहीं दिए जा सकते, जब तक वे लाइब्रेरी से ली गई किताबें और कॉलेज की अन्य संपत्ति खुद आकर वापस नहीं करते। सचाई यह है कि जिन स्थितियों में ये स्टूडेंट्स वहां से स्वदेश लौटे उनमें यह संभव ही नहीं था कि वे सारा सामान साथ ले आते। मिनिमम सामान के साथ जान बचाते हुए निकल आना ही उस समय संभव था और सबने ऐसा ही किया भी। ये स्टूडेंट्स कह भी रहे हैं कि सारा सामान वे ज्यों का त्यों हॉस्टलों में छोड़ आए। अब कहां वे किताबें ढूंढें और कैसे वापस करें। बाकी औपचारिकताओं के लिए भी स्टूडेंट्स से खुद वहां आने के लिए के लिए कहा जा रहा है। ध्यान रहे रूस-यूक्रेन युद्ध अभी समाप्त नहीं हुआ है। जाहिर है, इन यूनिवर्सिटीज का मकसद ट्रांसफर मामले को अधिक से अधिक अटकाए रखना है ताकि स्टूडेंट्स उनके यहां बने रहें और यूनिवर्सिटी को उनसे होने वाली कमाई बंद न हो। लेकिन यह वक्त ऐसा है जिसमें यूनिवर्सिटी को अपनी कमाई से ऊपर उठकर स्टूडेंट्स के भविष्य के लिहाज से सोचना चाहिए। अगर यूनिवर्सिटी स्वेच्छा से ऐसा नहीं करती तो राजनयिक और जरूरत पड़े तो राजनीतिक स्तर पर भी यह मसला उठाया जाए और यह सुनिश्चित किया जाए कि इसका सरल और व्यावहारिक उपाय जल्द से जल्द निकले। 12



# Restoring identity with our stories

High-quality Indian books are key to building a uniquely Indian imagination for our children

KAVITA GUPTA SABHARWAL

In political TV dramas, I like *West-wing* about a US president but I love *Maharani* about a Bihar chief minister. In books about strong women, I love *Catherine the Great* by Robert Massie but I love *Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee about Draupadi. In life advice, I like Tolkien's *Not all who wander are lost* but I love Ghalib's *Gumrah to woh hain jo ghar se nikley hi nahin*.

As I age, I realise my preferences of 'like' and 'love' have more to do with who I am - my identity as an Indian - than the content. In the last few decades, too many Indian children have constructed confused identities by reading more about Western Civilisations than their own. The wonderful revolution in Indian Children's literature has the power to change this. But it must accelerate.

African American Educator Rudine Sims Bishop characterises great children's literature as Mirrors, Windows, and Doors.

Mirrors reflect a child's own life experiences; they become Windows by offering a view into the lives and experiences of others, and Doors that allow children to trust their imagination and enter a different world. She says, "When children cannot find themselves in the books they read, or the images that they find are distorted or negative, they learn powerful lessons on how they are valued in society."

Globally, children's reading has been homogenised; google searches for 'best children's writers' only turn up white writers. But the world is changing; revolutions in African-American and Hispanic literature are replacing caricaturist cultural stereotypes with stories and characters that capture the complexity and context of rich civilisations.

India need not replace the global but to balance it, acknowledging the impact of incomplete perspectives on identities, role models, and confidence. India has a deep civilisation, yet too many of our children's stories lazily adopt a Western context. Indian children's writing, starting with Ruskin Bond's wonderful stories about the idyllic romance of our Himala-

yas, is rejuvenated by books like *Queen of Ice* by Devika Rangachari (whose historical fiction about Kashmiri Queen Didda's ruthlessness would put Chingiz Khan to shame) and *Weed* by Paro Anand (whose realistic fiction about a Kashmiri child Umer, whose father became a militant, told the story of many Kashmiris).

Authors, storytellers and filmmakers are calling on publishers to introduce more diverse books with themes and characters that truly reflect our diverse country, unlock the treasures of our civilisation, and offer our youth a balanced intellectual diet with a vision of India@100 that need not be muscular but is representative, inspiring and inclusive.

India's multicultural and multilingual existence that sits so lightly on our shoulders - its effortlessness is stark as the rest of the world wilts under differences - owes its strength to plurality of beliefs and culture, carried in richly textured stories. You can't know what you don't know' said my Grandfather, who was the family story teller.



Atomising families and a digital invasion are taking away stories that were, as A K Ramanujan said, 'just a grandmother away'. Children's books give kids that opportunity today, to see outside themselves, to grow into adults who connect in meaningful ways to other people, and build knowledge that bridges contexts. As author, and storyteller Kwame Alexander said "The mind of an adult begins in the imagination of a child".

To construct a truly Indian imagination, children's book creators must capture the rich diversity of historical and contemporary India, publishers must provide the vast fields of hope for them to do their work, and teachers and parents must transfer these stories through curriculum and conversation. The caravan is gathering momentum.

Deepak Dalal's adventure stories in mystical Ladakh and magnificent Ranthambore are literature seated in geography. Bijal Vacchranjani's realistic fiction and information books on saving the planet, build knowledge on climate change and inspiring Indian environ-

mentalists, besides mentoring genre writing. Natasha Sharma's historical fiction brings alive Mughal India and her literary personifications convey language concepts that are relatable. Art advocate Ritu Khoda's foundation funds children's books on Indian artist lives. Rohini Nilekani's dual legacy with her own stories for her grandson and Pratham Books whose innovative Storyweaver platform is a #CreativeCommons treasure just waiting to be used as levelled readers, with activities, topics, and names, the vast diversity of India's children can relate to, to build critical reading skills and recover Covid learning loss.

Our children's writing must continue to move beyond personal chronology, mythology and folk tales - these are important but inadequate to convey the Ideas of India@75 or the hopes of India@100 - because our children will read more if the stories have characters they identify with, issues they confront at home and school, and places they relate to for the importance they hold in our past and present. Ending the gap in stories of 18% of the world's population is needed not just to complete the global narrative of a multicultural world, but to change India's future.

Making the profession of children's writing more financially sustainable needs more books to be sold. Our market for children's books is insignificant and dominated by Western titles. Changing this not only needs more compelling storytelling, but also better production, better editing, better illustrations, better covers, and thicker paper.

America recently lost a wonderful chronicler with the death of David McCullough who made the case for American history because it was "our greatest natural resource". All healthy civilisations think about a shared identity but the case for vibrant children's literature also includes cultivating the reading habit. Is there any tool as powerful as reading for lifelong learning? Is thinking about identity in reading really parochial? What can be done to increase the demand for Indian books? What can be done to increase the supply of high quality Indian books? Whatever else we do for India@100, we must create new shelves of children's books that capture our past and present because books are an endlessly renewable source of energy and inspiration for our children.

(The writer is Founder of Neev Schools and Co-Founder of Neev Literature Festival)

10/11/22



## The quiet, contemplative

# Life of a bookstore sales assistant

It is a delight to be lost among the shelves, and to touch and sniff the books you love. But Rashmi Vasudeva, trying her hand at bookselling, had not bargained for the stillness



It is a truth universally acknowledged that a bookworm in possession of a dreamy disposition must want to own a bookshop.

Jane Austen would sneer at this inelegant theft of her famous opening line, but she would certainly approve of the sentiment behind it.

When I volunteered to work at The Bookworm on Church Street, and write about the experience, it felt like a teenage dream coming true. I would experience being among books all day, sniff and sort them, feel their spines, and hug them (all in secret, of course).

When I walked to the bookstore on my first day as a sales assistant, it was drizzling. I was worried the rain would dampen my adventure. I expected the store, spread over 5,500 sq ft, to be yawningly empty. Who would sash around puddles to visit a bookstore?

Krishna Gowda, owner, knows me well (see box). As he welcomed me into the store, which he set up in 2016, the first thing I did was eavesdrop on three young people. A girl and a tall boy were discussing whether a book with upturned chairs on the cover was an appropriate buy. "Japanese is good," the girl advised. He was unconvinced. "It's not fantasy, bro, she will like it," the girl continued, recommending it with conviction. I moved closer unobtrusively to take a look at the title. 'Before the Coffee Gets Cold' by Toshiko Kawaguchi. Ah. One of those new-age must-reads.

I left them to their indecision and walked further inside. Store assistants were sorting and arranging books. About eight work at this store, in shifts of around eight hours. I climbed up a flight of winding stairs to where I knew rare and first editions were kept, mostly biographies and volumes of history.

### Quietest corner

For those who know, this is a sanctuary within a sanctuary, the place where the bookshop is at its quietest and yet feels most alive. The mustiness hits you nice and square, the air is still, and the silverfish vanish in a flash. Here, in the heart of Bengaluru's central business district, you can actually hear chattering mynahs and the distant call of the koel. Most importantly, here are books, delighting in their disorder, unsorted and primed for haphazardness—the raison d'être of bookstore romances.

Bookstores are romanticised in Hollywood. They play a big role in pop classics such as Tom Hanks' 'You've Got Mail' and 'When Harry Met Sally'. The latter made me steadfastly believe that I would look into the eyes of the love of my life as I moved a dusty tome aside. In reality, I would have sneezed in his face!

But the allure of bookstores comes not just from the chance of meeting a soulmate. Being a book lover is about believing in serendipity, even in this age of algorithms and 'You may also like' this recommendations. 'Moby Dick', considered one of the greatest novels of all time, was resurrected from obscurity—book critic Carl Van Doren spotted it at a second-hand bookstore, wrote about it, and catapulted it to classic status. Khushwant Singh chuckled in one of his columns that he found a copy of his 'Train to Pakistan' that had signed and gifted to a dear friend. An ardent

Auden fan, I stumbled on a clothbound edition of his collected poems on the first shelf I touched at a Charing Cross bookshop in London.

### Slow-living joy

No one understands this romance better than the independent bookseller. Unwittingly, they have become a part of the global slow-living movement and are flourishing, despite dire predictions, not just in urban India but also in cities like New York and London.

Good independent bookstores don't stock all books...the titles have to earn their space on the shelves. And booksellers like Krishna know their customers and their tastes, and recommend titles that do not appear on bestseller lists.

Krishna says he used to display fiction prominently earlier but lately, it is non-fiction that sells more and so he has changed tactics. "Japanese pop philosophy books like 'Ikigai', easy-to-read psychology/self-help books and works on AI sell the most," he says, adding current affairs and biographies too are catching up fast. What happens to books that are unsold? "Since we handpick books to buy, that does not happen much. But, once in a while, we donate books that remain unsold for long," he adds. While he obtains the new books from regular distributors and publishers, 90 per cent of the second-hand books he sells are sourced from customers.

"People spend hours looking at the books. Some tell me it gives them peace to be around books," he says. Do they steal as well, I ask, only half in jest. "Oh yes, it is a big problem. Especially Manga comics! We keep these near the billing counter but still lose them."

He loves his job, and says it has

given him knowledge and wealth. "But sometimes, customers can be cranky! Some want a particular edition with a particular cover. Some ask about a book without knowing either its title or its author. But we try! That's why they come back," he says.

Do they have a strategy to deal with rude customers? Says, shop assistant Shashidhar, "We don't get too many rude people but when we do, we deal with them politely or simply leave them alone. People who come to bookshops are generally well-behaved madams." Krishna says disputes are few and far between but when they do arise, it is about discounts. "We politely tell them to look elsewhere if they are dissatisfied... In fact, we even give them directions to other bookstores in the area!"

### Hybrid model

It is a mistake to assume that indie bookstores, full of old-world charm, are caught in a time warp. They are tech-savvy, and know how the business is panning out online. After the second lockdown, Krishna tweeted that his store was open for business, and his post went viral. "That was a big surprise and it encouraged us to try out delivering books. Now, a hybrid model has come into practice," says Krishna. On an average, he courier 10-15 parcels a day. Even as we chat, he gently tries to persuade a regular customer to buy an "entire set" instead of just one book.

For well-known writer Vivek Shanbhag, a regular to indie bookshops, the appeal is in the whole package. "When you pick up a book and you know that it has passed through a few hands, it connects all of us. Then there is the element of surprise. I look for a book and I find something else. That is how I have found

many new writers. This doesn't happen online. And you always bump into someone you know or you make new friends—because once you are in a bookshop, you know only book lovers come in!"

On my first day as a sales assistant, I browsed to my heart's content, chatting with Krishna and his colleagues and smiling at the occasional customer. So at home I felt among those shelves that I had to remind myself that I was there for a story!

### Second day

The season is wet, but thankfully, the rain let up a bit. Krishna was already in. On a typical day, he comes in at 10.30 am, about half an hour after the shop is open for business. Trusted assistants such as Preetham and Shashi come in earlier. Krishna's first job is to go through his WhatsApp messages and sort out requests for online deliveries!

"I reply to every one of them, check addresses and get the packages ready," he says. Once that's done, he looks into the pricing of second-hand books. His assistants first check the books for damage, glue them up and repair what they can. Krishna then determines their prices. Labels are stuck accordingly.

He spends his afternoons taking stock and ordering books from distributors and publishers. Since he is expanding his online business, he is busy rearranging his stocks. "This is everyday work... what I truly enjoy is recommending books to my customers and hunting down books in response to unusual requests," he says.

I am now eager to talk to customers, but it is a lazy afternoon. A few customers walk in, including an apparently bad-tempered regular—one of their oldest customers. He admonishes an assistant, "Grow your knowledge." He turns to me and gives the same advice.

After two hours, I feel strangely antsy. Am I bored living out my childhood dream? Or am I not as secure with silence as I imagined I would be? Bookselling is a curious business—not only does it ask you to be comfortable with long bouts of stillness, but it also demands that you be a people's person. I now wanted to try and sell something.

### I sold a book, or did I?

I walked up to the children's section in the hope of finding a kindred soul. A young girl walked in, looking lost. I smiled at her tentatively. She did not respond. This was more difficult than I imagined. I pretended to be busy, but kept an eye out. She was certainly looking for something specific. I gathered my courage and approached her. "Any particular book?" "Yes, Harry Potter and the Cursed Child."

Ah, the relief! The serendipity of which I have been thinking so much about! That Harry Potter should come to my rescue in a quiet corner of an indie bookstore says it all. Of course, it was a book I, a Potterhead, had read. I felt like a qualified sales assistant. We both hunted for the copy together and found two! She smiled. I did too. Perhaps my first (and only!) sale.



The reporter (left) at The Bookworm with its owner Krishna Gowda.

PHOTO BY RISHITA KHANNA

### Potterhead story

In 2002, I had not heard of Harry Potter. Just out of an English literature course, I had stuck to my Thomas Hardy and George Eliot. Krishna, who then used to sell books on the pavement near the now abandoned Shringar Complex on MG Road, was becoming my go-to bookseller. One day, he picked up a lot book with a dragon on its cover and gave it to me. "Read this, madam. It is nice." It was 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire', the fourth book in the series. That evening, I didn't read it—I devoured it. The next morning, I ran back to Krishna and bought all the earlier books in the series. This was born another Potterhead and a friendship that has lasted two decades.

### Book streets

Every cultured city has a book street. Kolkata has College Street. Mumbai has 'Book Street' near Flora Fountain, and London has Charing Cross Road. Church Street did not set out to become Bengaluru's book paradise but it is one now. The trend goes to Premier Bookshop and its owner T S Shanbhag, who offered a 20 per cent discount and had an unerring ability to find what you asked for. Once it closed in 2009, its patrons found solace in stores like Blossom Book House and The Bookworm. Goode's Book Republic and Book Hive followed. Of course, there was always Select Bookstore off Brigade Road, known only to bibliophiles.

Like this story? Email: [dhenuvati@deccanherald.com](mailto:dhenuvati@deccanherald.com)



# India's low HDI rank reflects poverty, inequality

The United Nations HDI Report must warn the policy makers in India of growing inequality and stress among people

A rank loss on the UN Human Development Index is a grave indicator of India's overall social and economic performance that invites investment and global participation. India slipped to 132 from 131 last year, which was 130 in 2015.

The UN Human Development Report (HDR) noted slippage on quality of life, attainments to basic schooling, healthcare, job losses, penury, and overall lack of opportunities during the Covid-19 pandemic in many countries.

India needs course corrections for holistic happiness and not mere cosmetic achievements. The growth as per HDI is not merely the GDP but beyond it. It was created to emphasise that



SHIVAJI SARKAR

(The author is a policy analyst)

people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not the economic growth alone.

It is a complex composite index that reveals more than the GDP, a gauge of incomes or output. The HDI is computed on the basis of three parameters – life expectancy, mean years of schooling and average per capita national gross incomes. The per capita income of an Indian has fallen from Rs 94,270 in 2019 to Rs 85,110 in 2021 and per capita GDP as per World Bank at is \$1961.42, 16 per cent of world average.

India's HDI values of 0.633, down from 0.642 in 2020, correlating to a "medium human development category country" denote miser-

able conditions, including falling life expectancy from 69.7 to 67.2. It is behind Bangladesh (129th), Bhutan (127th), Sri Lanka (73rd) and China (79th). Switzerland with 0.962 got the top global ranking, meaning less than the best UN parameters.

Income inequalities amplify failings on other HDI indices of human development. While most reports suggest inequality has increased in India because of a rise in poverty and shrinkage of the middle class, the report by National Bureau of Economic Research shows a decline in inequality. This is because Indians in higher percentiles of the income distribution saw larger relative income declines during the pandemic. However, it

fails to reflect the deprivations of poor households.

An Oxfam report, considered biased by the official agencies, says inequality has been rising sharply in the last three decades. For these three decades, since the 1990 neo-liberalism, rhetoric of open and free markets, less government and less regulation, more private players and entrepreneurs, has been concomitant with the slow death of key public institutions.

The HDR appreciates India's support to the vulnerable sections, South-South cooperation, International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure and net zero carbon emission targets. The State of Inequality in India Report released by Bibek

Debroy, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) in May, 2022, that inequities across sectors of health, education, household characteristics and the labour market make the population more vulnerable and triggers a descent into multidimensional poverty.

The World Inequality Report 2022 says the world's most extreme inequality has been observed in India. It notes India is a "poor country and very unequal, with an affluent elite". The WIR says the top 10 per cent of the country's population account for 57 per cent of the national income, of which 22 per cent is held by the top 1 per cent. While a small section of India's populace enjoys 5-star privileges, for the bottom

50 per cent sustainability of life is still a challenge. This is due to a variety of factors, including but not limited to, loss of job opportunities, an erratic unorganised sector, and rising poverty and inflation. The bottom 50 per cent are earning Rs 53160 and the top ten percent Rs 1166520, 20 times more.

The Gini (inequality in income distribution) coefficient points to an increasing inequality in India. The coefficient in 2014 was 34.4 per cent (100 per cent indicates full inequality and 0 per cent full equality). The coefficient increased to 47.9 per cent in 2018. India is said to be next to Russia in the world in terms of inequality.

The report also suggests that stress, sadness, anger, and

worry have been increasing over the last decade, now reaching record levels. The HDR cautions that "uncertainty, inequality and insecurity go hand in hand with polarization and lack of trust". It finds political volatility becoming reality.

Developing countries are entering a divergent social, political and economic period with sharp downside risks for the most vulnerable and regression in gender equality. India's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) increased five times between \$443 in 2000 and \$2014 in 2019. This doesn't mean a uniform rise in income. The top one per cent in India earned 21 per cent of total country's income in 2019. This was 11 per cent in 1990.



# STEM pretensions

According to the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), the top two universities in the country are IIT-Madras and the IISc. Why is it that neither of these two schools has ever made it to the list of 200 top-ranked schools worldwide, whereas tiny Singapore is represented by three universities?

'Frogs in wells know nothing of the sea', so goes the Chinese proverb.

While there are almost 9,000 technical universities and institutions in India approved by the All-India Council on Technical Education (AICTE), more than 90% of the students graduating every year with degrees in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields from these schools have no employable skills. Why?

Irrespective of their children's attitudes or academic desires, most Indian parents want their offspring to major in one of the STEM fields, simply because most job openings are in technology or engineering. And after obtaining their undergraduate degrees, a large number of engineering students obtain an MBA and opt for careers in management, which pay even more. Hardly any pursue careers in research or academia. No wonder there is a dearth of qualified faculty at most technical institutes, especially at the PG level.

Upon admission to a technical institute, students are confronted by a standard set of courses, the syllabi of which have been freely copied from websites of Western schools, mostly taught by faculty who barely understand the material they are teaching. Rote scribbling on the board by the instructor followed by rote memorisation by the student, with neither any wiser for it. Teaching for the exam passes for education, but who

cares. You want critical thinking? Not a chance.

Though schools may use 'outside' examiners to create the final exams, it makes no difference since there is an archive of questions to be drawn from, and this archive is available to any examiner. Accessible to students too, for a price.

The "excellence" of an institute's programmes is advertised based largely on the number of jobs its graduates are hired for by top companies, especially MNCs, and the size of the 'pay packet'. US and EU companies are given top billing while Indian

**Roger Marshall**

a computer scientist, a newly minted Luddite and a cynic



MNCs are ranked lower on the list. Just like the IITs, then the NITs, etc.

Postgraduate institutions promote themselves based on how many PhD degrees they have granted and how many research articles have been published. AICTE's insistence on faculty publications for promotion has adversely impacted the research environment. Quite often, faculty publish their work in one or more of the several hundred bogus journals that have magically popped up to serve the need. The 'publish or perish' mantra has given way to 'pay to publish'.

