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HINDU (P-9), 01 DECEMBER 2025

India needs research pipelines

Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar,

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India will not meet its growth ambitions on public grants alone. The countries that turned science into industry did one thing well: they matched firm outlays to campus strengths and kept that link steady for years. The policy question is clear. How do we move private research outlays from episodic Corporate Social Responsibility to a predictable pipeline that buys lab time, funds doctoral cohorts, and books pilot lines?

Global benchmarks

Leading tech firms run innovation budgets at industrial scale. In 2024, Meta's research outlay reached about $44 billion, near a third of revenue. Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, IBM, and Microsoft also reported multibillion-dollar programmes. In the U.S., enterprises booked roughly $692 billion of domestic research against about $14 trillion in net sales in 2022, a ratio near 5%. Policy instruments translate that investment into campus partnerships. The National Science Foundation's Industry-University Cooperative Research Centers pool company fees for pre-competitive university work. The Semiconductor Research Corporation funds multi-university consortia that train talent while tackling industry-relevant problems.

China's Huawei reported an R&D expenditure at 179.7 billion yuan in 2024, equal to 20.8% of revenue. More than half of Huawei's workforce is in R&D roles. Build Your Dreams , a Chinese multinational auto company, invested 54.2 billion yuan in 2024 on R&D against roughly 777 billion yuan of revenue, an intensity of nearly 7%.

These examples demonstrate one trait. Corporate research works with campuses through joint centres, shared lines, long-horizon consortia and open talent pipelines. India should scale this on Indian terms. The goal is self-reliance with open doors to global science while anchoring discovery to India's needs. Private research outlays need size, predictability, and structured linkages with higher education institutions (HEIs).

The countries that turned science into industry did one thing well: they matched firm outlays to campus strengths and kept that link steady for years.

Today, India's GERD sits near 0.65% of GDP, with enterprises funding about two-fifths. Advanced economies show a higher firm share. Yet India has bright spots. Tata Motors reported revenue of about ₹4.38 lakh crore in FY24 and R&D outlay of ₹29,398 crore, an intensity of 6.7%. Sun Pharma invested 6.7% of global revenues in R&D in FY24. Dr. Reddy's spent ₹22.9 billion, about 8.2% of sales. Bharat Electronics dedicated 6.24% of turnover to R&D in FY24, an important signal in a strategic sector. Reliance Industries recorded over ₹4,100 crore of R&D expenditure in FY2024-25.

In terms of partnerships, India already runs strong platforms. IIT Madras Research Park hosts more than 200 companies near faculty labs and student teams, creating a daily flow of ideas and talent. The Ministry of Defence promotes startup and research lab teaming through iDEX. The India Semiconductor Mission pairs industry investments with skill pipelines and academic partnerships, as seen in the Micron ATMP project at Sanand.

Policy actions

These strands form a workable base. The task now is to scale them and set clear expectations for private R&D expenditure and university linkages across sectors. First, we must set three-year R&D-to-sales ratios for autos, pharma, electronics, defence, space and energy that climb year by year, balanced with export goals and cash-flow realities. We must use shared IP frameworks that reward publication and commercialisation together. Second, reward co-funded projects and shared facilities and offer matching grants where industry rupees flow through HEIs for multi-year projects with open data deliverables and industry-relevant key performance indicators. Create a dedicated line item for university-managed pilot lines and testbeds that industry can book by the hour. Seed multi-university centres around a portfolio of problems rather than isolated projects. Third, modernise tax instruments for research. Weighted deductions can focus on measurable outputs such as patents, standards contributions, clinical milestones or field trials. Link incentives to proof of collaboration with accredited HEIs and to hiring graduate researchers into industry roles. Fourth, teach collaboration. Support campus programmes that train faculty and PhD scholars to work with industry, negotiate IP, and run translational projects. Bring more PhDs into product groups, create dual-track roles with adjunct appointments, and sponsor doctoral cohorts aligned to corporate roadmaps. Fifth, ask listed companies to report R&D investment and the share of spend that flows to Indian HEIs. Disclosure nudges boards to treat research as strategic, not incidental. Publicise results in Indian languages and in practitioner-friendly formats. That builds prestige around research careers and attracts talent.