Likewise, hundreds of 'international' research conferences are hosted in India every year. Sadly, neither the editors nor the reviewers have the requisite credentials to justify their roles in this highly lucrative pub-

lishing game. In what is a reciprocal transaction, faculty ask other authors to cite their papers in order to boost their citation index.

In addition to capitation fees, tuition rates are quite steep at private institutions. While public universities are cheaper, corruption and politically motivated appointments are issues at these. If it takes a Rs 2-8 crore bribe to be appointed vice chancellor, to recoup the 'investment', the appointee will need to charge several lakhs for filling each vacant university position. There have been published reports of students having to pay significant sums of money to have their PhD theses approved. Ah, the evolving food chain!

The success of the IT industry in India can be solely attributed to finding enough bodies to fill jobs that have already been created for problems that have already been identified and solutions found.

Practical solutions with nation-wide applicability are yet to be found for uniquely Indian problems, such as the lack of clean drinking water, proper sanitation facilities, or continuous availability of electricity. IIT graduates, who are perceived as being smart, haven't found any solutions to these problems because they are busy seeking answers on the web using Samsung or Apple smartphones that they did not design, with software that they certainly did not create. Meanwhile, Toyota SUVs and the Italian-designed autorickshaws choke the nation's pothole-filled roadways.

Identifying a polluted lake using a few sensors and creating an app is a no-brainer. Cleaning up the lake and keeping it clean is the hard part.

You make your bed, you lie in it.

24/12/11



# Are uniforms really uniform?

BARKHA SHAH

Looking back at some of my old school pictures, I notice how every student's uniform differed in length. Some tunics stayed at knee-length; the others passed down from older siblings, were hemmed but still hung below the knees. For many more, the uniforms stayed above the knees, well-paired with rolled-down socks and tightly fitted belts.

Commuting back and forth from school was by cycle-rickshaws many times. I remember how we would place our school bags strategically in front of our folded knees to avoid any embarrassment. And if we ever cycled on our own to school, we would be conscious of our tunics not rolling up. Many schoolmates, therefore, would utilise cycling shorts to steer clear of gazes. As design consultant, Vidya Mukundan says, "Because of the clothes that girls wear, they are always made conscious of their bodies." Vidya designed gender-neutral uniforms for a school in Kerala where the focus was on comfort and convenience. Vidya is also a filmmaker, actor and writer who drew from her personal experiences to design a uniform that spelt freedom for both genders. "As a girl child, I remember avoiding sports because of the skirts we had to wear in school. The concept of uniforms must change to overcome these limitations," she adds.

Many schools have adopted a similar stance. Ankur Montessori in Bengaluru does not have a uniform per se but recommends comfortable trousers and T-shirts for kids. Somika Ankur, an early childhood educator with Ankur explains the reason behind it. "In a school environment, it is especially important for little girls to feel enabled to participate in the same activities as their male counterparts. We don't want to convey the message that girls can't climb the jungle gym, play in the mud, hang upside down or sit cross-legged on the floor because of the clothes they wear," she says, adding that children begin to form ideas about their place in the world at a young age and drawing attention to gender differences may not be the right way forward.

The shift in uniform design, nonetheless, has met with resistance in some quarters as seen in Kerala. As Vidya puts it, "Whenever good changes happen in our society, the patriarchal



system tries to impose its way through religion, culture and biology. The clothes themselves do not come with the label of gender. We started assigning gender to clothes based on our beliefs." Vidya is, nonetheless, hopeful of evolution, even if it takes time. "Clothes should reflect comfort, freedom and equality," she insists.

Comfort in terms of clothing, especially for sports, saw takers at the European Beach Handball Championship too. In 2021, the women's Norwegian handball team was fined for switching to comfortable shorts instead of the official dress code of bikini bottoms. Similar dictations of dress codes called for objections in the case of badminton and golf. While in one case, the guidelines insisted women players wear skirts or dresses, in the other, the length of the skirts became a point of discussion. Interestingly, in all the above cases, whether it was schools or international sports, the debates were only around the uniforms of one gender. For the other gender, nothing seemed to have changed over the years, besides perhaps colour or design.

The responsibility lies on many of us for this as well. Scores of times, we have found ourselves guilty of dolling our little girls up so that they look like princesses. Perhaps, it is time to let them be free, both physically and mentally.

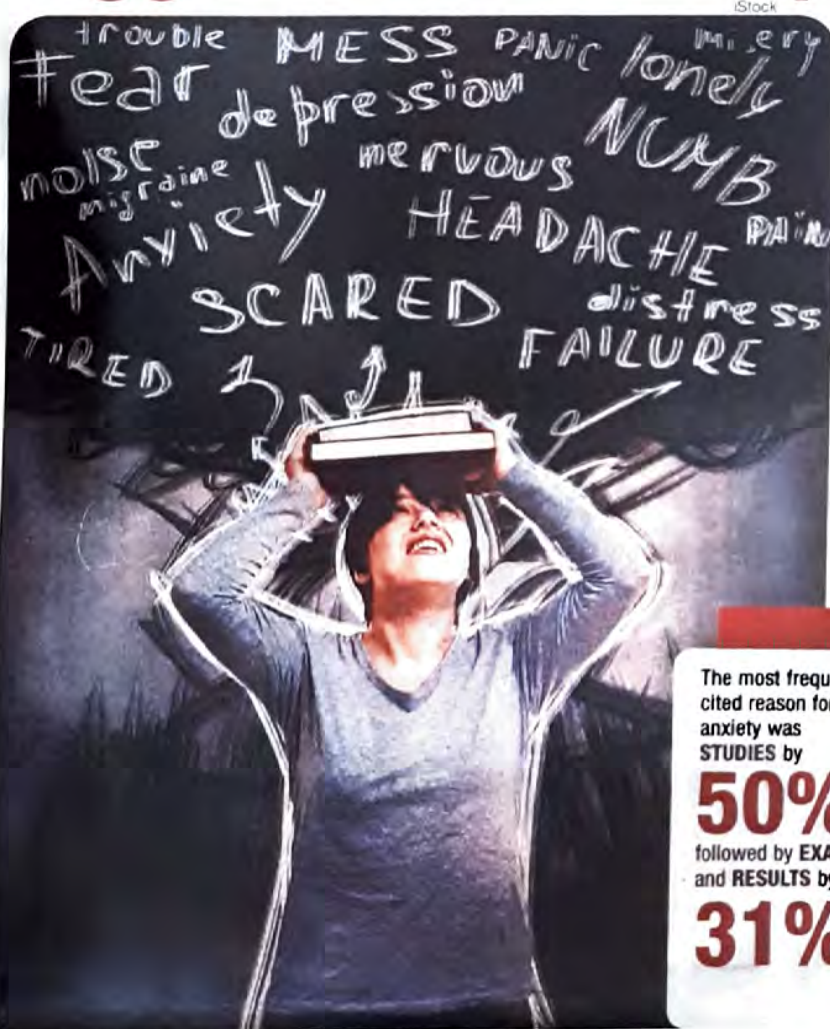
Skirts and dresses have their space. But maybe not in schools and maybe not limited to gender. Jaimil Mehta, dancer, artist and choreographer who has a global social media following, would definitely believe so, considering his flair for dancing in skirts. With #MentInSkirts, his reels seek to make clothes gender neutral too.

20/10/24



# NCERT issues mental health guidelines to schools

# Exams and peer pressure among biggest stressors, say experts



As per the new guidelines, schools need to develop a safe environment for students, while teachers must be trained to identify mental health triggers

**Riya Sharma**

**F**ollowing a recent survey on the mental health of schoolchildren – that highlights exams and peer pressure as some of the major factors for stress and anxiety among students – the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has issued guidelines to schools to better safeguard students' mental health. Talking about how schools are seen as a safe and secure environment for students, who spend one-third of their day and 220 days of a year there, the guidelines stress that it is "the school's responsibility to ensure the safety, security, health, and well-being of all children in schools and hostels". They further state that teachers must be trained in identifying early signs in students for attachment issues, separation anxiety, school refusal, communication issues, anxiety patterns, depressive states, conduct related issues, intellectual disability, and more.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 7**

## WHAT IS STRESSING STUDENTS OUT?

The most frequently cited reason for anxiety was

# 50%

followed by **EXAM**  
and **RESULTS** by

**31%**

**29%** of responses reported lagging behind in studies due to lack of concentration

**36%** of students agreed to doing well in studies for social value/approval seeking

**33%** of the respondents agreed that **they** try to please friends most of the times

**45%**  
mentioned feeling tired  
& low on energy 2-3  
times in a week

**34%**  
felt tearful

**27%**  
felt lonely

Source: Mental Health and Well-being of School Students Survey 2022



# Mental health needs to be integrated into the school system, say experts



...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

## 'FAMILY AND PEER PRESSURE, LOW SELF-ESTEEM ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES STUDENTS FACE'

From worrying about their academic performance to dealing with family and peer pressure, these are some of the issues that school-going children face, share mental health experts. "Students, especially adolescents, face a lot of stressors from multiple domains. Brain and bodily changes, personality changes, changes in social dynamics, interests and the additional academic demands, all have a collective effect on their overall well-being. Some of the most common issues that students come up with include ideological differences and communication challenges with parents, peer pressure, personality changes leading to increased aggression, self-esteem and confidence issues, sleep and appetite-related problems, anxiety and panic, difficulty in attention and concentration," shares Dr Ruchi Sharma, Consultant Psychologist, HCMCT Manipal Hospital, Dwarka.

## 'COLLABORATING WITH PARENTS, SENSITISING THEM IS ALSO IMPORTANT'

Moly Suryawanshi, HOD Wellness, Ridge Valley School stresses that mental health is an integral part of the overall well-being of a child. "A child spends nearly one-fourth of their day in the school with his educators and peers. School is the second safe space that the child creates in his mind after home and teachers are the second guardians after his parents. Therefore, it is important that schools ensure a safe and healthy learning en-

vironment for each child. It can be tough to tell if troubling behaviour in a child is just a part of growing up or a problem that should be discussed with a mental health professional. But the most common issues that surface are related to separation anxiety and excessive internet usage concerns which result in poor attention span, and poor self-regulation stemming from which could be conditions of attention deficit, hyperactivity, poor executive functions, and communication skills being impacted. We work extensively in identifying these early signs and collaborate with the parent body, sensitising them and creating a uniform environment of emotional upliftment for each child. From one-on-one intervention to educator-parent sensitising sessions to cognitive behaviour therapy, all come together to support the child in bringing back their socio-emotional equilibrium," she says.

## PANDEMIC ADDED TO SCHOOL KIDS' STRESS: PARENTS

Getting used to online classes during the pandemic, and then having to return to classrooms now has also added to the stress levels of students. Sushma Rajput, a parent of a Class 9 student, shares, "The way a classroom functions has changed several times in the last two years.

With the pressure of academics, peers, pandemic also added to the anxiety among students." The NCERT's guidelines also mention the need for schools to set up a mental health advisory panel, and a school-based mental health programme and offer pedagogical support to ensure mental well-being of students, while engaging with parents.

**IT IS IMPORTANT THAT SCHOOLS ENSURE A SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR EACH CHILD**

— Moly Suryawanshi,  
HOD Wellness,  
Ridge Valley School



# The lost beat of *sarkari* schools

**R**ECENTLY, I met a young grandniece pursuing a PhD in Oxford on the impact of the New Education Policy on primary and secondary education. I know next to nothing about the policy but I do remember an awful lot about the state of primary and secondary education in Kumaon in the first two decades after Independence. This is partly because my father was in the state's Education Service and deeply invested in his job. Also, as I spent the first few years of my school-life in Nainital, my memories of that time are vivid even today. As we spoke, I realised why a successful system of state-supported education had slowly faded away.

My mother used to say that Almora was among the Indian towns with the highest literacy rate at Independence. This I can endorse as I recall that virtually everyone who worked for us was functionally literate, could write their own letters home and were conversant with rudimentary arithmetic as well. One of my aunts had a cook, Daulat, renowned for his foul temper and tongue. As the Brahmin *maharaj* who presided over the kitchen in her home, he was also the *pandit* who did the daily *puja*. I still remember many *shlokas* and prayers he taught us as we sang along with him.

This was probably due to the fact that the colonial government had laid a huge network of primary and secondary schools all over Kumaon. Even remote tribal outposts, such as Munsiyari, had an Uchch Madhyamik Shiksha Sansthan (Intermediate College) established in the 1920s. This was largely to serve the Raj's purpose and create a huge force of Class III and IV (clerks and *chaprasis*) for the colonial offices. For several years later (right up to the 1970s), the Lucknow Secretariat and the Central Secretariat in Delhi had several Kumaoni *babus* and *chaprasis*.

The teachers in these government schools were often the local *pujari* or grocer. They belonged to the village, were widely respected, and had a vested interest in ensuring the village children learnt their lessons well. Teaching then was not a profession but a calling and for years, these old teachers (*Maa's sa'abs*) were venerated by not just the students, but the entire village. The emphasis was on Hindi, Sanskrit, basic English and arithmetic: the three vital Rs.

Alongside these modest schools were the posh boarding schools set up in our hill stations. Run by Christian missionaries, early students here were mostly English and Anglo-Indian children. Later, Indians were admitted but they came from the Army top brass, tea planters, feudal families — to become the future *babalog*. A fair amount of proselytising too went on under the benign gaze of the state. More significantly, this introduced a division between English-medium and Hindi-medium education that was to have a profound social fallout later.

The rot set in when India decided to utilise the bulk of its modest education budget to set up engineering and medical schools and universities. While this was a much-needed step forward to provide higher education to those students who could not afford to go to foreign universities, it also spelt the gradual decline of the erstwhile network of village and district-level primary and secondary schools. As English assumed a greater role in social and public life, no one wanted to study in the local *sarkari* school and learn just Hindi and Sanskrit. Soon, there were 'Inglist-medium' schools run by private entrepreneurs who could hardly write their own name but charged huge sums for the 'education' they offered. You can see them everywhere now, some transformed into computer and coaching centres but dodgy in terms of the quality of instruction.

There is something else and that relates more to social and cultural anthropology than anything else. In Kumaon, Brahmins have traditionally occupied a very significant part of the village community. Some were landed but many survived on their learning and *shastric* knowledge. The temples provided them with a huge *jajmani* (as for the *pandas* in Mathura, Varanasi and Haridwar) so food and *dakshina* received from clients gave them a basic level of comfort. Added to this was the high sense of social entitlement as the learned *pandit* of the village. Often, they lived and died in the same place and so retained their links with students throughout their lives. This is now unthinkable and has led to a displacement that is difficult to quantify, but is a contributing factor to today's social upheaval. The traditional respect for the *guru* and knowledge has become, more often than not, a deep contempt for 'useless knowledge'. Information and digital devices have now virtually replaced the village *pathshala* and its quaint system of teaching.

Another interesting fact of this old system was that virtually no Kumaoni girl or woman remained illiterate. The heavy hand of patriarchy often meant that many were not sent to school, but home schooling made up for this. My mother spoke in awe of her blind grandfather, a renowned Sanskrit scholar and astrologer (this is why maths was at par with Sanskrit in the old Kumaon school system), who made them learn the *Shabdakosh* by heart and could spot a fault when they recited it to him. All those who grew up learning Sanskrit have tremendous mnemonic recall and could recite tomes learnt by rocking to an inner beat.

I wonder if that lost beat will ever return.



**TOUCHSTONES**  
IRA PANDE

While utilising the bulk of the modest education budget to set up engineering and medical schools as well as universities was a much-needed step forward, it also spelt the gradual decline of the erstwhile network of village and district-level primary and secondary schools. As English assumed a greater role in social and public life, no one wanted to study in the local *sarkari* school and learn just Hindi and Sanskrit.

A successful system of state-supported education is slowly fading away.

TRIBUNE PHOTO



# Latest tech can reduce cheating in entrance exams

We must create an environment where exams can be conducted in a fair manner, writes **Tanmoy Chakraborty**

PHOTO FOR REPRESENTATION



**W**ithin the larger scope of education, conducting and monitoring examinations is one area where AI/ML can be of assistance. We already have access to many software such as Proctor U, Proctor IO, Examroom.AI, Exam-Lock, etc, that provide web-based monitoring of exams. We can think of these systems as digital invigilators, which, based on a combination of rule-based and ML driven heuristics, try to determine whether the examinee is doing an action that is not allowed in the examination. For example, by gauging a student's eye movements and keystroke frequency, the e-invigilator can determine if the student is trying to open a new tab or a window on the current system or moving their eyes to read off a secondary screen. The speed of answering questions and keystroke patterns of the registered student can be used to determine if it is the same student authoring their exams or not. In an online setting, one can also use a network analyser to find which applications on the student's system are occupying bandwidth; this can also help identify if the student is using more than screens.

For offline settings, we can still take the help of object and motion detection systems to keep a watch on all the students and have the analysis reported to the invigilator in real time. In both online and offline settings where students are giving exams out of exam centres, we can consider employing real-time plagiarism detection to determine if identical answers are being circulated among students within

the centre. Even though states such as UP and Bihar have low technology penetration, national-level exams that employ digital proctoring like JEE are already in place. Technology can help human invigilators better monitor a larger batch of students. To bring technical solutions closer to exam centres that are poorly equipped, one has to think in the direction of stand-alone hardware systems that can be put in each class and which can use data streams from devices like Bluetooth, CCTV cameras and noise-capturing equipment. However, one must extrapolate their usage with a pinch of salt, as the problem in states like UP and Bihar is not just technical but must be addressed at an institutional and societal level.

## Well-maintained centres are important

AI-assisted systems are limited in their ability to invigilate like humans. One such issue is the limited purview that cameras can provide and contextual information for exams with different rules like open book exams. Another issue is the ability of the student to contest a falsely predicted instance of cheating, as any attempt to interact with the system during the examination will be blocked and reported.

Guaranteeing that students sitting at home have rooms, access to electricity and stable wifi during the exam hours is challenging. To overcome this, well-maintained examination centres that accommodate varying examination needs should be opened across the country.

*(The author is associate professor, IIT Delhi)*



# सिविल सेवा परीक्षा पर उठते प्रश्न

इन दिनों संघ लोक सेवा आयोग (यूपीएससी) की ओर से आयोजित की जाने वाली सिविल सेवा की मुख्य परीक्षा हो रही है। यह 25 सितंबर तक चलने वाली है। यह परीक्षा तीन चरणों में होती है—प्रारंभिक परीक्षा, मुख्य परीक्षा और साक्षात्कार। इस अवसर पर यह स्मरण रखना आवश्यक है कि पिछले वर्ष की प्रारंभिक परीक्षा का कट आफ मार्क्स 43.77 प्रतिशत रहा था। ध्यान देने की बात यह है कि 2016 में यह 58 प्रतिशत था, जो क्रमशः गिरते-गिरते इस दयनीय दशा को प्राप्त कर चुका है। इस वर्ष इसमें और भी गिरावट आने की आशंका है। पांच जून को हुई प्रारंभिक परीक्षा यदि सामान्य रूप से हुई होती तो कोई बात नहीं थी, लेकिन इस बार की परीक्षा में जिस तरह के अनसुने, अनजाने और अनपढ़े प्रश्नों का ढेर लगा दिया गया, उसने परीक्षार्थियों को बेहद निराश किया। पूछे गए प्रश्नों को देखकर इन्हें समझ में ही नहीं आ रहा था कि वे अगले वर्ष की तैयारी कैसे करें? वे बुरी तरह भ्रमित हुए।

प्रारंभिक परीक्षा के परिणाम की घोषणा से पता चला कि लगभग एक हजार पदों के लिए करीब 13 हजार उम्मीदवारों का चयन होना था, जो हुआ, लेकिन परिणाम आने के बाद अफरातफरी इस बात को लेकर मची कि बड़े-बड़े दिग्गज धराशायी हो गए। यह स्थिति प्रारंभिक परीक्षा के बारे में कुछ मूलभूत एवं अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न खड़े करती है। पहला और सामान्य सा प्रश्न तो यही है कि क्या देश की इतनी प्रतिष्ठित उच्च स्तरीय प्रतियोगी परीक्षा का इतना कम कट आफ मार्क्स आना सम्मानजनक है? यह हास्यास्पद बात है कि इसी परीक्षा के सामान्य अध्ययन के द्वितीय प्रश्न पत्र को मात्र क्वालीफाई करना पड़ता है, जो सीसैट के नाम से अधिक जाना जाता है और ऐसा करने के लिए 33 प्रतिशत अंक की जरूरत होती है। दूसरे प्रश्न के रूप में यह बात आती है कि क्या यह गिरावट इस परीक्षा में बैठने वाले युवाओं के गिरते हुए शैक्षणिक एवं प्रतिभा के स्तर के कारण है? यदि ऐसा है, तब तो यह अत्यंत चिंताजनक है। कोई भी राष्ट्र चाहेगा कि उसके सर्वोच्च स्तरीय प्रशासन में देश की अच्छी से अच्छी प्रतिभाएं आएँ। इसलिए इन सेवाओं को इतना आकर्षक एवं प्रतिष्ठापूर्ण बनाया जाता है। यदि हम ऐसा नहीं कर पा रहे हैं तो हमें



डा. विजय अवावाल

**यह पहेली सुलझनी चाहिए कि यूपीएससी की प्रारंभिक परीक्षा की गुणवत्ता मुख्य परीक्षा की तुलना में दयनीय क्यों है?**



भ्रम के शिकार होते परीक्षार्थी • फाइल

अपनी प्रणाली पर पूरी गंभीरता से विचार करना होगा, लेकिन एक अच्छी बात यह है कि ऐसा है नहीं। इसके प्रमाण के तौर पर मुख्य परीक्षा के कट आफ मार्क्स को देखा जा सकता है, जिसे प्रतिभा का संपूर्ण एवं वास्तविक परीक्षण करने वाली परीक्षा माना जाता है। 2016 में साक्षात्कार में जाने के लिए न्यूनतम 787 अंकों की जरूरत थी। यह पिछले वर्ष की परीक्षा में 745 (कुल अंक 1750) रही। 2016 में साक्षात्कार के अंकों को जोड़ने के बाद चयन के लिए न्यूनतम अंक थे-988, जो पिछले साल 944 रहे। साक्षात्कार 275 अंकों का होता है। ये आंकड़े बताते हैं कि यदि प्रतिभा में गिरावट आई होती तो उसका प्रभाव मुख्य परीक्षा और साक्षात्कार, इन दोनों पर पड़ता।

आखिर प्रारंभिक परीक्षा के अंकों में इतनी कमी क्यों है? इसका उत्तर बहुत साफ है और वह यह कि पिछले कुछ वर्षों से सामान्य अध्ययन के रूप में जिस तरह के उलटे-पुलटे और कठिन प्रश्न पूछे जा रहे हैं, वे सामान्य न होकर विशेष से भी विशेष हो गए हैं। उदाहरण के रूप में इस वर्ष 2018 में अफ्रीका की एक शरणार्थी बस्ती

बीडीबीडी के बारे में पूछा गया। जिन चार ग्रंथों में से जैन ग्रंथों का चयन करना था, उनके नाम थे नीतिपकरण, परिशिष्टपर्वण, अवदानशतक और त्रिशष्टलक्षण महापुराण। चाड, गिनी, लेबनान और ट्यूनीशिया की घटनाओं पर प्रश्न था। मध्यकालीन भारत से एक प्रश्न था कि कौन कुलाह-दान कहलाते हैं? चाय बोर्ड के विदेश में कहाँ-कहाँ कार्यालय हैं? प्रभाजी कश्मीर बमबारी प्रणाली क्या है? ऐसे अनेक प्रश्न हैं। यह पाया गया है कि इस बार के कुल सौ प्रश्नों में लगभग 55 प्रश्न अत्यंत कठिन श्रेणी के हैं। बहुत से प्रश्न तो ऐसे हैं कि उनके उत्तर के रूप में दिए गए विकल्पों के समूहों से भी सही उत्तर तक पहुंचने का कोई सूत्र नहीं मिलता। अधिकांश पूछे गए तथ्य भी ऐसे होते हैं कि उनका ज्ञान या सिविल सेवा के करियर से कोई संबद्धता नहीं होती।

प्रारंभिक परीक्षा के साथ एक दिक्कत यह भी है कि न तो इसका पाठ्यक्रम बहुत स्पष्ट है, और न ही इसके ज्ञान का स्तर। हालांकि यूपीएससी ने मुख्य परीक्षा के लिए इन दोनों का स्पष्ट प्रविधान किया हुआ है, लेकिन इस प्रारंभिक परीक्षा के लिए नहीं। यदि हम व्यावहारिक रूप में मुख्य परीक्षा के निर्देशों को प्रारंभिक परीक्षा के लिए मानकर चलें तो फिलहाल वह सुसंगत नहीं दिख रहा है।

मुख्य परीक्षा में पूछे जाने वाले प्रश्नों के बारे में आयोग ने कहा है कि 'प्रश्न ऐसे होंगे कि कोई भी सुशिक्षित व्यक्ति बिना किसी विशेष अध्ययन के इनका उत्तर दे सके।' सामान्य अध्ययन का सामान्य और एकमात्र अर्थ भी यही होता है, लेकिन प्रारंभिक परीक्षा में यह बात दिखाई नहीं देती। यही कारण है कि इसमें अंकों का प्रतिशत लगातार कम होता जा रहा है। जबकि मुख्य परीक्षा के अंतिम परिणाम के अंकों में एक प्रकार की स्थिरता बनी हुई है, सिवाय 2013 को मुख्य परीक्षा के। यूपीएससी को चाहिए कि वह इस स्थिति पर पूरी संवेदनशीलता के साथ विचार करके इसे प्रतियोगियों के स्तर के अनुकूल बनाए, ताकि एक तार्किक एवं व्यवस्थित रूप से उनका मानसिक परीक्षण हो सके। वर्तमान के 'बौद्धिक अन्याय' को उसे दूर करना ही चाहिए।

(लेखक पूर्व प्रशासनिक अधिकारी है।)

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# Internet of Things and smart wearable devices

**PROF. SOURAV SANA**

The internet as we know today had a humble beginning as a data packet sharing project of the US Defense Advanced Research Projects (DARPA) in 1973. Today it has metamorphosed into a massive decentralized juggernaut that is used to coordinate, collaborate and most importantly control the way in which modern societies transcend borders and languages in communicating and carrying out commerce.

Once human communication became an ubiquitous phenomenon, the next frontier for internet supremacy has been controlling machine communication. The marvel of silicon has already ensured that most mechanical devices and machines have electronic circuits at their heart.

With a simple chip connecting the electronics to the internet, now these machines can be controlled from anywhere through smartphone applications. The internet brought families closer where expatriates living at say Boston could communicate regularly with elderly parents at Bangalore through audio and video. The health and status of electronic devices at their native place located thousands of miles away could be easily probed through Human-to-Machine (H2M) communication. Connected devices like smart watch on our wrists can report important health parameters when demanded. Such parameters are also constantly monitored using Machine-to-Machine (M2M) communications and any anomaly or deviation from the usual pattern is immediately alerted. In effect slowly such devices are taking control over our lives facilitating smarter choices through Machine-to-Human (M2H) communication, resulting in better quality of life. Application of such systems range from simple household devices to extremely complicated industrial tools enabling process automation and reduction of manual labor costs. This network of physical objects or "things" having sensors inside them that can connect to the "internet" for the purpose of transfer of information with other devices, systems or humans is popularly known as "Internet of Things" or IoT. These connected devices are encouraging



businesses to redesign their value chain and strategies. The immediate benefits across domains is access to device information on demand and better synchronization between processes helping in automation.

Already segments like those of Utilities and Transports have brought the technology mainstream. Water meters can notify users of leakages and possible contamination. Electric meters can detect potential line faults and send alerts to the users. In the transport segment, the new-age cars already have such smart sensors fitted inside the cars. A network of such sensors is also helping us to reach the next innovation frontier for the connected cars and smart fleets. These sensors can detect when a particular equipment will fail and can trigger safety measures and alerts in advance. In cold weather, the owner can remotely trigger the heating of the engine before embarking on a journey. In the agriculture and farming segment, these IoTs help monitor light, temperature, humidity, etc. in the soil with



provision for automatic irrigation.

In segments like Retail, IoT is used to optimize inventory and reduce wastages. Smart cameras or smart weight panels can sense when the items in the shelves are below a given threshold and trigger reordering. In the Smart-City for the future world, IoT sensors help conserve energy, send signals when sanitation conditions are poor, alleviate traffic and monitor and address environmental concerns in the city like toxic gases and pollution. It has been estimated that by Gartner that

Building Automation or Connected building will be the fastest growing segment followed by automotive and healthcare.

Some of the technologies that have made IoT efficient, effective, and viable are access to low-cost and low-power sensors, Internet connectivity, Software and Network sensors, Cloud Computing platforms, cyber security and data analytics. Experts in such evolving technologies are still scarce and organizations spend significant efforts in upskilling the workforce. The slowing electronics industry has got a new area of focus with the focus on manufacturing these sensors so graduates in electronics have much to cheer about. Those who are competent in the area of networking can focus on getting the 5G network in place so that connectivity of such IoT devices can even touch the remotest of villages enabling better healthcare, education and communication. With IoT devices, a lot of data gets generated. The cloud computing ecosystem has been growing rapidly to keep up with the demands so those working in the areas of

database management and data engineering have some good time ahead of them. With a plethora of such devices and data being generated and used to control critical infrastructure, cyber security and surveillance becomes even more important to control the wellbeing of the citizens using these technologies in day to day life. The data generated from such devices can be analyzed for patterns of anomalies and predictions on instances like demand surge, equipment failure can be effectively mitigated using data analytics. In fact the most sought after practitioners will be those who would be working at the intersection of data analytics and cyber security to give birth to a new breed of cyber analytics professionals.

Larger organizations working in the area of agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, supply chain to environment and public safety are already adopting IoT allowing newer use-cases to surface. This will encourage medium and smaller businesses to realize the benefits of the technology in enabling cost reduction through automation and manual labor in order to remain competitive. It has been estimated that by 2025, roughly 22 billion IoT devices will be used, while predictions of Tech analyst company IDC pegs this number at 41.6 billion. With such mass adoption and commercialization of the technology, it is important that organizations encourage skill-building and job creation for this technological marvel whose possible business values are practically limitless. The building blocks for some of these are taught at many Technical Schools but only a few prepare learners towards the strategic and financial implications of IoT. With the evolving technology and business landscapes of the IoT ecosystem, the curriculum is unable to keep pace with the rapid evolution. Practitioners looking at either technology or business aspects in this ecosystem are required to constantly learn on the job and take part in helping the ecosystem evolve. It is imperative that Academia and Industry work together in bridging the skill gap and produce a workforce that is productive and efficient in helping mature the IoT ecosystem.



# 5 ways online tutoring ensures quality learning

ARUN VERMA



**Show and tell:** While teachers surely need to innovate and find ways to enhance the learning process for students, they also need to monitor their progress on a regular basis. No matter how informative their classes are, it would still be redundant unless implemented by students. In the virtual space, the need to monitor the progress of pupils is imperative. Without in-person supervision, teachers can resort to shared workspaces like Google Drive to exchange notes and monitor assignments to track progress of the students. On the other hand, virtual whiteboards can also enable educators to save their online sessions, which can be accessed by students whenever they need.

**Introduce self-assessment opportunities:** Students may be unable to participate effectively if they cannot track their progress. One of the best ways to enable students to examine their own conceptual comprehension is through self-assessments. Short examinations, survey questions, and situation-based questions can all be provided by teachers so that students can assess their strengths and limitations. In order to improve their weak areas, students should be encouraged to create a self-learning plan using various e-learning platforms and under their teacher's supervision.

**Final Thoughts!** For many tutors, the market for online tutoring is expanding, and it provides students many facilities who can't travel to a physical classroom setting with better convenience. Even if online learning is becoming the new norm, it is crucial to incorporate effective methodology to achieve the ideal balance and maximize student engagement.

Teachers and other educators can use the aforementioned strategies to develop a learning environment that encourages greater student engagement and long-term academic success, which will ensure quality learning.

The author is founder & CEO of TeacherOn, an online tutoring platform

Almost every aspect of life has been altered by technology and it appears that educational systems are no exception. Instructors are utilizing current tools and embracing new technology to assist students in achieving their greatest potential. The technology significantly impacts educators, teachers, and students in the current environment. They use it to collect knowledge or concepts that they can employ daily.

During the pandemic, the education system turned to online courses and e-learning platforms to establish a virtual learning environment. Online teachings differ significantly from traditional classroom teachings. Learning becomes more collaborative and exciting as students interact directly with teachers and their peers in a classroom setting.

Most educators concur that a high-quality learning experience depends heavily on student's participation. Interaction, teamwork, and learning activities between students and teachers are simply high in a classroom setting. Both professors and students are still getting used to the online learning approach; therefore, they are having trouble collaborating online.

Teachers must establish a stimulating learning environment to guarantee that students don't procrastinate their homework and maintain connections with their peers and teachers. This will prevent distractions for students and ensure quality learning online.

Here's a look at 5 ways that will ensure quality learning:-

**Give students authority over their learning process to empower them:** While studying online, many students experience loneliness and a lack of motivation. Making students feel valued and putting them at the center of the learning process is one of the finest methods to combat this. Allowing students to select their own tasks allows teachers to create a

flexible learning environment. As a result, students will be able to explore topics in-depth and gain new skills.

**Gamify with rewards:** Online teaching can use gamification features in various ways. It is not required to have fully game-based learning; simple gamification components can offer great potential for enhancing the teaching-learning process. Teachers should appreciate students' successes by giving them badges, points, or stars. By rewarding top achievers, quick learners, quick problem solvers, etc, they can appreciate each big step a child takes.

**Speak and repeat:** Many students find it challenging to make adjustments to listening comprehension. Repetition is a wonderful technique to ensure students comprehend the lesson and support the learning process. Teachers must ask

for a repetition of the conversations with their students. It's time well spent, so there is nothing to be worried about if the repetition takes some tutoring time.

**Establish and follow the rules:** A particular online environment can gain flexibility. To prevent distractions, it is a good idea to establish some rules. Teachers can create their own place of teaching and be available to the students at the designated time at all times. Since online tutoring is a two-way process, it is essential to ensure that communication is simple and that educators are aware of the various academic needs of each student.

**Same tutor face-to-face:** This one applies to tutors who meet with students in person. In order to preserve the continuity of service, the online sessions should ideally be led by an in-person tutor. The tran-

sition to the online tutoring session will be easier with familiarity.

**Make learning interactive:** One of the finest ways to get students interested in a specific topic is to make online lectures interactive. Teachers should motivate students to study in small groups by setting up online groups. This will facilitate peer interaction and bonding. Furthermore, by integrating online guest lectures from subject-matter experts, teaching-learning can be made engaging and interesting. Hence, students will become more excited and enthusiastic.

**Track progress:** There are various types of assessments in the virtual classroom. Whether you choose group projects or homework, make the time to develop strategies that track students' development. This information can be both inspiring for the students and satisfying for the tutors as well.





# Best teaching-learning resources for all

■ Dr Sadiq Hussain

**B**ased on three cardinal principles of the education policy – access, equity and quality, the Government of India initiated a programme called SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds). The focus of the programme is to distribute the best teaching-learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged. SWAYAM aims to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital uprising and cannot join the mainstream of the knowledge economy. It facilitates the idea of smart learning as it hosts all the courses taught in classrooms from Class IX to post-graduation to be accessed by anyone, any time and anywhere. All the courses are interactive, prepared by the best teachers in the country and are available free of cost to any learner. More than 1,000 specially chosen faculty and teachers from across the country have participated in preparing these courses. The courses hosted on SWAYAM are in four quadrants – video lecture, specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/printed, self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes and an online discussion forum for clearing the doubts. Steps have been taken to enrich the learning experience by using audio-video and multimedia and state-of-the-art pedagogy/technology.

In order to ensure that best quali-

ty content is produced and delivered, nine national coordinators have been appointed. They include AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) for self-paced and international courses, NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) for engineering, UGC (University Grants Commission) for non-technical post-graduation education, CEC (Consortium for Educational Communication) for undergraduate education, NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) for school education, NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) for school education, IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University) for out-of-school students, IIMB (Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore) for management studies and NITTTR (National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research) for teacher training programme.

Courses delivered through SWAYAM are available free of cost to the learners; however learners wanting a SWAYAM certificate should register for the final proctored exams that come at a fee and attend in-person at designated centres on specified dates. Eligibility for the certificate will be announced on the course page and learners will get certificates only if this criterion is matched.

Universities/colleges approving credit transfer for these courses can use the marks/certificate obtained in these courses for the same.

SWAYAM follows a four-quadrant approach, which means an e-learning framework that has four quadrant components. The first quadrant is e-tutorial. It comprises video and audio content in an organised form, video demonstrations, virtual labs, animation and simulation. The second quadrant is e-content. It contains e-books, illustrations, case studies, presentations, self-instructional material and web resources. The third quadrant is the discussion forum for raising doubts and clarifying them on a near real time basis by the course coordinator or his team.

Assessment is the fourth quadrant that contains problems and solutions, which could be in the form of matching questions, fill in the blanks, short answer questions, quizzes, long answer questions.

Dibrugarh University along with other universities in the north-eastern region, is one of the host universities that offer various courses.

The next is the SWAYAM Prabha. It is a group of 22 DTH channels devoted to telecasting high quality educational programmes on a 24x7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite. Every day, there will be new content for at least four hours which will be repeated five more times in a day, allowing the students to choose the time of their convenience. The channels are uplinked from BISAG-N, Gandhinagar. The contents are provided by NPTEL, IITs, UGC, CEC, IGNOU. The INFLIBNET Centre maintains the web portal. The DTH channels shall cover higher educa-

tion, school education (9-12 levels), curriculum-based courses. Higher education includes curriculum-based course contents at postgraduate and undergraduate levels covering diverse disciplines such as arts, science, commerce, performing arts, social sciences and humanities, engineering, technology, law, medicine, agriculture, etc. All courses would be certification-ready in their detailed offering through SWAYAM, the platform being developed for offering MOOCs courses. School education (9-12 levels) is comprised of modules for teachers' training as well as teaching and learning aids for children of India to help them understand the subjects better and also help them in preparing for competitive examinations for admissions into professional degree programmes. Curriculum-based courses can meet the needs of lifelong learners of India in the country and abroad. They also assist students (classes 11 and 12) to prepare for competitive exams.

Another initiative worth mentioning is Samarth. This project aims at creating an open source, open standard-enabled robust, secure, scalable and evolutionary process automation engine for universities and higher educational institutions (HEIs). The project is being implemented by the University of Delhi (DU). Samarth is an ERP automation software designed to help HEIs in India migrate from paper-based, unreliable third-party ERP systems to a secure, reliable and scalable one. As a member of a high level committee of the Krishna Kan-

ta Handiqui State Open University, Assam, I came in contact with the members of the project implementation team. 'Samarth eGov Suite' is the e-governance software created under the project. The software is being offered to public-funded central universities and select HEIs as a cloud-based service. It provides nine essential packages, 40-plus modules implemented by more than 40 central universities. The architecture of Samarth eGov Suite is SAAS-oriented and hence highly scalable. Samarth ensures total data security.

Samarth is comprised of nine modules such as base module, admission module, account and finance module, academics module, university facility module, employee services module, governance module, recruitment module and data management module. There are sub-modules for each module. For example, inside the account and finance module, there are sub-modules like bill tracking system, budget & accounts, endowment portal, fee management, payroll management and research project management.

Alumni portal, evaluation grading, hostel management, programme management, student feedback and training and placement are parts of the academics module.

Students aspiring to learn some novel and skill-oriented courses should go with SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha whereas the higher educational institutes may be benefited amply by utilising Samarth project.

AST/21/6



# A Governor gone too political, too far

**T**he relations between Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan and the LDF government of Pinarayi Vijayan have so deteriorated that there is almost a daily exchange of accusations and recriminations, warnings, and even personal attacks. They have been at odds with each other for a long time and differences have been aired in public in the past too. But the spat has now turned into unseemly confrontations, with an unmistakable political dimension to it. In an unprecedented action, Khan called a media conference at Raj Bhavan and levelled serious charges against the government and the Chief Minister. Vijayan held a media conference the next day to reply to him. There are references to past actions, letters and meetings in the exchanges, with both berating the other, and the Governor trying to escalate the situation.

The Governor has highlighted some issues of contention with the government, on which, however, his positions do not seem to be very convincing. He has said that he was heckled over his speech at the Indian History Congress at Kannur in 2019. He has described it as an attempt to murder him and went to the extent of saying that the octogenarian historian Irfan Habib, who was present there, had a role in it. He has charged that the government did not take any action on that. The video clips of the event he presented at his press conference, however, did not show any murder attempt. He has said that the extension of tenure of Kannur University Vice-Chancellor Gopinath Ravindran was wrong. He had himself approved it but now he says that he did so under pressure. He has also said that he would not give his assent to some bills which have been forwarded to him. He visited RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat at a pracharak's house earlier this week, raising questions of propriety.

**Khan seems to be inventing new issues every day**

The Governor has made outlandish statements and untenable demands. His conduct and statements have given the clear impression that he is inventing newer and newer issues to raise the pitch of the confrontation. If he has differences with the government, they should be taken up in established ways, not in public so as only to run the government down. It is his government, and he has to respect the mandate of the elected government. He says that as Governor he has to protect and defend the Constitution, but he is following not the Constitution but the playbook of Governors in other non-BJP states who are working as political agents of the central government. He has no powers to interfere in matters of governance in the way he is doing now.

24/9/22/6





# India's pride, prejudice and its global rankings



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

India's relationship with global rankings has always had shades of Jane Austen. Call it pride and prejudice. Each time, there is a laudatory reference, there is euphoria and gushing pride. Each time, we figure at the bottom of any international list, there is near-hysteria and accusations of prejudice.

This emotional yo-yo between excessive pride and prejudicial hand-wringing may have once been understandable. But in 2022, the geo-political and geo-economic situation require us to be less of Jane Austen and imbibe more of the spirit of a SWOT analysis. "SWOT" is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis systematically lists an organisation's greatest strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

One can always cherry-pick indicators that make one look good or better than some other countries. The India of the future, however, will depend on which metrics and indicators we choose to play up, and which ones we try to gloss over.

We should celebrate our strengths and successes. But celebrations without an honest deep dive into weaknesses will continue to derail the possibility of ordinary Indians fulfilling their potential.