India's university campuses sit next to some of the world's most dynamic markets, and they carry knowledge traditions that examine technology as part of a broader human inquiry. When corporate research engages that heritage, solutions gain depth and context and match what high-performing corporate R&D needs.

India has the labs, talent, and markets. The task before the industry is clear: set transparent targets, match grants that buy real lab time, and collaborate better. The task before academic institutions is straightforward: shape research for measurable value, welcome industry questions, and show evidence of success. Do that, and research becomes a national supply chain, not wishful thinking.

DECCAN HERALD (P-8), 02 DECEMBER 2025

Cosmetic fixes will not help school education

The Karnataka government's decision to incentivise teachers in government schools to improve SSLC results and increase student enrolment is a welcome shift from a system long reliant on reprimand and punitive action. Recognising and rewarding good performance is essential to motivate teachers, especially when many work under challenging circumstances with limited support. Yet it only scratches the surface of what ails the state's public education system. The most glaring is the 60,000-plus teacher vacancies that have accumulated over the years. The recent decision to appoint 51,000 guest teachers may temporarily plug the gap, but it raises a troubling question: why was such a massive shortage allowed to fester until it became a crisis? Incentives cannot substitute for the absence of qualified, permanent teachers in thousands of classrooms.

This year's SSLC results — a pass percentage of 62.34% — highlight deeper structural issues. In 2024, stricter anti-malpractice measures, such as CCTV webcasting, initially pushed the pass rate down to 54%, only for it to climb to 73.4% after the generous distribution of grace marks. In hindsight, the previous year's 83.89% now looks misleading. Karnataka cannot build a credible education system on cameras, grace marks, and tinkering with pass percentages. Nor will reducing the pass mark from 35% to 33% address the learning deficit. The bigger picture demands attention. The state allocates only 10-12% of its Budget to education — far short of the recommended 15% to 20%. Most of this goes towards salaries, leaving little for infrastructure, training, or pedagogical reforms.

Rewarding teachers helps, but vacancies hurt schools more

Government schools will produce better students only when classrooms are provided with the required resources, schools are equipped with proper laboratories, and teacher quality is continuously assessed and upgraded. Child-wise tracking of learning outcomes must become standard practice. The success of Karnataka Residential Educational Institutions Society (KREIS) schools run by the social welfare department offers a powerful lesson. With a 91% pass rate and top state ranks, these schools prove that when the most marginalised sections are given the best education, excellence follows. If the KREIS can achieve this with disadvantaged children, why can't the education department replicate this model more broadly? For far too long, the state has oscillated between crisis management and cosmetic fixes. Incentives for teachers are a step forward, but Karnataka needs nothing less than a structural overhaul. A society that aspires to progress must ensure that its poorest children receive not just schooling, but the highest quality of education. 2/12/25

TELEGRAPH (P-10), 02 DECEMBER 2025

What does Modi mean by 'slavish mentality'?

Come clean

VIVEK KATJU

While delivering the sixth Ramnath Goenka lecture on November 17, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called upon the nation to entirely shed the mindset of slavery by 2035. He came back to this theme at the flag-hoisting ceremony of the Ram *mandir* eight days later. Modi emphasised, at the lecture, that Thomas Babington Macaulay had destroyed the Indian education system in 1835. He also threw Indian civilisational achievements into the dustbin. That began the process of Indians developing an inferiority complex and a lack of confidence in their cultural inheritance. This led them to deprecate whatever was indigenous and to think that if India had to achieve greatness it would have to be through foreign means and methods. Consequently, Indians began to look abroad for ideas for governance and innovation. They considered foreign goods and services as superior. This process, the prime minister argued, became strengthened after Independence with India associating its educational system, economy and social aspirations with those abroad.

It is true that Macaulay considered India's culture and position to be far inferior to those of the West. It is equally true that he wanted to create a class of "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern". These "interpreters" were to "be Indians in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Macaulay thought that these "interpreters" would "enrich" Indian languages so that they would become the vehicles of conveying modern ideas to the Indian masses. The question whether vernacular languages were important to Macaulay's famous 'Minute on Indian Education' rose from the question whether the East India Company should continue to spend funds for maintaining institutions of Arabic and Sanskrit education. He advocated for the establishment of English-language-teaching education.