Which brings me to two headline-grabbers in recent weeks — India overtaking the United Kingdom to become the world's fifth-largest economy around the same time that the Human Development Report 2021-22, brought out by the UN Development Programme, showed that India's global rankings have gone down. India ranks 132 out of 191 countries and territories in the Human Development Report 2021-22 — down from 130 in 2020.

Shorn of emotions, what

does this mean? Does a low rank mean all is lost? Coming back to the analogy of the SWOT analysis, one must remember that strengths and weaknesses are fluid and they change over time but not without a lot of work.

Opportunities and threats, on the other hand, are external and not always within one's control. They too are not necessarily permanent.

Look at Ukraine. Against massive odds, and contrary to many expert forecasts, its counter-offensive against Russia notched up significant victories in recent days. Nearer home, look at a country like Bangladesh. In 1971, when it became an independent nation, Bangladesh had a GDP per capita that was the tenth lowest in the world. By 2015, it had reached the status of a lower-middle-income country, and today it is ahead of India on many parameters — life expectancy, mean child-bearing age — and it has a higher HDI rank.

Now, let's get back to India. India now has the fifth largest economy but denominators matter. Its per capita GDP is only around \$2,500. The corresponding figure for the UK is \$47,000. India is also dominantly young. According to the latest National Health Profile, the proportion of population in the working-age group (15-59) years is expected to rise from 60.7 per cent in 2011 to 65.1 per cent in 2036. Jobs are and will be central to this population. This is why strengthening human capital becomes such a pressing issue.

The extraordinary have always done well and will continue to do so.

But a country's long-term success depends on how its ordinary citizens fare. That depends on the foundation — education, health, nutrition. Without quality education, food consumption that is not

**Countries viewed as huge success stories did not wait to become rich to strengthen their foundation. They became rich simply because they focused on strengthening their foundation.**

only calorie-adequate but also nutritious, and good health, the vast majority of Indians will find it hard to tap into the new opportunities in the evolving world of work.

It is easy to get lost in the maze of numbers, but let me pick just a few.

India's Global Innovation Index ranking has improved from 81 in 2015 to 46. This is good news. But what does it really mean when India's mean years of schooling are at 6.7 years. Mean years of schooling (MYS) refers to the average number of completed years of education of a population and is a widely used measure of a country's stock of human capital. The global average is 8.7 years. Mean years of schooling in Japan is 13; the corresponding figure for Sri Lanka is 11, for Malaysia, it is 10, for Philippines, it is nine, for Vietnam and Indonesia, it is eight.

Impressively, India has lifted a staggering 271 million out of multi-dimensional poverty over the last decade and the country is improving access to clean water, sanitation, and affordable clean energy, the UNDP's Human Development Report acknowledges. The Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan are steps in the right direction. These will contribute towards our strengths. UNDP also notes that India has boosted access to social protection for vulnerable sections of society, especially during and after the pandemic, with a 9.8 per cent increase in the budgetary allocation to the social services sector in 2021-22 over 2020-21.

But the celebration of strengths must not come in the way of a hard look at the persisting weaknesses and gaps that remain.

India lags behind not only in mean areas of schooling but also in healthcare. The latest National Health Accounts shows that while out-of-pocket expenses have come down, they are still higher than global average. India consistently falls short of the goal of its own National Health Policy — spending 2.5 per cent of GDP on health. Setting up new hospitals mean little unless they are adequately staffed and equipped and an ordinary Indian finds it much easier to access affordable and quality healthcare. And the level of stunting among children under five years in India still hovers around 36 per cent.

"We have been seduced by big mega-projects. These need to be matched by attention to the micro-context and interventions in key areas — education, health, nutrition and reduction of pervasive inequalities on the ground. Those at the top can afford to send their children to exclusive schools, expensive coaching classes. Their children will do well. What about the rest? The Constitution guarantees equality. But we need a more collaborative society in practice which recognises the mutuality of interests", says P.V. Ramesh, a physician, a former IAS officer who has also worked in many countries worldwide.

Grand narratives hinge on big ideas. But big ideas are most successful when attention is paid to the smallest details affecting the ordinary person. While celebrating the success of Indians who have "made it", we can't afford to abandon the rest if India as a country wishes to succeed and be a developed nation. Countries widely viewed as huge success stories today did not wait to become rich to strengthen their foundation. They became rich simply because they focused on strengthening their foundation.

We need to bring the focus back on ordinary Indians and their ease of living.

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AN/S



# Indians making it big in Australia



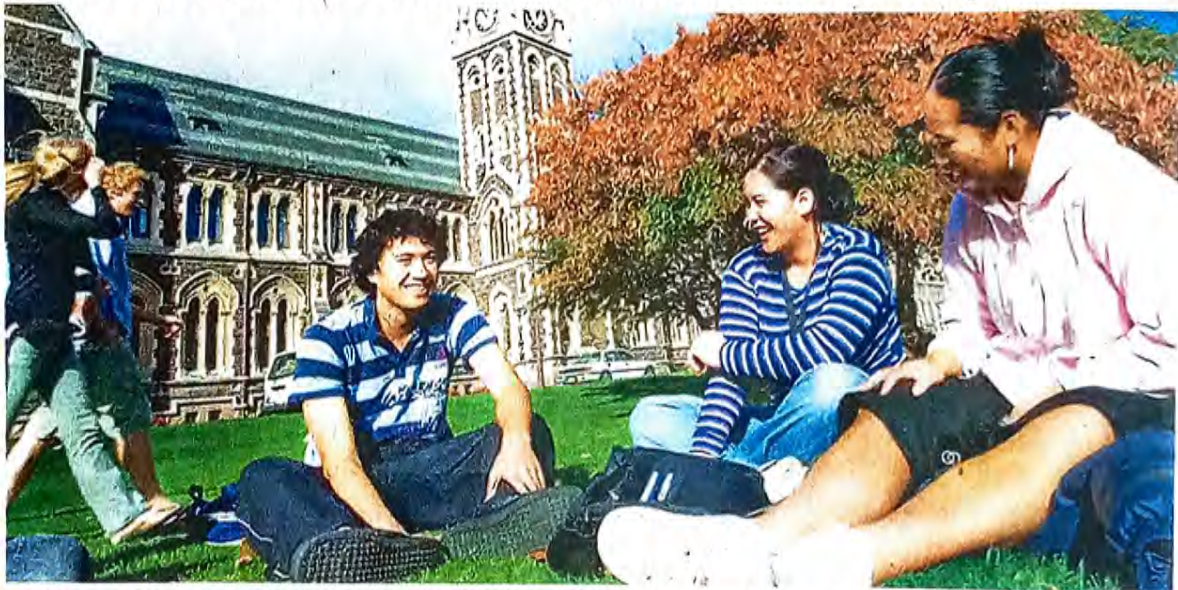
ASHUTOSH MISRA

With its sheer determination and hard work, the Indian diaspora in Australia has carved a niche for itself in the Australian society

**T**hey drive cabs in the wee hours, man 7/11 franchises, and gather scattered trolleys at supermarkets, amongst a long list of arduous tasks. But they also teach at schools and universities, lead mega engineering projects, save lives at hospitals and treat the sick at medical centres, manage the information technology in big companies, showcase the best of the cuisines at Indian restaurants, and own micro, medium, and large businesses in Australia. Indian diaspora has entered into business, politics, the judiciary, government, civil society, academia, science, the performing arts, and sporting codes. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 census 783,958 persons declared their ancestry as Indian constituting 3.1% of the Australian population. They constitute the second largest taxpayers and easily outnumber their Australian counterparts in stadiums during the Border-Gavaskar series.

20 years ago, not many may have anticipated their meteoric rise and role in 'Advancing Australia Fair'. A data-rich report prepared by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade entitled - "Australia's Indian Diaspora: A National Asset: Mapping the Community's Reach into the Australia-India Economic Relationship" - quite timely encapsulates the rise of the diaspora, especially when bilateral relations have hit a historic high.

Australia's rapidly transforming demography wherein one in four Australian has been born overseas, the Indian diaspora is now turning heads. Calling the diaspora 'aspirational', the report shows that a comparatively younger diaspora is vital for meeting Australia's skills shortage, technological development, and exports. Largely concentrated (70%) in the states of Victoria and New South Wales, the diaspora has moved interstate into Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia. In any



developing suburb, the Indian family is a common sight. The DFAT report indicates the cumulative effect of a generally highly educated youthful, linguistically diverse, and growing community, plugged into networks of innovation, and well represented in business, across services and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) sectors with strong export potential. It is a key contributor to not only bilateral trade and investment but Australia's international competitiveness.

According to the 2021 Orbis database of company information collated by Bureau van Dijk, a Moody's Analytics Company - people of Indian heritage are employed in at least 996 Australian organizations of which an estimated 2,840 (13%) as directors and managers (12.5% women), constituting 3% of the Australian population. The report says that 964 of these 2,840 could potentially drive bilateral business and trade engagements in health, tourism, ICT, and resources, across companies with a gross \$250 billion annual turnover.

Surprisingly, in the flagship sector of education, and

in agribusiness their role remains below par. But that may change rapidly as international education and student migration drive bilateral relationships. Indians were the largest source of skilled migrants in 2019-20 and the second largest source of international students in 2019-20 Australia. The DFAT report estimates that the diaspora's role in senior academic positions roles at the lecturer level and above has increased from 1.75 per cent in 2016 to 1.92 per cent in 2020. Of the 721,000 Indians (2016 census) approximately 88% are of working age and 61% are in full-time and 27% in part-time employment making them the second highest tax-paying migrant community after the UK-born migrants, contributing over \$12 billion to the Australian economy.

As of 2021, numbering over 780,000 Indian migrants have overtaken Chinese and New Zealand-born immigrants. Their numbers doubled during 1996-2006, and quadrupled during 2006-2020, and were Australia's fastest growing large diaspora community in 2020. Australia's Department of Home Affairs has even established a Global Talent Officer

for South Asia, eyeing India as a source of global talent.

A 2013 path-breaking research published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America entitled, "Genome-wide data substantiate Holocene gene flow from India to Australia" established that a substantial gene flow occurred between the Indian populations and Australia well before European contact, 4,230 years ago. The study links changes in tool technology, food processing, and the appearance of dingoes in the Australian archaeological record to migration from India.

In sum, over 4,000 years ago Indians made Australia their home and now they 'toil with hearts and hands to make this Commonwealth of ours renowned of all the lands'. As India rises as a Vishwa Guru, Indians assume their long-due place in Australian society.

(The author is the CEO Institute for Australia India Engagement, Brisbane, National Sports Chair [Australia India Business Council] and Editor-in-Chief, India News Australia. The views expressed are personal.)



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1996-2006, AND  
QUADRUPLED  
DURING  
2006-2020**



# Equality remains an elusive dream



ISHANEE SHARMA

The fundamental right to equality stays on paper, for there exist several reasons for negation of the abiding dream of the Constitution

**T**he idea of equality in India goes back to the days of the Vedic wisdom, which treated every individual as an embodiment of the divine spark. Equality as a spiritual and philosophical precept was founded on this theory of the divinity of humans. The Upanishads and the Dharmaśāstras insisted that every individual should be given an equal opportunity to pursue the Puruṣārthas (the four-fold legitimate goals of life) without any arbitrary interference from any external agency, including the state, in order to enable him or her to realise his or her full personality.

Perhaps the notion of legal equality can be traced back to the natural law doctrine of the Stoics, which, in the name of universal reason, postulates equality of individuals, races and nations. However, only on a spiritual and philosophical plane it may be said that all people are equal, but in the actual world of material and social life it may not appear to be so.

There may exist natural inequalities as well as artificially created social inequalities and economic disparities among people and groups of people in society. In such a society, to pursue the principle of formal or legal equality, which insists that all people are to be treated equally by law, would be only to perpetuate the existing inequalities, for the same law for the ox and the lion is oppression. Therefore, the concept of equality to be meaningful and intelligible should essentially be a dynamic and relative concept, capable of accommodating the necessary equalisation strategies as permissible means to remove the existing social and economic inequalities and to secure the goal of equality and social justice.

While we celebrate the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, there still remains glaring inequalities in the society around us. The beloved dream of the makers of the Constitution is far from materialisation.

The adoption of our Constitution was also a declaration of a desire for a society where everyone would enjoy equal access to education, good health, freedom of speech and dissent, employment, and political participation.

Some people experience inequity from the beginning, because they are born blind, physically impaired, or mentally ill. We must be given exactly equal opportunity, intelligence, strength, health, and money if we were to be born equal.

Legality became a synonym for justice in the Athenian republic because it was derived from the Greek/Latin word *aequalis*, which meant the sameness of two objects in amount or value or as in the Islamic algebra, which is still in use today. It later came to be used interchangeably with the concept of liberty, which was first articulated by influential thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Friedrich Hegel, and later by Frenchmen like Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who



**ANY VIBRANT SOCIETY WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY REQUIRE THAT ALL HUMANS ARE TREATED EQUAL AND WITH DIGNITY. SUCH A CONVICTION WOULD OBVIOUSLY WARRANT A WISE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY ON THE GROUNDS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY**



are known for the statement "Man is born free".

These concepts had a significant impact on our ancestors. It had a profound impact on the society, which was a colony of the British Empire. They battled against their oppressors after rising up in rebellion, won the war, and then went on to draft the clause that reads, "All men are created equal".

People who have lived in abject poverty are given hope when we say that there will be equality. However, if this hope is not realised, there will be strife between the "haves and have nots" in society. Additionally, according to Karl Marx, this disturbs society and may therefore spark a revolt. This is the fundamental idea of the disharmonic society that India has accepted, which implicitly includes the idea of conflict.

The overarching principle of equality is established in Article 14, which calls for equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws and forbids unjustified discrimination against individuals. It is acknowledged as a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution. No discrimination should exist on any grounds. The phrase "equal protection of the law" is a good one. Simply put, it means that everyone in comparable situations should be accorded the same rights and obligations. In essence, it means that everyone should be treated equally.

Equals and unequals cannot coexist on an equal footing or get equal treatment. The concept of equality before law does not mean absolute equality among human

beings which is not possible to achieve. It is a concept implying absence of any special privilege by reason of birth, creed or the like in favour of any individual, and also the equal subject of all individuals and classes to the ordinary law of the land. Equal protection of the laws does not postulate equal treatment of all persons without distinctions. What it postulates is the application of the same laws alike and without discrimination to all persons similarly situated. It denotes equality of treatment in equal circumstances.

The rule of law, in Dicey's opinion, is equality before the law. It means that no one is above the law and that ordinary courts have jurisdiction over everyone, regardless of status or circumstance. All people with identical circumstances must be treated equally in terms of the rights granted and obligations imposed by the law. There shouldn't be any distinction between one individual and another, and everyone should be subject to the same laws in the same circumstances. The rule is that similar things should be handled similarly rather than dissimilar things similarly.

In the case of *Stephen's College v. University of Delhi*, the court determined that the phrase "Equal protection of the laws" is now understood to be a positive obligation on the state to ensure equal protection of the law by enacting the necessary social and economic changes to ensure that everyone can enjoy equal protection of the law and nobody is denied such protection. The state violates its obligation to offer everyone the

same protection under the law if it ignores the existing inequality. Citizens of India and those who are not will get equal protection from the state.

The US Constitution's 14th Amendment serves as the foundation for the concept of "equal protection of the law". It stipulates that everyone in India should receive equal legal protection so they can exercise their legal rights without any exceptions or favouritism. This is a good idea since it suggests that the State has a responsibility to take steps to guarantee this right to all citizens. It makes the State responsible for taking all necessary actions to ensure that the promise of equal treatment of everyone is upheld. This rule states that like individuals should be treated similarly, yet it also states that unlike people shouldn't be treated similarly.

It hardly needs any mention that any vibrant society would undoubtedly require that all humans are treated equal and with dignity and that all must be supported to the fullest possible development. Such a conviction would obviously warrant a wise affirmative action policy on the grounds of social justice and equity. Here, one needs to know that while access could be ensured in a variety of ways, it is the equality of opportunity which is much more important than anything else as it requires the support of whole range of antecedent variables commencing from curriculum to pedagogy, differential inputs, assessment, remediation, feedback, attitude, institutional care, etc. Pia/7

(The author is a lawyer)



# उच्च शिक्षा में हो विषयों का संगम

दुनिया भर में शैक्षणिक संरचना बाजार मूल्यों, उच्च शिक्षा के निजीकरण और उपयोगितावाद से प्रेरित है। इस शैक्षणिक परिवेश से निकले हुए स्नातकों से अपेक्षा की जाती है कि वे अल्प समय में ही कामकाजी आबादी का हिस्सा बनें। एक सामान्य धारणा है कि एसटीईएम (विज्ञान, प्रौद्योगिकी, इंजीनियरिंग और गणित) या वाणिज्य की तुलना में कला और समाज विज्ञान के स्नातकों के लिए व्यावसायिक अवसर अपेक्षाकृत कम होते हैं। कोविड महामारी ने इस धारणा को और मजबूत किया है। परिणामस्वरूप कला और मानविकी संकायों के संसाधनों में भारी कटौती हुई है। वैश्विक स्तर पर कला और मानविकी से जुड़े कई कार्यक्रमों-पाठ्यक्रमों को बंद भी कर दिया गया है। होना तो यही चाहिए कि तकनीकी और कला एवं मानविकी के बीच ताल मिलाई जाए।

इस संदर्भ में ध्यान देने योग्य है कि अमेरिका में नेशनल एकेडमी आफ इंजीनियरिंग ने अपनी एक रिपोर्ट, 'ग्रैंड चैलेंजेस फॉर इंजीनियरिंग' में प्रमुख वैश्विक चुनौतियों की पहचान की है। अमेरिकन सोसायटी आफ मैकेनिकल इंजीनियर्स स्ट्रैटेजी विजन, 2030 और नेशनल एकेडमी आफ साइंसेज ने भी अनुशंसा की है कि सामाजिक चुनौतियों के समाधान के लिए तकनीकी ज्ञान से परे देखा जाना चाहिए। विभिन्न संदर्भों में कई अन्य अध्ययन भी इसी निष्कर्ष पर पहुंचे हैं। महामारी ने हमें सिखाया है कि दुनिया की गंभीर समस्याओं का समाधान सभी विषयों के निरंतर सहयोग में ही निहित है। हमें न केवल कला, समाजशास्त्र और मानविकी से संबंधित विषयों की आवश्यकता है, बल्कि इंजीनियरिंग और एसटीईएम डिग्री पाठ्यक्रमों में उनका समावेश भी उतना ही आवश्यक है। उच्च शिक्षा में इंजीनियरिंग पाठ्यक्रम ने तकनीकी शिक्षा पर इतना अधिक ध्यान केंद्रित किया गया है कि कला और समाजशास्त्र जैसे मानवीय मूल्यों वाले विषयों के प्रति एक उदासीनता सी आ गई है।

अमूमन इंजीनियरिंग के छात्र शिक्षा की आवश्यकताओं को पूरा करने के लिए ही कला एवं मानविकी में अनुमोदित पाठ्यक्रमों की सूची से कुछ विषय पढ़ते हैं, जिनका कोई परस्पर संबंध नहीं होता। अमेरिका जैसे देशों में इंजीनियरिंग में स्नातक की डिग्री के लिए 15-20 प्रतिशत पाठ्यक्रम कला



मनीष पालीवाल



स्वाति पाराशर

**उच्च शिक्षा में कला, मानविकी और इंजीनियरिंग के एकीकरण से बहुत सकारात्मक परिणाम प्राप्त हुए हैं**



भिन्न-भिन्न विषयों के ज्ञान से बढ़ती है क्षमताएं • फाइल

एवं मानविकी से संबंधित होता है। वहीं भारतीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान यानी आइआईटी में स्नातक की डिग्री के लिए लगभग 10 प्रतिशत पाठ्यक्रम कला एवं मानविकी से संबंधित हैं। राष्ट्रीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थानों में यह तीन प्रतिशत से कम है, जबकि विभिन्न राज्यों के कई इंजीनियरिंग कालेजों में कला एवं मानविकी के पाठ्यक्रम उपलब्ध ही नहीं हैं। कुछ अपवाद जरूर हो सकते हैं।

पिछले कुछ दशकों में तकनीकी क्षेत्र में भारी प्रगति हुई है। इस गतिशील, विकसित परिवेश में स्नातकों को वर्तमान एवं भविष्य में सक्षम बनाने के लिए अपने विचारों को स्पष्ट रूप से संप्रेषित कर पाना, अप्रत्याशित समस्याओं को हल कर पाना या एक समूह में अच्छी तरह से काम कर पाना जैसी योग्यताओं की विशेष आवश्यकता है। ऐसी शिक्षा से जिसमें कला एवं मानविकी के पाठ्यक्रमों को इंजीनियरिंग पाठ्यक्रम में विचारपूर्वक एकीकृत किया हो, आलोचनात्मक समीक्षा की क्षमता,

परस्पर संवाद की क्षमता, मिलकर काम करने की क्षमता और आजीवन सीखने की क्षमता बढ़ती है। अतः हमें भविष्य की चुनौतियों का सामना करने के लिए स्नातकों को तकनीकी प्रशिक्षण से परे शिक्षा की आवश्यकता है, जो कला, मानविकी, विज्ञान, सामाजिक विज्ञान, इंजीनियरिंग और गणित जैसे विभिन्न विषयों को एकीकृत करती हो।

शिक्षा का यह एकीकृत मॉडल एक ही पाठ्यक्रम में कई विषयों के ज्ञान एवं अनुसंधान के विभिन्न तरीकों को एक साथ लाता है, जहां छात्र इन विषयों के बीच अंतर्संबंध समझकर सफल उपयोग एवं प्रयोग कर अपनी शिक्षा को समृद्ध कर सकते हैं। चुनौतीपूर्ण परिस्थितियों में नैतिक और व्यावसायिक जिम्मेदारियों को पहचानने और जानकारी भरे निर्णय लेने की क्षमता हासिल कर सकते हैं। साथ ही वैश्विक, आर्थिक, पर्यावरणीय और सामाजिक संदर्भों में इनके प्रभाव पर विचार कर समुचित इंजीनियरिंग समाधान प्रदान करने में सक्षम हो सकते हैं। कुछ शोध इंगित करते हैं कि उच्च शिक्षा में कला, मानविकी और इंजीनियरिंग के एकीकरण से सकारात्मक परिणाम मिले हैं। इससे समालोचनात्मक सोच प्रक्रिया, नैतिक निर्णय लेने, समस्या-समाधान और परस्पर सहयोग जैसे कई कौशलों का विकास होता है, जो रोजगार क्षमता बढ़ाते हैं। यह एकीकृत दृष्टिकोण एक सामाजिक-सुधार उपकरण के रूप में महिलाओं एवं सीमांत वर्गों की भागीदारी भी बढ़ाता है।

एसटीईएम पाठ्यक्रम के स्नातकों को रचनात्मक समाधान की क्षमता के लिए सामाजिक स्वास्थ्य, सुरक्षा के प्रति शिक्षित होना चाहिए और विभिन्न सांस्कृतिक, सामाजिक, पर्यावरणीय एवं आर्थिक संदर्भों के बारे में जागरूकता बढ़ानी चाहिए। उच्च शिक्षा में केवल एक एकीकृत दृष्टिकोण ही बौद्धिक जुड़ाव, नीति-आधारित समाधान और गतिशीलता संभव कर सकता है। एकीकृत पाठ्यक्रम के लिए एक नए सोच वाली वैश्विक पहल जरूरी है, जिसमें संस्थानों और शिक्षाविदों को आगे आना होगा।

(पालीवाल अमेरिका के द कॉलेज आफ न्यूजर्सी में मैकेनिकल इंजीनियरिंग के विभागाध्यक्ष हैं और पाराशर स्वीडन के गोथेनबो विवि में स्कूल आफ ग्लोबल स्टडीज में शांति एवं विकास की प्रोफेसर हैं।)

25/10

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# Mother language in primary education

■ Nabamita Das

**M**other language, mother tongue or native language is the first language or dialect that a child is exposed to after birth. It may be said that mother tongue is the language which a person grows up with, speaking it from early childhood. Mother tongue does not necessarily have to be the language spoken by one's mother. Mother language education refers to the form of schooling which uses the language/languages that children are most familiar with in their immediate home environment and social setting. This enables them to learn and understand the content or subject matter better. The Government of India introduced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in July 2020. It is the biggest reform in the education system since the National Policy of Education of 1986. This policy tries to bring changes and reforms in many crucial areas of education and one of them is the medium of instruction at primary schools (both public and private). This new education policy states that mother tongue will be the medium of instruction upto class 5 at all schools, and further adds, preferably upto class 8. This step has been taken in order to ensure that any gap that exists between the language spoken by a child at home and the medium of teaching at school is bridged. What are the benefits of providing education in mother language in the formative years? Will it impair a student's grasp of the English language? Will it impede the learner's academic progress? What is the scenario in India?

In India there is an increasing use

of English (foreign language/colonial language) as the medium of instruction at most of the schools. Are we depriving our children from getting numerous benefits that come with being educated in one's mother language/mother tongue?

The UNESCO strongly advocates the use of multilingual education based on mother tongue from the earliest years of schooling. Multilingualism has immense cognitive benefits for young learners.

Children pick up languages very quickly in their foundational stage (from 3 yrs to 8 yrs). In fact, they should be exposed to different languages at an early stage. But, the focal point or the main emphasis should be on the mother language. Research shows that education in mother tongue is a key factor for quality learning and it also improves the learning outcomes and academic performance of children. India is a multilingual country and children should always be encouraged to learn and expose themselves to the rich literary and cultural heritage of our country. Using mother language or local language as the medium of instruction shall in no way hamper or obstruct the use of the English language at schools. In fact, English should be taught to the children right from their first grade, along with their mother language, in order to help them gain expertise in this global language that is used

worldwide. Excellent communication skill in the English language is a very important soft skill for students to excel in this current era of cut-throat competition. Students with good English skills do have an added advantage over those who lack this vital skill. Hence, the importance of this second language cannot be undermined.

It is not at all practical to shed this global language. National Education Policy 2020 does not mention shedding this key international

**Providing primary education in mother language/mother tongue as per NEP 2020 directive seems to be the move in the correct direction and if implemented in the right spirit, it would surely enhance the learning capabilities of the students by boosting their self-confidence and making the learning process a more wholesome experience. Using mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the formative years does not necessarily imply that English (second language) would take a backseat.**

language, i.e. English language. The new education policy nowhere states that imparting education in mother tongue would impair a student's learning of this important second language. There is enough evidence to prove that if children are taught in their mother language (particularly in the foundational years – 3 yrs to 8 yrs), then it ensures higher retention, higher proficiency, better grades and lower

school drop-out rates. Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that there is disharmony in a child's mind while studying in a foreign tongue at school – a language that is culturally unfamiliar from the spoken language at home. Hence, learning for a child should not only be a cerebral activity mostly in the form of rote learning, it should also be an emotionally felt experience that the child can relate to and enjoy thoroughly. In order to resolve this dilemma, India's National Education Policy was approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2020 foregrounding the importance of mother language in primary education. This step has been taken in order to make education more well-rounded and fulfilling to the learners.

Some more advantages of using mother tongue in primary education are mentioned herein: It ensures a child's smooth and easy transition to school education. It is vital in framing a rational thought process and emotions of a child. Learning would be a two-way communication between teacher and students. A child understands the content/subject matter better. It boosts the self-confidence and self-esteem of the child. It propels the child to continue schooling with enthusiasm. It resolves the issue of school drop-outs. It builds a strong home-school partnership in the child's learning. Parents are able to participate and contribute more in the child's education. Young children grasp concepts more quickly in their home/mother language. It makes children's learning experi-

ence more wholesome. Mother language makes the teaching-learning process more engaging. Students get a better sense of their culture, language, tradition and heritage. Mother language helps students to progress with their roots intact as a strong foundation. It secures the future of the learners, makes the students more creative/innovative and enables the students to become better critical and analytical thinkers, etc.

Providing primary education in mother language/mother tongue as per NEP 2020 directive seems to be the move in the correct direction and if implemented in the right spirit, it would surely enhance the learning capabilities of the students by boosting their self-confidence and making the learning process a more wholesome experience. Using mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the formative years does not necessarily imply that English (second language) would take a backseat. Rather, it would help immensely in the better and quicker grasping of this second language. It is only through the development of a strong sense and knowledge of their own cultural identity, arts, language as well as traditions that children can build a positive cultural identity and self-esteem. The aim of education should not only be cognitive development of a child but should equally focus on other crucial aspects like social and emotional development. It should create holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with all necessary skills and abilities. Cultural and social awareness as well as emotional expressions are important contributors both to individual and societal well-being and development. It is high time we realised that we need to preserve our language, our culture and our identity.





AMEETA MULLA WATTAL

# A SCHEME FOR TEACHERS

*The success of PM SHRI schools will depend on quality of educators*

THE UNION Cabinet's approval of the PM SHRI schools scheme comes at a time when the schooling system is in disarray. Teachers seem to be caught in a time warp after the pandemic and the anxieties of children are increasing because of the switch to online classes during the public health emergency and then the pivot back to regular schooling. Confused school managements and parents are finding it difficult to address learning gaps. Where do we go from here? Perhaps towards a pedagogy based on activities, toys, art and projects and inclusive learning methods that incorporate sports and give vocational learning its due.

Four national curriculum frameworks have emphasised inquiry, creativity, discovery, problem-solving, decision making and joyful learning. How do the NEP 2020 and the new NCF that is likely to come into play soon differ from the earlier initiatives? Essentially in the weightage they accord to the above elements of classroom learning. The 14,500 PM SHRI schools could become the agencies for the change envisaged by the new policies. But that will require commitment, hard work and progressive thinking. These schools will need to find ways to reverse learning losses and ensure life outcomes that have a positive bearing on the nation's economy — especially in the ways the country uses its demographic dividend. We need to find new ways to understand not just what the children learn but also how they learn. In India, 250 million children are out of classrooms and several million are in

school, but unable to learn.

Hopefully, the PM SHRI schools will attract large investments from the Centre as well as state governments, apart from the separate budget allocated to them to upgrade their facilities. These schools promise to encompass all aspects of the NEP. Every region will have PM SHRI schools that will handhold and mentor other schools in their vicinity. A wide range of learning experiences, good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources will be available to students. A variety of pedagogies and assessment systems will be used along with the introduction of vocational education. Linkages with skill counsellors and local industry will be established to provide employment opportunities to students graduating from these institutions. The schools will be energy-efficient with natural farming patches, they will be equipped with rainwater harvesting systems and will enable the study of traditional environment-friendly practices. The community and alumni will be involved in activities such as career guidance and mentoring. Parents too will be trained to become home mentors. The school will become community centres after the regular hours and converge with existing schemes including PM Poshan, Samagrah Shiksha and Ayushman Bharat.

If these "ideal" schools accomplish even a quarter of their goals, they will make a significant difference to the educational landscape of the country. However, improving the quality of education is not just extremely challeng-

ing but also an expensive proposition, especially in countries that have large socio-economic gaps. Years of investment deficits in high-quality teachers, training and resource materials have led to cycles of poor learning. Breaking them will not be easy.

As a document, NEP 2020 is inspirational. However, it will remain on paper if teachers are not motivated to work hard. Currently, poor status, low salaries and inadequate working conditions deter talented people from entering the profession. However good these "rising schools" may be, they will not become meaningful centres of learning, if the teachers are not trained in the novel methodologies underlined in the NEP. We still do not have enough institutes with a curriculum that trains teachers for the schools of the future.

Poor teaching is a product of systemic deficits that makes the teaching profession unattractive to a large number of talented people. For the PM SHRI schools to succeed, a teacher training programme must be in place to train the educators in the pedagogical practices proposed by the NEP. As far as principals are concerned, there is a great crisis of leadership.

Perhaps, the government's next initiative should be a "PM TRI" scheme — Teachers for Rising India.

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24/9/22

Currently, poor status, low salaries and inadequate working conditions deter talented people from entering the profession. However good these 'rising schools' may be, they will not become meaningful centres of learning, if the teachers are not trained in the novel methodologies underlined in the NEP. schools of the future.



# No quota for EWS

## Introduce economic criterion even in SC/ST/OBC quotas

**T**HE ongoing hearings by a Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice of India UU Lalit on petitions challenging the validity of the 103rd Amendment — by which 10 per cent quota was recently introduced for EWS categories (families with gross annual income below Rs 8 lakh) in government jobs and admissions in educational institutions — have highlighted some pertinent questions and possible solutions to the matter that has widespread implications. Imperative to the way out is the upholding of the republic's aim of ensuring the socio-economic betterment of people of all castes and classes.

In keeping with this objective, the SCs, STs and OBCs (other than the creamy layer), who have historically suffered social and economic disadvantage, are enjoying the protective umbrella of 50 per cent reservation in jobs and education. Rather, they are loaded with more quotas — in promotions, local bodies, legislatures and Parliament. So much so, that a legitimate concern has arisen: that in the past 75 years, families that have availed themselves of the quota for two-three generations are today enjoying a good socio-political, educational and financial standing. Their children have an unfair advantage over those who are still languishing on the margins as they never got a chance to rise in status. The lawmakers must address this inequality by revisiting the rules and ensuring that only the socio-economically poorer cousins get the benefit of this quota.

Even among the general category, nearly six crore people are grossly poor and in need of handholding. But extending 10 per cent reservation for the EWS would eat into the general people's lot of the 50 per cent seats left open for them. Thus, there is some merit in the SC's observation of looking into the possibility of helping the EWS through affirmative measures like providing them scholarships and fee concessions instead of reservation. Plus, there is this related issue: of private unaided educational institutions opposing quota in admissions as it violates their right to practise a trade. Indeed, the SC has a complicated balancing act cut out for it. 24/8



# Job creation

The Assam Government ceremonially handed out appointment letters to 11,236 youth across 24 departments of the State in a function held last Friday. According to the official statement, 5,335 appointment letters were distributed for posts in Home Department, 27 in Higher Education and Technical department, 3811 in the School Education Department, 277 in the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, 299 in the Health and Family Welfare Department while rest of the posts were in several other departments. It may be recalled that ahead of the Assembly elections in 2021, the BJP had promised the people of Assam that if voted to power, it will give them one lakh jobs within a year of forming the Government, and no doubt the latest round of handing out appointment letters is another step in trying to fulfill that pledge. Assam's Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma asserted that the BJP Government has already recruited about 27,000 youths in a transparent manner during the last 18 months and advertisement for another 10,000 posts was in the offing. While such an attempt at alleviating the unemployment problem in Assam can be deemed laudable, one cannot help but point out that, considering the prevailing unemployment, under-employment and disguised unemployment in the State, the end result is merely a drop in the ocean!

As reported in the media, figures released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) had put Assam's unemployment rate in June, 2022 at 17.2 percent of the total workforce, the third highest in India, behind Haryana (30.6%) and Rajasthan (29.8%). These translate into many lakhs of youths without jobs, a reality very starkly illustrated by the fact that in the qualifying examinations conducted recently 11,92,509 candidates had applied for a mere 26,000 Class III and Class IV government jobs! It is also a reality that unemployment figures for Assam would have been far higher had not thousands of individuals, prompted by the lack of job opportunities here, left the State in search of work, only to take up lowly paid jobs elsewhere in the country. Thousands more, who had gone outside the State for higher studies, have chosen not to return because of absence of suitable jobs; all such developments have resulted in a brain-drain whereby Assam has been deprived of the services of enterprising people. This makes it imperative that the State Government take steps to create an environment which would result in creation of jobs, such as industrialization, mass-based organization of the agricultural sector etc. It has been Assam's misfortune that even seven and a half decades after independence major Indian entrepreneurs continue to shun this region, thus it would be up to the State Government to remove such a roadblock.

# Leave the schools alone

**L**ate last month, a Kannada textbook for the eighth grade had people rolling on the floor and laughing after it claimed that Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar often flew out of prison on a bird while he was lodged in the Andamans jail.

Some folks claimed that the parable was metaphoric and not literal, but the context of that story didn't seem to suggest that at all: The author leads by describing Savarkar's prison cell, which he says lacked even a key-hole. "But still," he narrates, "somehow bulbul birds used to come flying into the cell, and sitting on their wings, Savarkar used to visit his motherland every day."

Insofar as the cult of glorification of a personality goes, that chapter should rank amongst the world's best. But how convincing is it really? Over the years, many countries have dabbled and experimented with the right proportion of fact and fantasy in cultivating the most sustainable and compelling personality cults.

In Russia, kindergarten kids once made a cartoon — supervised by their teacher — that showed President Vladimir Putin wrestling with a brown bear and flipping it over his head with his bare hands. China's Xi Jinping has generally taken a more serious approach — infusing his "Xi Jinping Thought" into the school curriculum. But occasionally, even his propaganda efforts have bordered

on the frivolous. Four years ago, he banned a film featuring Winnie the Pooh because — well, simply put — he *looks* like him. More recently, he pulled out George Orwell's books on authoritarianism off the syllabus, with incredible amounts of self-implicating irony.

Yet, the unchallenged gold medalist in propaganda and indoctrination is inarguably North Korea. Schoolchildren in that country are taught that Kim Jong-il — father of the reigning Kim Jong-un — was born atop the sacred Paektu Mountain, under a double rainbow and a glowing new star which heralded his coming (in reality, Kim Jong-il had been born in a small Siberian village). His official biography also claimed that his body was so well calibrated that he never had to urinate or defecate!



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But as hilarious as these stories might sound, centralised and unaccountable control over the education system can also be used for more sinister purposes. In the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion, for instance, Putin has used the Russian school system to teach young children a falsified version of history and mould them into warmongers. One Kremlin bureaucrat recently told thousands of teachers at an online workshop that their job is literally to "infect them with our ideology."

Meanwhile, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan has turned what was previously one of the Muslim world's most secular education systems into a fervent Islamist factory. Last year, a study of 28 new Turkish textbooks by a Jerusalem-based research institute found that public school students in that country are taught that jihad is a responsibility for every good Muslim and that veiling is "an order of Allah."

The dangers of a centralised and corrupted education system are not difficult to see. It ruins scientific temper and the ability to think critically (in fact, in most cases, that's exactly what they are designed to do: to kill critical thinking and thereby all political opposition). And in the long run, that means that the country's population is unable to invent, innovate or create — leaving it a mediocre economy at best, and a failed State at worst.

But in the case of silly and demonstrably exaggerated stories such as bear-wrestling and bird-riding, one also has to wonder: how are kids supposed to take school seriously if it teaches them such trash? 25/9/22





# Teachers should earn respect

Educators must toil to retrieve the lofty social stature they once had

**Viney Kirpal**

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**I**t hurt to see on TV recently how a male teacher caught on a school CCTV dragged a five-year-old girl out of the classroom and taking cover of a tall bush, slapped her soft face repeatedly. Then clasp her hand, as if nothing had happened, he took her back to the class. Can we imagine the imprint on the child's mind, her hatred for teachers and

schooling, the incident would have left?

In 2012, I was waiting to chair a meeting of the school management committee of a government primary school. My eyes fell on a young woman teacher in the next classroom brutally hitting a girl who, sitting on the floor, barely reached 10 inches up. Horrified, I screamed at her.

"How dare you beat the baby?"

"She's not listening to me!"

"Listening? Look at her age," I was livid. "Since you don't know corporal punishment is banned, I'm going to report you."

She started apologising, but I did not spare her. No teacher ever beat a student in the school as long as I was there.

## Many reasons

There could be many reasons for teachers to hit students. The first is personal frustration with life, relationships or even some kind of mental illness. The second is they are bad at teaching and cannot engage students, are ill-read, and knowing their failures, turn their anger on the student. The third is their lack of love for the profession and for students.

The fourth is they were thrashed by their teachers or parents; so they think there is nothing wrong with hurting students to compel obedience. A fifth probability is unchecked display of power on the hapless student.

This happens in colleges too where students are shamed for not understanding a concept!

Malpractice and sexual harassment are also being reported across educational institutions.

## Rampant abuse

A huge majority of marginalised students are subject to corporal punishment and most parents are okay with it. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it. A student had shaved his hair on one side for fashion. The principal called him to her room and loudly complained to his mother in the presence of many people sitting there. The mother, taking the cue, took off her slipper and hammered the 15-year-old

mercilessly.

Generally, these incidents do not happen in rich schools where educators fear well-placed parents will file an FIR.

A press article recently asked why teachers were not getting respected, and argued for restoring respect to teachers. But who can respect teachers who are bullies and bad at teaching and exploit vulnerable students? Whether it is teachers or anyone else, respect cannot be demanded; it has to be earned the hard way.

Many thought leaders – vice-chancellors, scientists, artists, CEOs, professors – of today can share heart-warming stories about their favourite teachers, years after they had ceased to teach them.

The common thread will be: "Our teachers turned our lives around in unimaginable ways with the gentlest correction, knowledge and unconditional love. We're what they made of us!"

These were teachers who joyfully hand-held their students and shaped them.

Even today, there are teachers who win respect from everybody beyond school and college, for an eternity.

Teachers' Day was started by President Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, once a teacher himself, in 1962 to honour teachers, but somewhere we have forfeited the right.

A change in public perception towards all teachers calls for character combined with excellence in every school, college and university educator in the country. Teachers must toil to retrieve the lofty social stature that Dr. Radhakrishnan had conferred on them.



# Copyright falls prey to mighty internet

Globalisation and post-globalisation have brought us ever closer to each other. This intricate journey was only made possible by a vast network of information and communication technologies (ICTs). As a result, we all have experienced a slew of modernisation, standardisation and deterritorialisation drives all around the world. At the heart of this colossal process lies a "superior and never seen before" brand new upheaval called "information revolution". As this information is gone in the great internet machine, it has witnessed another global movement called the digital revolution. The information revolution accompanied by the digital revolution has pushed knowledge beyond the control of the sovereign nation-states.

Before moving into the problems and prospects of safeguarding the copyright laws, let us see what copyright is all about. Copyright is regarded as "author's right". In legal terms, it is meant to describe the set of rights that the creators or the owners have over their literary and artistic works. The very word "works" refer to books, music, paintings, sculptures, films, computer programmes, databases, advertisements, maps and technical drawings as specified by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). Regardless of the WIPO conventions and other relevant global covenants, the copyright law is territorial and national in scope. Therefore, wherever an author or a creator resides or his work is first published, the applicability of the copyright protection depends on the national laws of the country in which the particular author demands protection. The term of a copyright law depends on several factors such as whether the work has been published or if so, the date of its first publication. Once it is published, the copyright lasts for the life of the author and additional 70 years after his/her death. Under the US Copyright legislation, an anonymous work, a pseudonymous work or a work made for hire, the copyright is guaranteed for a period of 95 years from the year of its first publication or a period of 120 years

from the year of its creation, whichever expires first.

Precisely, there is nothing like international copyright law applicable to all the nations. Therefore, no single copyright law can protect an author's work throughout the world with a single registration like the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) that allows patent filing in a multinational context. Nevertheless, nearly 180 nations have already ratified the historic Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works of 1886, administered by the WIPO. This convention sets a minimum standard for the protection of the rights of the creators of the copyrighted works across the nations. Besides, there have been serious efforts to bring copyright legislations under one single umbrella among the members of the European Union (EU). However, the biggest challenge to this harmonisation effort is emerging from a host of numerous national copyright laws currently existing in the EU nations. The Berne Convention, apart from calling for establishing minimum standards of protection, has two unique principles: "National Treatment" and "Automatic Protection". The first principle of "National Treatment" underlines that works originating in one signatory nation are given the same protection in other signatory nations as each grant to works of its creators. The second principle of "Automatic Protection" refers to the idea that copyright inheres automatically in a qualifying work upon its fixation in a tangible medium and without any required prior formality.

Indeed, the origin of the global copyright governance system is very much linked to the invention of the printing machine by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany around 1440. By 1483, when printing machines reached England, various monarchs starting from King Richard III to King Henry in 1553 shaped a new regime of copyright that later defined the international copyright governance. Then, the era from 1661 to 1911 witnessed the evolution of a detailed copyright law in Britain.

Now in India, we have a



defined copyright regime, and its roots lie in the long British colonial regime. The copyright legislation was first introduced in India in 1874 during the time of East India Company. This act was replaced by the Copyright Act of 1914 which was just a replica of the then existing Copyright Act of 1911 in Britain. When India became independent, we got our first Copyright Act in the year 1957 which came into practice in 1958. The new Act immediately replaced the colonial

copyright laws thereafter. The same Copyright Act was subsequently amended in 1983, 1984, 1992, 1994 and 1999. Again, the Copyright Act was amended in 2012. It was done to bring the Copyright law into compliance with the WIPO treaties such as the WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) and WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT). Further it must be highlighted that the obligation under Article 11 of Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property

Rights (TRIPS) which came into effect under the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, Article 7 of the WCT and Article 9 of the WPPT are to provide for commercial rental rights for computer programmes and cinematograph films. This right was introduced in India by using the word "hire" in Section 14 of the current Copyright Act. Thus, the Indian Copyright Law is now capable of addressing both national and global concerns under the new global gover-

nance regime brought by the WTO TRIPS.

In spite of having a global effective IPR regime, the information revolution and digital revolution have pushed knowledge maintenance to the brink of a serious danger. We receive information so very easily that we don't even realise the worth of the creator or the owner. Information superhighway is widely perceived as a modern day colonial tool both to subjugate and exploit the massive resources from the Global South by the rich and technologically advanced nations from the Global North.

With connectivity growing at an unimaginable speed, people are increasingly becoming restless. Once powerful nation-states seem to surrender to market forces. What Karl Marx, the legendary German socialist thinker, prophesied in the 19th century about the "withering away of the state" (capitalist) is now turning right at the very heart of the capitalist nations. Nonetheless the bitter truth is that today the mighty western liberal nation-state is facing challenges from several points, and they are all multinational forces. These counterforces are not only transnational corporations and the gigantic markets controlled by them but also from civil and human rights movements, global civil society and international non governmental organisations and at times from international terrorist organisations consistently backed by very strong radical religious movements. It is all spearheaded by the availability of knowledge networks accompanied by advancements in communication and technology networks. Super knowledge owners like Google, Microsoft, Facebook and a host of other electronic platforms have made learning available to all. And it is both a boon and bane. The information superhighway is now dominated by a large network of MNCs mostly based in advanced nations like the US, Japan, the UK, Germany, France, Canada, etc. The global flow is in their hands. The poor and developing nations are at the mercy of these gigantic corporations controlled by the developed countries.

The world is now at a crossroads. Knowledge has exploded. The owners of knowledge are finding it too difficult to protect their creations. The intriguing part of the TRIPS and post TRIPS global IP regime is that they all have failed to address the pitfalls of the huge information revolution. Today no single person or enterprise is the sole owner of knowledge or any other technical knowledge. It is fully diffused. It is there everywhere. Then how to safeguard it and how the creators will be benefited from their long hard work? The solution to this problem is too complex.

The global and national copyright legislations are facing an uphill task today. Nowhere the knowledge is safe. And there is no place to hide. Of course, there are stringent punishments awarded to law breakers, but then there is no end to predators till date. Frankly, the wide network of the transnational forces has weakened the long hand of the copyright law that used to be there much before the advent of the mighty Internet. Today the global knowledge economy is beyond the reach of the nation-state. Therefore, the knowledge networks that are supposed to aid all and share the benefits of innovations do not accord equal power to all. It further leads to a great digital divide between the countries of the North and the South. And this is creating an uneven world of knowledge. There is a large gap between access to knowledge and exploiting the benefits of the same in both sides of the globe. Today the global knowledge economy has gone beyond the arms of the copyright laws. It has long been micro-solified. Thus the owners of knowledge are solely in the hands of the big corporations of the advanced nations.

(Dr. Mahan Saikia has taught political science and international relations for over a decade in institutions of national and international repute after specialisation in globalisation and governance from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He is the chief editor of the Journal of Global Studies, an international journal.)

Despite a robust IPR regime, the information revolution and digital revolution have pushed knowledge maintenance to the brink of a serious danger. We receive information so easily that we don't even realise the worth of the creator or the owner...

Therefore, the knowledge networks that are supposed to aid all and share the benefits of innovations do not accord equal power to all. It further leads to a great digital divide between the countries of the North and the South



MAHAN SAKIA  
Pioneer

# Engg not just about computer science and IT. Can we stop this mad rush?

OPINION



V RAMGOPAL RAO

Engineering education in the country is facing enormous challenges with colleges hardly able to fill even one-third of the available seats in branches other than computer science and IT. Students don't want to join any of the traditional disciplines such as civil, mechanical, materials science, metallurgy, electrical etc. Many colleges are at a crossroads, wondering what to do with the faculty and infrastructure created in these core disciplines.

This leaves many unanswered questions. If everyone studies IT/CSE and if all the companies and products they build are e-commerce and IT related, where does that leave the other disciplines? It's easy to move from mechanical, civil, electronics etc to IT but the vice versa isn't going to be easy.

And what about India's unsolved problems at the grassroots level. Someone needs to build tech-

nologies in healthcare, agriculture, energy, defence, space, civil infrastructure, transportation, waste processing, semiconductors, manufacturing, drones and many more. Engineering isn't about civil, mechanical, CSE etc. Engineering is all about providing optimal and sustainable solutions to society's needs. Most of the problems we face in society don't come with a disciplinary tag. They often need multi-disciplinary teams to develop a solution. If all disciplines merge into CSE and IT, our innovation potential in addressing societal challenges may get grossly affected.

How can we address this situation and renew the interest of students in these traditional disciplines? In my opinion, this requires a multi-pronged approach at the national level as outlined below.

Firstly, we need to change the perception about traditional disciplines. For example, mechanical is no longer about dealing with large machines that require physical strength to operate and neither is civil engineering only about building bridges and dams. Industry 4.0 has completely transformed mechanical engineering with many depart-

ments doing advanced work on micro-electro-mechanical systems, microfluidics and other such technologies. A lot of civil engineers now study environmental issues and work on a multiplicity of pollution-related problems. Metallurgy has got morphed into materials science. Electronics is no longer about communications, there is VLSI and nanoelectronics. Electrical is not about electrical machines, it's all about smart grids and renewables. There is a need for AICTE and University Grants Commission (UGC) to create awareness workshops and provide counselling to students at the school level. Institutions must also offer minor degree programmes in areas that have a great job demand so every student can gain the required background from employment point of view.

Secondly, we need to launch technology missions at the national level that not only fund research but also serve as vehicles for innovation and wealth creation. For example, after the IT revolution that swept the country from the late '90s onwards, multiple other technologies have come and made a big impact on the research front. Some countries have

also capitalised on them. These are namely biotechnology, nanotechnology, cognitive technology (AI/ML etc) and quantum technologies. Drones and other applications have become possible, thanks to the advancements made on batteries etc. owing to nanotechnology and other materials research. Every decade has seen a new technology getting the attention of scientists and policy makers. Launching a mission mode initiative in these advanced technologies requires planning on three fronts—education, research and innovation. That's when jobs get created and educational programmes become attractive for students. Here are the broad steps.

• Every mission needs to start with creation of research facilities and building a research base in the country. All such missions must involve industry experts and allied ministries from the beginning.

• Research initiatives need to be backed by significant innovation and start-up funding schemes. There must be schemes to encourage industry participation. Knowledge generated through basic research needs to be steadily channelled into application-oriented areas.

• Educational programmes need to be planned from the beginning to find out how many graduates the country needs in these technology areas at the diploma level, graduate level and PhD level and over what timelines. Model curricula and study materials need to be devised with the help of top educationists in academia and professionals in industries. Teacher training and special manpower development initiatives need to be undertaken.

Such alignment of research, innovation and educational activities is important for these technology missions to eventually generate jobs and value for the society.

As a nation, the country is missing out on great opportunities these new technologies have on offer despite the vast knowledge pool and talent available locally. Without proper planning and execution, it will be a continued saga of India missing out on many such buses. We can do better. Careful planning holds the key. ■

*Prof V Ramgopal Rao is Pillay Chair Professor in the Dept of Electrical Engineering and former director of IIT Delhi. Views are personal*

TOL/25/25



SEEMA SACHIDEVA

**L**OU D Punjabi music is blaring from a modified car with boys on a 'geri' route. A cop tries to stop them but the 'kakas' attempt to intimidate the police officer and use abusive language. Meanwhile, more boys of their ilk crowd around, some simply to watch, others making videos that they would later upload. The incident that has been shaking the social media took place in Strawberry Hill, Surrey (British Columbia) on September 11. The car's silencer (muffler) removed, a group of Indian students had been taking rounds in the Sheridan plaza area. Following a complaint over the loud music, a police officer reached the area. When he issued them a ticket, some started banging on the bonnet of the police car, one even tried to open the driver's door. Fearing for his life, the officer immediately left the place.

As many as 40 youths, mostly students on study visa, are said to be involved, directly or indirectly, in this incident of hooliganism. According to Constable Sarbjit Sangha, media relations officer of the Surrey RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), "Threatening and trying to intimidate a police officer on duty is a serious matter. One youth has been identified while investigation is on to identify others. Some of them may be deported to India. Earlier, too, we had deported some Punjabi youths for causing nuisance here."

Terming it completely unacceptable, **Rachna Singh, MLA from Surrey Green** Timbers and parliamentary secretary of anti-racism initiatives, says, "For the past two to three years, incidents of inappropriate behaviour by Indian students, particularly from Punjab, have been coming to our notice. This kind of reckless conduct by even a small number makes things difficult for the rest of the hard-working, sincere students who are here to change their fortunes."

Prof Prabhjot Parmar of the University of Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, however, feels that such incidents must not be applied as a blanket representation of the Indian children coming to study here. "I'm sure such nuisance would not be tolerated even in India. While it will certainly bring attention to the fact that these 40-odd miscreants were international students, we have to understand that there are bound to be children with different types of behaviour, especially when such huge numbers are coming from India," she says.

Canada has been home away from home for Punjabis since long, but the last few years have seen a huge influx of students from India. Since the country opened its doors with the fast-track Student Direct Stream (SDS) programme, study visa has become a ticket to get permanent residency. Most of these students take admission in two-year diploma courses, which makes them eligible for a three-year work permit. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, there were 6,21,565 international students in Canada at all levels of study at the end of 2021. While there is no country-wise breakup, Indian students make up the maximum at 35 per cent. As many as 65 per cent of the Indian visa applications for Canada are from Punjab. The statistics released by the National Foundation for American Policy in March this year found that ever since visa restrictions increased in the US (from 2016 to 2019), the number of Indian students at Canadian colleges and universities went up by 182 per cent.

Figures state that international students boost the Canadian economy by about \$24 billion. Ruing this loss of human and financial resources, Gurbhajan Singh Gill, chairman of Punjabi Lok Virsa Academy, Ludhiana, says, "A large number of seats in our colleges are lying vacant, while children are thronging unnumberable private shops offering IELTS training to leave the country where they see no opportunities for themselves. We need to look at where our education system is failing."

With most Indians (read Punjabis) settled in Ontario and British Columbia (BC), a number of students from Punjab prefer to study and live in areas closer to Brampton and Surrey for a feel of home, besides easy availability of Indian food and no language hurdles. Students mostly live in



# JARRING NOTES

The recent incident of hooliganism by some Indian students in Canada, which went viral, puts the spotlight on the issues they face in a foreign land

## Parents should guide, support children

Constable Sarbjit Sangha, media relations officer, Surrey RCMP talks about the fate of the 40 Indian students who tried to intimidate the police officer and more. Excerpts from an interview:

### ■ What exactly happened that day?

On September 11, when our police officer tried to issue a violation ticket to a car driver, the crowd swarmed around and started abusing him. They also tried to stop his car. Our investigation is on. One suspect has already been identified while the identification of others is on. Once the investigation is completed, a detailed report will be forwarded for further action to the Canadian Border Services Agency, which can take a decision on their deportment as well.

### ■ How serious can the charges be?

According to the Canadian Criminal Code, two charges will apply: Obstruction of Justice System and Intimidation of Justice System. These are both very serious charges. If you are convicted in court, you will be given a jail sentence of two years and five years, respectively. Depending on how many more such cases these students have



CONSTABLE SARBJIT SANGHA

### The Tribune Interview

been involved in earlier, they can be deported as well. Merely being a spectator or video-taping the incident is not against the law, but whosoever is involved in the act of intentionally stopping the officer's car will be charged.

### ■ Have there been cases of deaths by suicide?

While the number of suicides is not very high, it is definitely a matter of concern. International students face a lot of stress. It is more in cases where they don't have a work permit. I have spoken to many girls who say their parents have sent them to Canada and they will not spend more on them. Any fee, rent or other expenses are to be managed on their own. Many girls, who don't have work

permit, work here on cash, where they are sometimes exploited by the owners. If there's any sexual assault by the employer, they do not report the matter out of shame. While very few cases come to us, we know such things are happening in our community.

### ■ What is your message to parents and students?

When you send your children to a new country, make them aware of the rules and regulations there, including motor vehicle laws. Your responsibility doesn't end with sending your child to Canada. When you decide to send your sons or daughters to a foreign country, please make sure you have the financial means to support them till their studies get over.

If international students are victims of any kind of crime, they should not hesitate to report to the police. We are here to help the Indian community. Also, please keep in mind that end with sending your child to Canada. When you decide to send your sons or daughters to a foreign country, please make sure you have the financial means to support them till their studies get over.

## WORRY BACK HOME

For parents in India, diplomatic rows like the one over a pro-Khalistan referendum leaves them with anxiety over the safety of their children. In its advisory to Indian nationals and students in Canada, the Indian government mentions a sharp increase in incidents of hate crimes, sectarian violence and anti-India activities in Canada.

Diplomatic tensions could create problems for Indian students. An issue of some worry, say experts, is that Canada has opened its SDS programme to Pakistan students as well.

Toronto-based mediaperson Shameel Jasvir says, "We understand parents must be concerned about the safety of their children, but they can be rest assured that there has been no sectarian violence." Neither in the Vancouver area, says Richmond-based news director Sameer Kaushal, nor Calgary, according to Senator Rishi Nagar, who is presently in India.



PHOTOS: THE TRIBUNE, ISTOCK

groups of 10 to 15 in the basements, sharing the rent. They have gained a reputation of not maintaining the property well, besides indulging in brawls.

Says Rishi Nagar, Senator at University of Calgary, "Most of the students come straight after finishing Class 12. In the absence of any parental guidance, many have no regard for the local laws and regulations. From driving cars with loud music and jumping red lights to jay walking on roads and stepping out in bathroom slippers, which is looked down upon here, they are clueless about the norms being followed. One understands the huge cultural difference that these students must be experiencing but their parents and families back home should guide them about the need to respect the norms and culture in another country."

"The incidence of fights among the students is limited, say only 5-7 per cent, but these get highlighted and noticed because of social media, feels Shameel Jasvir, host and news director at REDFM, Toronto. "Often, a few rich students who are not bothered about com-

pleting their courses can be seen driving flashy cars with Punjabi songs blaring. They create a bad name for the rest of the sincere and hardworking ones, who, too, are looked at with disdain by the established community here." He says that the non-acceptance from the locals adds to their sense of isolation. They do not want to share their problems back home for the worry it would cause and often end up facing mental health issues, he says, adding that cases of death by suicide among students have also been reported over the past few years.

"Making ends meet with a work permit of 20 hours a week is not enough. It is an open secret that many students work for cash, often at stores and warehouses owned by Indians. Many a time, the employers exploit them by making them work beyond the timing or pay them less than the fixed wages. Youths often get involved in drug peddling to make easy money. It is sad that there have also been instances of sexual assault on girls students while some of them even get into trafficking," says Sameer Kaushal, news director at AM600 Sher-

Punjab Radio, based in Richmond, BC.

Rakesh Kumar Rhythm, who is based in Langley, British Columbia, feels the kind of courses students are taking up is an issue. "Proper guidance is missing. Often immigration consultants and travel agents in India guide them to their commission-based diploma courses. For instance, the diplomas in associated sciences or arts programmes have little or no utility for the students unless they enroll in expensive university degree courses. So, after their course gets over, most end up picking low-paying jobs. Instead, they should do specific diplomas in skill-based technical courses such as dental hygiene, lab technician, radiology, plumbing, electrician, carpentry, etc, which remain in high demand and pay you as much as a white collar job here."

"Most of the students who come to us are interested in taking admission in diploma courses like associated arts or business administration," says Kamal K Bhumbal of BN Overseas Educational Services, Jalandhar. "We advise them to go for technical or skill-based courses but often they

choose courses their friends are also taking up," adds the immigration consultant. "Unlike earlier, most of the students nowadays are going to Canada in groups." On lesser number of visas being issued, he says it could be due to backlog but good profile visa applications never get rejected.

The problem, says Toronto-based community activist Jaspal Bal, is that most of these children, barely out of school, are enrolled in courses that are not academically challenging. Taking a compassionate view of the incidents of misbehaviour by the international students, Bal, whom Indian students approach regarding their issues, feels deportation of kids is not a solution. The students have come here chasing the dream of permanent residency, just like many others who came here decades back, and who too must have made many such mistakes. They need our help and guidance. We cannot just shun them." If and when some of these kids are deported, they'll be a low-hanging fruit for gangsters and other anti-social elements, he says. "It will only sear and break them for life."

7/25/22



# Governor vs Govt

The spat between the Kerala Governor and the Chief Minister is most unfortunate

**Y**atha Raja, Tatho Praja (As the ruler, so his subjects) is an age-old saying. If the rulers are honest, the ruled too would be of the same genre, as per this adage. The rulers are the ones who set the benchmark of quality and standard in normal life. The stand-off featuring Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was a blot not only on democracy but on the entire political discourse. What started as a wordy duel soon degenerated into name-calling and using the choicest of abuses by certain CPI (M) leaders known for their contempt for civility. Arif Mohammed Khan should have used his reign in Thiruvananthapuram Raj Bhavan to learn that the Marxists are blunt and hubristic towards persons who do not agree with their line of thinking. Whenever they are in power, it is customary for the CPI (M) to appoint party fellow comrades and cadres as vice-chancellors, faculty members, and



administrative staff in universities even if they do not meet the mandatory qualifications. The Marxists in Kerala are known for their uncompromising stance that the 'Boss can never be wrong. Being a scholarly person as claimed by BJP leaders, the Governor should have read George Orwell's Animal Farm before landing in Thiruvananthapuram.

The issue before the Governor is that certain legislations enacted by the Assembly to strengthen the CPI (M)-led Government with the power to appoint people of their choice in all Government departments and to do away with the authority of Lok Pal, the official whistleblower. Arif Mohammed Khan could have signed the Bills or sent the same for the opinion of constitutional experts. There was no need for the Governor to interact with the Kerala media which the Raj Bhavan itself has pronounced as 'hostile' and 'partial'. The Chief Minister, while rebuking the Governor for speaking in a language that does not suit the position being held by the latter, should have asked his comrades too to not cross the Lakshman Rekha. One of the party commissars was sentenced to a jail term for calling High Court judges 'illiterates' and 'imbeciles'. A good Governor should have taken a cue from Queen Elizabeth, the former monarch of Great Britain who, having worked with more than two dozen Prime Ministers, left a mark of elegance and aristocracy on her tenure. Despite facing myriad personal and official issues, the Queen remained a cool customer and a role model for other heads of State. Khan should have emulated the Queen.

26/9/22



# Human Development

The current Anthropocene era, in which human activity is the dominant influence on climate and environment, is seeing unprecedentedly high temperatures, floods and fires across the globe. Acute crises have become endemic, adding layers of uncertainty to everyone's life and instilling a feeling of insecurity. The world order that was designed for post-war - not post-millennium - challenges is crumbling, unable to countenance selfish national interest by major powers. Not surprisingly, the Global Human Development Index has fallen two years in a row



**H**uman Development Report 2021/22 titled "Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World," released by UNDP recently, draws a disheartening conclusion. The Global Human Development Index is headed downwards, due to uncertainties in the lives of people as a result of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic, endemic conflicts, particularly the Ukraine war, as also adverse climate and ecological events. Assessing human development the world over, the Report finds that polarisation and transformation in societies have led to previously un-experienced vagaries and vacillation and inequalities in income and opportunities, that have exacerbated the anxiety and uncertainty in peoples' minds.

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures average achievement of a country in three key dimensions of human development, namely: having a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and having a decent standard of living. The health dimension is measured by life expectancy at birth, and the education dimension by average years of schooling for adults above 25 years and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age. The standard of living dimension is measured by per-capita Gross National Income (GNI). The Human Development Report, is based mainly on data from United Nations agencies like United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and international organisations like World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The current Anthropocene era, in which human activity is the dominant influence on climate and environment, is seeing unprecedentedly high temperatures, floods and fires across the globe. Acute crises have become endemic, adding layers of uncertainty to everyone's life and instilling a feeling of insecurity. The world order that was designed for post-war - not post-millennium - challenges is crumbling, unable to countenance selfish national interest by major powers. Not surprisingly, the Global Human Development Index has fallen two years in a row, erasing the gains of the last five years.

The Human Development Report does not bring good tidings for India, our rank has fallen to 132 from 131 and our HDI is now .633 as against .645, of the

earlier year. Expectedly, there has been no official reaction, since adverse findings by international bodies are anathema to rulers.

Statistically, the HDI score and ranking of India has fallen because of the fall in life expectancy, from 69.7 years to 67.2 years, probably on account of Covid deaths. Coming to the second indicator, none can deny that education, particularly after the Covid disruption, is at its nadir. So far as per capita income is concerned, we are in the lower-middle income group at a rank of 142. Thus, give or take a few positions, there cannot be much dispute about our low HDI ranking.

That said, the Human Development Report has focussed disproportionately on insecurity and anxiety in peoples' minds. This factor may not be present with the same intensity in India; the Public Distribution System (PDS), under the National Food Security Act, with 81 crore beneficiaries, provides assured rations to all Indians, taking away a major source of worry and uncertainties. With its many shortcomings and scandals, PDS is far from perfect, but has largely achieved its objective. Probably, for this reason alone, the Consumer Confidence Survey of the Reserve Bank of India, found that the Current Situation Index (CSI), presently at 77.9, though in pessimistic zone (below 100) is rising steadily, while the Future Expectations Index, is at 113.3.

Rather, income and social inequalities and the poor state of education, employment, and public healthcare, with rampant inflation in the background, are the main causes of poor human development in our country. Concomitantly, our score and rank in achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has also fallen.

Some alarming indicators of falling human development in India are:

Poor people being pushed back into extreme poverty.

Workers in the informal economy - 80 per cent of the workforce - facing underemployment and unemployment.

Most people at risk of disease, because of lack of adequate housing, no running water, shared toilets, little or no waste management systems, overcrowded public transport and limited access to healthcare facilities.

\* Poor healthcare services and

poor diet and nutrition.

\* Surge in domestic violence against women and children.

\* School closures during the Covid period kept 90 per cent of students out of school and caused them to miss school meals. Most students had no learning during this period, because of lack of access to computers and smartphones.

\* Rising temperatures and adverse climate events that brought floods and droughts and lowered agricultural production.

The Human Development Report prescribes the three I's:

investment, insurance and innovation, to improve HDI.

\* Investment, in renewable energy and measures to increase preparedness for pandemics and extreme natural hazards, will help in dealing with global shocks. Investment in social services, like healthcare and education, will better the lives of people.

\* Medical, asset, and life insurance will protect people from contingencies.

\* Innovations, technological, economic, cultural, will be vital in responding to un-known and unforeseeable challenges of the future.

However, these measures alone may not be sufficient for India to climb up the human development ladder; first, we have to address acute poverty, that has deprived many people of human dignity let alone development, and also social and income inequalities that are leading to discontentment and strife in society. Statistics in this regard are alarming: during the last two years, 84 per cent households suffered a decline in their incomes, with 4.6 crore people falling into abject poverty. Rampant inflation, nearly 7 per cent for the last six months, has reduced the purchasing power of poor households significantly. Contrarily, the number of Indian billionaires has grown from 102 to 221 and their wealth has increased from Rs 23 lakh crore to Rs.60 lakh crore. Big business is earning superlative profits; the income of listed companies grew by 40.1 per cent in the June 2022 quarter, after a growth of 42.1 per cent in the June 2021 quarter.

Belying expectations of the Government, the money saved by corporates as a result of tax cuts and incentives, was not used to pay dividends or create infrastructure assets; net fixed assets

of non-finance companies grew by only 2.1 per cent in 2021-22 and investments in plant and machinery grew by only 0.21 per cent, while corporates increased their investment in equity shares by 17.4 per cent and investment in debt instruments by 28.5 per cent. Apparently, public money spent by the Government during the pandemic has also ended up in the share market, these humongous inflows have inflated stock prices beyond reason and increased the wealth of the already rich, accentuating income inequalities in society.

Large-scale unemployment is fuelling poverty and despair; according to Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy (CMIE) data, India's employment rate was only 37.3 per cent in August 2022, meaning that only 37.3 per cent of the working age population in India were employed. Unemployment was at a high of 8.3 per cent, with total employment falling by 2 million to 394.6 million in August 2022.

The key to solving these societal problems lies in shifting the Government's focus from mollycoddling business and industry, to promoting agriculture and improving rural infrastructure. Significantly, the agricultural sector was the only sector of the economy that grew before, after, and even during the coronavirus scourge, when the entire economy went into recession. A revamped agricultural sector will provide employment and income to many, because there is a huge demand for food grains and agricultural produce throughout the world. But for some reason the Government favours only big business; while announcing initiatives like Production Linked (PLI) worth Rs.1.76 lakh crore and tax cuts of Rs.1.45 lakh crore for corporates, the Government offered only the Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF), and now PM-PRANAM initiative for agriculture, which have no separate budgetary allocation.

The ball is now squarely in the Government's court: in addition to the three I's suggested by the Human Development Report, distributive justice and meaningful initiatives by the Government in the fields of employment, education and healthcare are required to ensure a better life for our countrymen, and reverse our falling Human Development Index. As Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft had said: "Fortunately for India, it has got a growing economy. If it is doing the right things with taxation and focusing on the right areas for human development, it is going to have no problem, over a period of time, taking care of its own needs." *Subh 26/9*



**DEVENDRA SAKSHINA**

The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax



# Raging battle

## SOUTHERN SKIES

M.G. RADHAKRISHNAN

**K**erala has seen many bitter altercations between state governments and governors. This is not unusual in states where the party in power is opposed to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. Yet, the ongoing spat between the 17-month-old Left Democratic Front government and the governor, Arif Mohammed Khan, has assumed unprecedented dimensions. For the first time in Kerala's history, the governor held a two-hour-long media conference at the Raj Bhavan on September 19 to attack the government and the chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan.

Crossing constitutional restraints, Khan slammed the government's various policies and said the LDF's ideology is of "foreign origin" that believed in violence as a legitimate political tool. The chief minister has now accused the governor of having political ambitions and being a tool of the *sangh parivar* to destabilise his government. Khan has indicated that he wouldn't sign the government ordinances intended to curtail the authority of the governor as university chancellor and alter the constitution of the Lokayukta.

A veteran with a half-a-century-long chequered political career, Khan has deployed all the tricks of brinkmanship in the ongoing war of attrition. What's new is the high-decibel clash between the governor and the chief minister. The state's two highest functionaries had refrained from attacking each other until now. This continued even when the governor clashed many times with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or the Congress since he took over in September 2019. But on September 15, the governor took on the chief minister personally for the first time, accusing him of nepotism. Khan was referring to the controversial appointment of Priya Varghese as associate professor of Malayalam at the University of Kannur, allegedly overlooking more deserving candidates. Varghese is the wife of K.K. Ragesh, the CPI(M)'s former Rajya Sabha member, who is now the chief minister's private secretary. "Can anyone believe the Chief Minister didn't know this?" Khan asked. He also said he wouldn't allow executive interference in universities. "I had said earlier I will give up my chancellor position. And I still do not want to continue, but if I'm the chancellor, I will not be a rubber stamp."

**M.G. Radhakrishnan, a senior journalist based in Thiruvananthapuram, has worked with various print and electronic media organisations**



The chief minister of Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan (left), and the governor of Kerala, Arif Mohammed Khan

Vijayan hit back immediately, calling the governor's outburst ridiculous and not befitting his office. "I don't know what is happening to him. He seems to be venting his frustration from some of his plans getting defeated. Mr Khan should examine himself or get himself examined." Vijayan asked how a chief minister could know every detail about the family members of his staff. "Besides, is being the wife of my staff a disqualification?" he asked. Quoting the Constitution and landmark judicial verdicts, Vijayan said the governor's words and deeds had no constitutional validity.

Khan promptly returned the fire, saying he was happy that Vijayan had ended his proxy war and come out in the open. Two days later, he held a media conference at the Raj Bhavan and repeated his allegations. The governor also presented visuals and letters by the chief minister claiming to bolster his charges. He accused Vijayan, Ragesh, and the UoK vice-chancellor, Gopinath Ravindran, of condoning or helping many wrongdoings, including an alleged attempt to assault him at the Indian History Congress's 80th session held in the UoK in December 2019. The session witnessed livid altercations between the governor on one side and many delegates, including the historian, Irfan Habib, on the other. Some delegates also heckled Khan by shouting slogans and raising placards when he defended the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the Narendra Modi government

in his inaugural speech. Setting aside his written text, Khan had countered the charges made by the earlier speakers against the CAA, including Ragesh, who was then a Rajya Sabha member. He later accused Ragesh of preventing the police from stopping the hecklers. Khan blamed Ravindran for allegedly joining the then 88-year-old Habib in trying to assault him physically and tearing up his security officer's uniform. Khan said it was an attempt to murder! Habib, the IHC's outgoing chairman, who was on the dais, had walked up to Khan when he quoted Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and told him to quote Nathuram Godse instead. This enraged Khan, and both exchanged angry words until Habib was persuaded to return to his seat by Ravindran. Khan also suggested that the chief minister, who holds the home ministry portfolio, had prevented the police from registering a case of heckling against him which was a cognisable offence. Khan had earlier called Ravindran a "criminal" and Habib a "goonda". Khan said his hecklers were not from Kerala but from Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia Millia Islamia and that the show of placards pointed to a conspiracy against him. The IHC reportedly dismissed Khan's charges, saying it made special arrangements for his security at the cost of Rs 8 lakh.

But the most awaited moment at the governor's crowded media conference was his promised pres-

entation of visual evidence of the 'attempt to murder'. But that turned out to be a bummer with nothing more than what the television channels had showed earlier. Khan also read out from letters of the chief minister assuring him of non-interference with the governor's authority as chancellor. Khan accused Vijayan of reneging on his promise as the government is moving to bring in ordinances to curtail his powers as university chancellor. He also revealed that Vijayan had personally requested him to extend Ravindran's tenure as the vice-chancellor.

Coincidentally, Khan's detractors at the IHC figure in Varghese's appointment issue, providing him with a perfect target. Varghese's husband, Ragesh, was the first to provoke Khan at the IHC by speaking most vociferously against the Modi government. Habib and Ravindran had been among the left-wing historians at the Indian Council of Historical Research with whom the first Modi government had a major spat in 2015. Ravindran, who was then a professor at Jamia Millia, had resigned as the ICHR's member secretary, alleging sardonisation of the ICHR.

Khan's outburst against the government has, once again, raised perennial questions regarding constitutional federalism and the authority of the governor *vis-à-vis* the state government. The CPI(M)'s declaration of war against Khan is reminiscent of the call by the Jyoti Basu government in Bengal in 1984 to boycott the then governor, A.P. Sharma, for his rejection of the names proposed by the government as vice-chancellors of the universities of Burdwan and Calcutta and withholding consent to the Calcutta University amendment bill.

**E**ven as the CPI(M)'s fusillade against Khan gathers steam, the Bharatiya Janata Party has run to his defence. Caught in the crossfire is the Congress, which, while opposing the government, doesn't want to appear to be friendly with Khan who never misses an opportunity to flaunt his closeness to the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Even while the controversy was raging, he took time to meet Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS *sanghchalak*, who was visiting Kerala. "What's wrong in it? I have been close to the RSS since 1986," he said.

Meanwhile, Khan's infatuation with the media appears to be over after he faced irritating questions at the Raj Bhavan meeting. The next day, he said he wouldn't speak to the Kerala media, saying it had no self respect because it failed to respond fittingly to the chief minister even after he ordered them out of a conference five years ago. 10/2/20



# महामारी से स्कूली शिक्षा में क्या बदलाव आया

कोरोना के बाद जब समाज वापस अपने ढर्रे पर आ रहा है तो शैक्षणिक व्यवस्था से जुड़े लोगों से अपेक्षा है कि वह पाठ्यसामग्री और उसके प्रस्तुतीकरण पर ध्यान दें



रामानंद

जिन बच्चों का जन्म पांच वर्ष पहले हुआ था, वे कोरोना के कारण अब पांच साल की उम्र में स्कूल जा पा रहे हैं। जो पहले जा रहे थे, उनका भी दो वर्षों के दौरान स्कूल की दुनिया से संवाद टूट सा गया था। कोरोना ने सबसे ज्यादा नुकसान बच्चों और उनके संसार को पहुंचाया। वास्तव में मानसिक और शारीरिक रूप से उन्हें कोरोना के दौरान कितना नुकसान पहुंचा, इसका पता लगाया जाना अभी बाकी है। लेकिन इस बात पर लगभग सबकी राय एक है कि बच्चों के भावनात्मक संसार को कोरोना ने जितना नुकसान पहुंचाया है, उसकी भरपाई मुश्किल है। कोरोना काल के दो वर्ष शिक्षण से जुड़े लोगों के लिए चुनौतीपूर्ण तो थे, लेकिन साथ-साथ अवसर भी थे।

- उस अवधि में समाज ने जो एक नया प्रयोग देखा, उसकी बदौलत हम टेक्नॉलजी के ज्यादा करगव आ गए। इसके जरिए शिक्षक

और छात्रों के बीच संवाद को फिर से जीवित करने का प्रयास हुआ। इस लिहाज से टेक्नॉलजी ने कोरोना के संकट में हमारी सहायता की।

- दूसरे पहलू को देखें तो यह जरूर साफ हुआ है कि तकनीक से बच्चों के व्यवहार में नकारात्मक परिवर्तन भी हुआ है। महामारी के दौरान कुछ लोगों को लगने लगा था कि तकनीकीकरण शैक्षणिक संरचना को पूरी तरह से बदल देगा।
- इस समय बहुत सी कंपनियां शैक्षणिक उत्पादें लेकर आईं। उनका दावा था कि आने वाले समय में शिक्षा व्यवस्था में शिक्षकों की और कुछ समय बाद स्कूलों की भी जरूरत नहीं रहेगी। अपनी बात को सच साबित करने के लिए उन्होंने बड़े-बड़े नामों के साथ विज्ञापन भी दिया। शुरुआती दिनों में उनके दावों से प्रभावित कुछ स्कूल और अभिभावक आकर्षित भी हुए। लेकिन पाठ्यसामग्री के अभाव और मानवीय संवेदनाओं की कमी ने जल्द ही अभिभावकों को इस भ्रम से दूर कर दिया।

नतीजतन ये कंपनियां जितनी तेजी से फैल रही थीं, अब उतनी ही तेजी से संकुचित भी हो रही हैं। इसके दो कारण रहे।

- पहला, परंपरागत शैक्षणिक संस्थान कोरोना के बाद फिर से खुल गए।



## कॉमन रूम

- दूसरा, इन कंपनियों के उत्पाद शैक्षणिक दृष्टि से पूर्ण नहीं थे। शिक्षाविद और अब तक के अनुभव बताते हैं कि शिक्षा में शैक्षणिक सामग्रियों का बहुत बड़ा योगदान है। यह शैक्षणिक सामग्री ही है, जिसने सुपर-30 को बिना विज्ञापन के ही पूरे विश्व में चर्चित कर दिया।

इसलिए कोरोना के बाद जब समाज वापस अपने ढर्रे पर आ रहा है तो स्कूलों और शैक्षणिक व्यवस्था से जुड़े लोगों से अपेक्षा है कि वह पाठ्यसामग्री और उसके प्रस्तुतीकरण पर फिर से चर्चा करें और उनके विकास पर ध्यान दें। इसमें एक महत्वपूर्ण बात और दिख रही है कि प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने स्कूली शिक्षा को

प्राथमिकता देना शुरू किया है।

- यह संकेत राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति-2020 से मिलने लगा था। लेकिन अभी 5 सितंबर को जब उन्होंने 14,500 नए आदर्श स्कूल खोलने की घोषणा की तो इसकी फिर से पुष्टि हो गई।
- ये नए मॉडल स्कूल ब्लॉक स्तर पर खोले जाएंगे और हर ब्लॉक में इनकी संख्या दो होगी। ये स्कूल राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति की सिफारिशों के अनुरूप होंगे और केंद्र सरकार इन्हें केंद्रीय विद्यालय और नवोदय विद्यालय के स्तर पर विकसित करेगी।
- ये नए स्कूल न केवल बच्चों को शिक्षा के लिए प्रेरित करेंगे, बल्कि राज्य सरकारों को भी इसी तर्ज पर स्कूल विकसित करने को प्रेरणा देंगे।

कोरोना काल के समय हुए नुकसान को पूरी भरपाई कर पाना तो संभव नहीं है, न ही हम बच्चों को उनके बोते दो वर्ष लौटा सकते हैं। लेकिन यदि हम अपने पुराने अनुभवों से सीखते हुए एक ऐसी शैक्षणिक व्यवस्था की बुनियाद रख देते हैं जो आगे चलकर कोरोना या कोरोना जैसी किसी भी परेशानी का सामना कर सके तो यह अपने आप में बड़ी सफलता होगी।

(लेखक सेंटर ऑफ पॉलिसी रिसर्च एंड गवर्नंस के निदेशक हैं और वर्तमान में एनसोईआरटी गॉटन शिक्षक शिक्षा के नेशनल फोकस समूह के सदस्य हैं।)

N 26/9/22



# Libraries rescue education in rural Karnataka

KEERTY NAKRAY

**C**ovid-19 posed one of the greatest challenges to the education system with school closures. According to UNESCO, the pandemic has led to school closures in 191 countries, leaving 1.6 billion (90.2%) students out of schools. The World Economic Forum has estimated that 320 million learners in India have been affected by Covid-19 and have transitioned to e-learning.

India is marked by inter and intra-household disparities in access to technologies such as television, laptops, tablets, mobile phones, and the Internet. In September 2020, a phone-based survey conducted by the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) showed that one in three children in rural area had no learning activity, and only one in 10 had access to live online classes. Learning, or lack of it, is only one part of the problem; closing of schools led to the non-availability of mid-day meals, disruption in routines, mobility restrictions on play, and lack of interactions with peers – all of which affected children's overall well-being.

Amid this grim scenario, Karnataka ushered in a new social movement through rejuvenation and recalibration of its 5600-strong network of rural libraries. Historically, decentralised governance through Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) has been pivotal to empowering rural communities in Karnataka. A three-tier model of governance with gram panchayats, taluk and zilla panchayats has been at the centre of developmental activities in the state with robust implementation of the gender and caste-based reservations. Additionally, based on a state legislation for libraries, the local bodies levy a library cess, which supports development and maintenance of its libraries.

With the onslaught of the first wave of the pandemic, the PRIs ensured doorstep delivery of Anganwadi and midday meal rations for children. Also, rural children were enrolled free of charge as library members. In addition, a public movement was initiated to collect books through community donations. The honorarium paid to librarians was increased, and training programmes were launched to upskill them.

The panchayats played a vital role in renovating library

buildings with child-friendly murals and gardens. The funds untied by panchayats were utilised judiciously. The state government has sanctioned 339 new libraries this year. Many students use the library space for doing their homework or preparing for competitive examinations. Some libraries also house indoor games like chess, carrom, and ludo, and have television screens for learning resources.

Within a short span, over 19 lakh children have been enrolled as members and can access libraries free of cost. Picture books, story books, dictionaries, etc., have been received as donations with support from Azim Premji Foundation, Pratham Books and other organisations. Several NGOs are supporting the initiative: Concerned for Working Children (CWC), Children's Movement for Civil Awareness (CMCA), Adhyayan Foundation, Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS), Kalike-Tata Trust, Akanksha Charitable Trust, Yuva Chintana Foundation and India Literacy Project. Efforts are on to upgrade 500 beacon libraries which will be disabled-friendly with ramps, aids and learning materials in Braille for the blind.

According to Uma Mahadevan-Dasgupta, additional chief secretary, Panchayat Raj in Karnataka, this initiative is unique because it envisions the rural library as a knowledge centre: "For rural children, these libraries are more than just a repository of books. They provide access not only to books, but also to online resources; more importantly, they provide access to safe spaces for children to read, reflect, interact and learn."

Rural libraries are unique experiments to reimagine the education system supported by decentralised learning spaces for rural children. Along with a potential to harness Karnataka's rich traditions of intellectual discussions, literature and music, rural libraries are strategically placed to be a part of policy framework to leverage Karnataka's existing vantage at the centre of India's science and innovation economy. It can produce the next generation of leaders in science, literature, and culture.

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# Playtime is key to intelligence, academic success

Playtime must find place of importance in the day's routine of children, for key life lessons are learnt in this manner

The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights recognises play as a fundamental right for every child. Play time must be looked at as an opportunity to enhance overall development of children and not something that is adopted at the expense of academic achievement. Thus, play is not an antithesis to brain and whole child development, but an important aspect of it.

Very often, children are told that they can play once they finish their homework. In other instances, play time is used synonymously as organised sports classes. However, play is characterised by choice, wonder, and delight. Hence, children have to be provided with adequate



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opportunities both for structured and unstructured play.

Unstructured play, also known as free play, is predominantly child-led. Children design these experiences for themselves to seek moments of happiness and excitement. These opportunities look like making up games and creating rules of fair play. Play-time structured or led by adults, while beneficial, reaps limited benefits.

The idea is to make children participate in experiences that are self-directed moments. Research indicates that it is the unstructured moments in which children experience wonder and delight. During real play, children shape the meaning they derive from their worlds and

ascribe the same to other experiences.

In choosing types of games, critical thought and self-awareness are required. Children's day is scheduled for the routine of the day or the timetable of the school. Children get limited opportunities to experience agency and choice. While engaging in playtime, children are not only making conscious choices about who to play with but also what and how to play. They even make decisions regarding team members; when does one win, and strategize about how they can win. These decisions which seem insignificant are building blocks of executive functions.

Same skills are employed when organising self-study,

choosing careers, and also when making emotional life choices. Exposure to decision making and evaluating provides a framework for thinking.

Children acquire tools such as pros and cons, logical reasoning and even organising their emotions. They learn to collaborate with peers to arrive at a conclusion.

Unstructured play gives students the language to communicate their own thoughts respectfully and negotiation tactics. Furthermore, team-based play inculcates essential leadership skills as well.

Play time, which engrosses children in a state of wonder, develops key areas of the brain responsible for constructing thought and imagination. These skills

are also useful for projection into the future. A child who can imagine make-believe scenarios during play would also be adept at imagining his or her success in the future. They would be able to think through who they want to be when they grow up. A core component of achievement is the ability to set vision and goals for an unknown tomorrow.

Playtime builds this awareness of scenarios that feel joyful and motivating. Such awareness helps them take better steps towards personal achievement, such as, staying in friendships, which bring a feeling of happiness and safety, choosing subject areas which instil pride, and eventually staying in professions, which harness

one's full potential.

Delight is an underrated aspect of a child's life. Much like adults, experiencing happiness provides encouragement to take on challenging situations and embrace resilience. Feeling truly satisfied empowers the child to do more.

When they experience delight, they find it within their potential to do something just a tad bit more challenging than what they could do the last time. So, the arena for hide and seek becomes larger or the introduction of special powers during play is often seen. Building the schema of tackling tough tasks after experiencing joy is essential for other aspects as well. One may notice children doing

simpler content before attempting to study the more difficult subjects. One might also notice children being able to do more challenging work when they are working with their friends. It is the feeling of happiness that propels them forward.

As long as we continue to look at playing as the opposite of academics, we are doing a disservice to children. As adults, we engage with play too, through board games or other party games. Try and remember how you felt in that moment, and how it might have impacted your functioning. Now imagine how much children could benefit if they got to experience that consistently. How well it might prepare them for a complex, challenging world.



# Development Issues

Development should be viewed as a journey to achieve freedom. It is a process of generation and realization of new opportunities. Sustained development, however, is a continuous process. Imparting proper education is a deliberate, spontaneous, process. It enlarges abilities. Social goals and social content of education appear to be equally important



The 2021 Human Development Index (HDI) report released recently by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicates a global decline and India is at the 132nd position out of 191 countries. The Human Development Report, a measure of a nation's health, education and average income - has declined for two years in a row - 2020 and 2021 reversing five years of progress, the report says. The report categorically stated - "Like global trends, in India's case, the drop in HDI from 0.645 in 2019 to 0.633 in 2021 can be attributed to falling perceived life expectancy-69.7 to with 67.2 years, India's expected years of schooling stand at 11.9 years and the mean years of schooling are at 6.7 years" in line with the global decline.

The latest Human Development Report - Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World, launched by the UNDP emphasises the importance of uncertainty prevailing in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated the problem to a great extent. In addition, political turmoil, economic regression, global climate change and war surely decelerated the quality of human life at least for five years.

It transpires from the UN report that India is lagging behind Bangladesh (129), Bhutan (127), Sri Lanka (73) and China (79) so far as HDI is concerned. Be that as it may the UNDP report on recent HDI is succinct and quintessential; it embraces major issues concerning development.

"The world is scrambling to respond to back to back crises. We have seen with cost of living and energy crises that, while it is tempting to focus on quick fixes like subsidizing fossil fuels, immediate relief tactics are delaying the long-term systematic changes we must make," iterated Achim Steiner, administrator, UNDP. It is true that despite severe uncertainty, many countries are striving hard to get back on their feet, but the recovery is insignificant. As a matter of fact, the health crisis intensified, with two thirds of countries recording further reductions in life expectancy at birth, the report said.

The Human Development Report shows that the progress globally is in reverse. India's dec-

line in human development mirrors this trend impacted by intersecting crises. But there is good news. Compared to 2019, "the impact of inequality on human development is lower", according to Shoka Noda, the UNDP Resident Representative in India.

The qualitative indicators of development as conceived by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are unique. Monitoring development over time is important in order to improve the life-styles of common people. Some typical qualitative

indicators are literacy, mortality and morbidity rates, income etc. The UNDP over the years has focused on the inter-relationships between human development and human rights. It analyses the impact of, growth, economic structures, human rights development and reiterates that elimination of poverty should be addressed as a basic entitlement of human right and definitely should not be perceived as an act of charity. The value of HDI, its relevance and importance is well recognized. Consequently the human poverty index (HPI) emerges as a powerful instrument for conceptual understanding and embracing sustainable development.

Recognizing the poverty of choices and opportunities implies that poverty must be addressed in all its dimensions, not income alone, despite the fact that a lot can be achieved in human development by utilizing income. It is absolutely essential that income should not dictate the value of the HDI. The HDI index has been criticized on a number of grounds. For example, it fails to include any ecological considerations including environment and climate change, exclusively pinpointing on national performance and ranking and not paying cognizance to development from a global perspective. The imperfections of the HDI index and its shortcomings like other composite indices evoke many pertinent questions including its transformation and evolution as well as its distillation and refinement.

Advocating equal rights for women and children has been and will continue to be an important factor underlying this evolution. The assessment of perceived satisfaction and dissatisfaction prove to be useful. Administrative records do not always give correct results. Statistics supplied by nodal agencies are most likely to be inaccurate.

Another indicator is the proportion of households with at least one literate member. Most developed countries which have had compulsory education do not necessarily measure

literacy. Similarly, few hospital beds or limited availability of health care centres per 10,000 population is an indicator of a lack of minimum infrastructure because of geographical misdistribution of health care centres that are inaccessible to the lower income group. However the UNDP ignores the essential needs of

human beings such as harmony and happiness while considering the human development index (HDI). Expansion of health, education and income, according to UNDP, would enable human beings to be more developed.

Surely income and health may be attributed as powerful instruments of development. Good incomes can combat inequality of opportunities in many respects. Generation of income is good and perhaps a driving force to improve the quality of life to a certain extent. At the same time, effective and meaningful use of income seems to be more important, particularly in the field of education which would ultimately bring social harmony and happiness.

The classical ideas of development as perceived by Aristotle, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill is significant even today. The terms development and freedom are common. However, careful consideration would reveal the intricacy of the two words. Development for whom? What is freedom?

There certainly exist various types of freedom, like freedom of speech, freedom to write and express views and ideas, freedom

of thought. Political and civil freedom is part of human freedom. But there appears to be lack of freedom, affecting millions in our country. Labour bondage is an example.

Development should be viewed as a journey to achieve freedom. It is a process of generation and realization of new opportunities. Sustained development, however, is a continuous process. Needless to say, imparting proper education is a deliberate, spontaneous, process. It enlarges abilities.

Social goals and social content of education appear to be equally important. Freedom of education only can ultimately bring human freedom and its total development. It is a glorious journey from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, from ignorance to consciousness. Freedom through education is necessary in our country with 424 million illiterates.

Around 35 million children, aged between six and 10, do not even attend school, and about 40 per cent drop out before reaching class five. In tertiary education, the enrolment is six per cent only. If advancement of human freedom is our main object and means for total development, it is imperative that we should re-examine our education policy, particularly for rural and backward sections.

It is absolutely imperative to initiate qualitative improvement programmes in the field of education, right from the primary to higher education level immediately, if real nation-building development is our aim.

Rural reconstruction has great relevance even today, despite the 'smart cities' concept. Even today, the picture of rural India has not changed. Bullock-carts, mud roads, absence of safe drinking water, electricity and minimum health care system and other basic amenities of life is still seen.

Although technology has brought about closer communication, there is still an in-built imbalance between urban and rural areas. The welfare of the rural poor is absolutely imperative and urgent need in the present scenario, not by prodding mere literacy but by nurturing and widening their minds to give strength and consciousness in all possible directions.



**PARTHASARATHI CHAKRABORTY**

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# India can lead the way in sustainable development

HARISH HANDE

**F**or India, 2022 is a historic year. It was 75 years ago that the nation attained independence and demonstrated to the world how democracy and diversity could come together. Of course, it has not been a smooth journey, with a large part of the population still battling social issues – hunger, malnutrition, lack of basic amenities, and above all, an uncertain future. Yet, India has come a long way. Problems exist, but the pathway to addressing them and becoming a 'developed' country is very clear now, more than ever.

Let us step back a bit. Globally, the 20th and 21st centuries have seen unprecedented advancements in terms of technology, transportation and communication. However, there exists another stark reality: Millions across the world, mostly in the global South, barely have access to fundamental services such as health, education, clean water, housing and livelihoods.

Unsustainable consumption patterns in the West, in pursuit of growth and unfettered focus on wealth accumulation, have escalated the climate crisis to unprecedented levels for India and other developing countries. Silent disasters like the droughts in central India, immense heat stress in most parts of the country, cyclones in the eastern part, and large-scale floods in the northeastern states are causing generational poverty besides exerting immense pressure on India's developmental resources – it is like turning the clock back every few years.

Inequality and climate issues are becoming powerful barriers for economically disadvantaged communities to take any sort of concrete steps to move forward. Unfortunately, there are very few programmes in the world that are designed from the point of view of beneficiaries/ Poorly designed programmes, and short-term projects designed without the involvement of indigenous intellectual expertise have formed the status quo in the development world. This also gives India an opportunity to take the lead.

Today, India has a chance to be a country that can show the world what inclusivity and sustainability can do. It has a chance to stay away from the high-energy pathway of the West which, in many ways, is

the primary cause and driver of the global climate crisis. It need not follow the present ways of capitalism that have led to a gaping divide between the rich and poor. By the time it turns 100 in 2047, India could become the one-stop knowledge hub of sustainability for the world.

India, through its investments in higher education, has created multiple pockets of high-quality innovation as well as training facilities. While the utilisation of such physical and human resources has not been optimum, the investment still stands. India should take advantage of having the right reserves to create appropriate and pragmatic solutions for the diverse set of concerns cutting across sectors and geographies.

Realising the urgency of ensuring parity, all stakeholders led by the UN set multiple targets by creating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. Nations came together and promised to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. They also pledged to reduce emissions by 30% in the same time frame.

Currently, we do not fare so well in many of the human development indices (HDI) and are lagging behind in the 2030 UN SDGs. It must be noted that these figures warrant further study, since the diversity of India, in terms of culture, geography and climatic conditions, calls for customised programmes to enhance the HDI and SDG indicators.

In its endeavour to benefit the masses, India has faltered in designing and implementing its social programmes. For example, inefficient water utilisation in agriculture has lowered water tables across the country causing hardships to many.

Solutions to poverty are complex and are contextual to geographies, topographies, geopolitics and in recent decades, climate. Poverty is not a homogenous, financially defined bracket. Lack of access to essential services like health and education, denies good quality of life to people. It constantly puts pressure on existing resources and assets. With its rich intellectual resources, India could lead the development of contextual and sustainable solutions to poverty, even before it enters its centenary year.

(The writer is a Magsaysay awardee and founder of SELCO.) 29/29/7



# EWS quota must wait

The SC has reserved its decision; the emotive issue must be amicably solved

**T**he reservation is as emotive an issue as it is economic. Nevertheless, it remains unresolved to date as both parties dig their heels in the court. The Supreme Court has reserved its decision on 10 per cent quota to persons from Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). The Central Government's decision to give 10 per cent reservation to economically weaker sections over and above 50 per cent already given to other backward castes, and Scheduled Castes & Tribes. The petition was filed against the 103rd amendment to the Constitution, which introduced changes to Articles 15 and 16 that deal with the right to equality and provide the basis for reservations. The argument against the amendment is that the 50 per cent limit on reservation cannot be crossed as it would tantamount to violate the basic premise of Constitution, which is equality. The Centre had earlier told the Supreme Court that the EWS quota does not erode the rights of

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities as they already enjoy many other benefits.

The Government contention that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been given several benefits under the Constitution, including Article 16(4)(a) (special provision for promotion) and Article 332 (reservation in State Assemblies), may be true but unfortunately despite all these benefits they still remain on the lowest rung of social hierarchy and lag behind on the economic front as well. But having said that, the economic criterion must be at least a factor while giving reservation to any section of society. The Government introduced the



EWS quota for those who do not fall in the category of SC/ST and OBCs but have an annual family income of less than ₹8 lakh per annum. The intent was right but the method was not. And this is what is being contested by the petitioners. The criterion is arbitrary and impractical, to say the least. To be fair to the Government, it cannot touch the reservation to SC/ST and OBCs and so it has no choice. Last year, the Supreme Court had said that the criteria seemed arbitrary. Since the income criteria of ₹8 lakh per annum was used to exclude the 'creamy layer' from the OBC quota, the court said it was 'mechanical' and included to distinguish EWS as well. The SC observation holds water as ground realities may be very different. The decision of Supreme Court in this regard would be a landmark in the debate for reservations and could stir a hornet's nest.

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# PM SHRI schools reimagine education in India

The Cabinet's approval to PM SHRI schools presents a rare opportunity for the country to take a quantum leap in education

The National Education Policy 2020 recognises schools as places for intellectual development and character building. Preparing students to become responsible citizens and active participants in community development is the original mandate of the policy. The policy envisages a focus on more than academics, fostering whole-child development.

Para 4.43 of the policy elaborates that fostering student agency must begin with self-regulated learning, self-assessment, peer-tutoring, and peer-to-peer assessment. It will help students care more about communicating with each other and the teacher to reflect on their learning and pursue collabora-



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oration goals.

Early internship possibilities, job shadowing, building cultural competencies, the spirit of volunteering, micro-credentials in life skills and school-college partnership will take the students on a lifelong learning trajectory.

A policy of the scale of NEP 2020 requires enabling legislation, curriculum framework, inter-ministerial dialogue, and preparing the ground for implementation at multiple levels. The policy is riding its course with the Prime Minister leading from the front, initiating discussions, addressing the nation, theme-based task allocation, and participative implementation strategy. The nation's response is

affirmative, and the academia is euphoric—signalling two significant indicators that the buy-in for the change is working.

Once the policy is in place, visualised outcomes recognised, and infrastructural requirements identified, we need strong institutions to foster learning and culture. In the budget speech 2021-22, the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced more than 15000 schools will be qualitatively strengthened to include all components of the National Education Policy.

These schools, she added, will emerge as PM SHRI schools in their regions, hand-holding and monitoring other schools to achieve the ideals of the Policy. Consequently, the Union

Cabinet has recently approved the launch of a new centrally sponsored scheme for setting up PM SHRI schools (PM schools for Rising India). These schools will influence, inspire, and impact other schools, receive performance-based budgetary allocation and adhere to standard benchmarks.

Of the total project cost of ₹27360 Cr spread over five years, the significant contribution of ₹18128 Cr will come from the centre, and the States and UTs will raise the remaining ₹9232 Cr. UDISE+ code having schools managed by the Centre/State/UT Governments/Local self-governments would be considered for selection under the scheme. Selection of PM SHRI schools will be made

through Challenge Mode, where schools compete to become exemplary schools succeeding through a rigorous three-stage process.

The selected schools will undergo intervention, support, and quality assessment from 2022-23 to 2026-27. The entire process will be driven by an Online Challenge Portal, open once every quarter for the first two years. The policy stipulates that a maximum of two schools, one elementary and one secondary/senior secondary, would be selected per block.

The Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics (BISAG-N) will service the scheme in geo-tagging and other related tasks. The big question is how

PM schools for rising India will differentiate themselves from the rest. The government has an ambitious target for whole-child education through motivation to learn and succeed, while promoting the relevance of the learning experience for future lives and careers, and instilling a sense of belonging in the school environment, besides adopting a broader approach to knowledge and skill acquisition.

Furthermore, embedding technology must enable personalised and mastery-based learning. Tracking of data, educational outcomes and timely interventions can be done more frequently with the intervention of EdTech, resulting in course correction, remediation, and prompt

guidance to each student.

PM SHRI schools will manage teacher talent through a structured approach, involving teachers in decision-making and policy implementation. Treating teachers as valuable assets, intentional investment in their capacity building, career management and promotion will be hallmarks of these schools.

PM SHRI schools will endeavour to invite parents as partners in learning. Their resources, energy and local network can be leveraged to benefit learners. There is also the need for shifts in interactive, participative, experiential pedagogy and empowering learners to change their behaviour and act for sustainable development goals.



# Matter Of Degrees

*UGC should think more on allowing four-year undergraduates to enrol for PhDs*

UGC is set to allow four-year undergraduate degree holders to enrol for PhD programmes. It is also diluting the requirement of mandatory publication of a research paper before the award of a PhD. Quantitatively, no doubt these changes will produce more PhDs. Also true is that a number of foreign universities allow undergraduates to skip the postgraduate stage and enrol directly for PhD. For some students it is a question of saving time, for some others money. But most students bypassing PG have a clear focus – or the institutions require they do – on their area of research.

A PG course helps students do a deeper study of the discipline and also in research – because a dissertation has to be written. Delhi University's four-year undergraduate programme offers an honours degree with the last year dedicated to research. UGC's direct PhD reform will likely be open for those who perform excellently in this option but DU faculty members have complained that core

discipline focus here is restricted to just three semesters.

UGC then must ensure that PhD coursework also integrates parts of the PG curriculum. Many PhDs will go on to teach undergraduate and PG students and inadequate knowledge of the core discipline will impair teaching standards. In 2019, the US had 55,000 doctoral recipients. The same year, India had 2 lakh scholars enrolled for PhD and 39,000 doctoral

recipients, a 100% and 70% rise respectively from just seven years ago – and for sure, quality wasn't following quantity.

Responding to complaints that the doctoral thesis screening isn't rigorous enough, UGC had mooted regulations like mandatory publication of research papers. But doing away with this can cut both ways. A doctoral student can focus on the thesis rather than a research paper but mandatory publication in a quality Scopus-indexed journal could prod the scholar to aim higher. A UGC study of 2,500 research scholars at a top-ranked central university and an IIT found 75% of the university submissions weren't in Scopus journals, but the opposite was true for IITs. This may be partly explained by the fact that there are around 30,000 Scopus-indexed journals in STEM and related fields against 14,000 for humanities and social sciences. The moot point is that the same yardstick shouldn't apply across disciplines. A PG degree may be important in some disciplines before a PhD and not so much in others. UGC must tread carefully.





# In interest of students

## Resolve issues arising out of Haryana teacher policy

**P**ROTESTS by teachers were on expected lines as Haryana announced its new rationalisation policy, which it claimed was aimed at rectifying the disparities in the student-teacher ratio in government schools across 22 districts. The stiff opposition from unexpected quarters — the students, parents and villagers — calls for a more nuanced official response. Contrary to claims that the move is meant to address the issue of shortage of teachers, several schools in various districts have either been left with fewer teachers or none at all. School gates getting locked, sloganeering and sit-in dharnas outside the premises to demand more teachers or protest closure are disturbing events. What is heartening to note is the community's involvement in seeking improved educational facilities. The issue cannot be left unattended.

The government is well within its rights to merge schools with low student strength, like it did with 105 of them recently, with other schools within a 3-km radius. While confronting financial constraints and a shortfall of teachers, optimum utilisation of infrastructure and human resources is a pragmatic approach. It is inevitable that the changes made to run the system better will cause unrest. The problem arises when decisions are taken without careful consideration of the consequences. The communication gap in conveying the reasons behind the policy shift adds to the disquiet. Not being open to a dialogue to make amends if the demands are rational is another failure.

If the end result is that one student stands to benefit at the cost of another, the supposedly progressive strategy is flawed. The government says it does have a plan to fill vacant posts, and is going through the litany of complaints and suggestions of teachers' organisations. What it needs to do is lend an ear to all the stakeholders, allay apprehensions, and ensure that classes resume. ५०/९