Significantly, Macaulay had noted, "Indeed it is unusual to find, even in the literary circles of the Continent [Europe], any foreigner who can, express himself in English with so much facility and correctness, as we find in many Hindoos." This demonstrates that Indians, who had their initial education in their own languages, took to learning English and, through it, gained an understanding of the ideas prevailing in Europe before Macaulay's initiative.

Far from succeeding, Macaulay failed spectacularly in his endeavour to create a group of "interpreters" who would forever remain subservient to the British or turn their back on their traditions and inheritance. They may have learnt English and even admired many characteristics of the West. They may have also wanted — and correctly — to reform pernicious social customs but only a handful left their spiritual fold. Indeed, these "interpreters" led the national renaissance, which began in Bengal and spread to other parts of the country. The renaissance, in turn, led to a flowering of culture — in arts, music and dance forms, and literature in Indian languages. It also led to the rise of a spirit of nationalism. Surely these are not attributes of mental slavery?

Thomas Babington Macaulay: long shadow

Some of the "interpreters" also turned their attention to the reasons that had led to India's colonisation. This was not an unnatural question for it flowed from the consciousness of a great society with intellectual prowess sinking so low as to be conquered by a resurgent, post-Industrial Revolution Europe. It led to the realisation that the true strength of a country lay in remaining at the forefront of scientific and technological knowledge and in social cohesion based on an egalitarian society. India had fallen behind in both these areas. Hence, they contended that if it became necessary to acquire these aspects of knowledge from foreign sources, so be it.

An injection of new ideas did not mean that Indian traditions were considered as low and unworthy or that Indian civilisational heritage had to be rejected. In fact, they were deemed as necessary for the country's rejuvenation so that it could take its rightful place in the comity of nations.

That could only be if India became free from foreign rule so that it could determine its destiny. That led to the freedom movement. Macaulay could not have, in his wildest imagination, ever considered that one day the "interpreters" class he wanted to create would become the vehicle for India's decolonisation. Even less could he have visualised that after India became independent, it would inspire other colonised peoples to break their shackles. Could such "interpreters" suffer from mental slavery?

Independent India chose the Westminster system of governance. It is now being asserted that ideas for political democracy originated in India. There may have been a few 'proto-republics' in the course of Indian history but no major ancient text in India advocated political democracy. Instead, the ideal political organisation in ancient India was based on *dharmic*, hereditary kingship. This was also the popular notion which included the belief that a king should be conscious of and responsive to the views of his subjects. Thus, the notion of constitutional democracy based on universal adult franchise which was adopted by the Republic grew out of the values which the "interpreters" and others embraced during the freedom movement. These values also placed an emphasis on affirmative action for sections of Hindu society which had suffered thousands of years of atrocious discrimination. It is here that some Indian sages and seers had, from time to time, sought to reform society but, truth be told, they had met with limited success. Can an acknowledgement of this fact be considered as an aspect of mental slavery?

Modi needs to elaborate on what he considers as elements of mental slavery, which the nation has to shed in the coming decade. Generalisations will be confusing. Hence, specifics would be useful. And, these specifics, may, for instance, include the benefits of traditional medical knowledge (which are many) but they should also be subject to audit.

One specific Modi has mentioned is language. Giving the examples of Japan, China and Korea, he stated that they hold on to their language even while looking abroad for ideas and practices. In this context, he said that he is not against English but is in favour of India's regional languages. There can be no quarrel with such an approach. The problem lies with what will be India's link language. Herein India differs from the countries Modi mentioned. In the next 10 years when India needs to compete with an established China, it can ill afford a weakening of social cohesion on any ground, including language or faith.

All Indians should be proud of their heritage as of their secular, constitutional traditions. To be simultaneously so cannot be said to be being victims of a slavish mentality.

Vivek Katju is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer

INDIAN EXPRESS (P-11), 03 DECEMBER 2025

As a STEM student, I want to stay in India, but won't

ARPAN MALAKAR

As a first-generation learner at a Tier-3 college — with no career cell and no mentors — I took a leap many would call reckless. I paid for a Rs 1,400 online module, practised timed mock exams, and moved 1,500 km to IIT Delhi after securing AIR 198 in the 2024 IIT-JAM. That journey was fragile. It depended on scraps of information, stubbornness and luck. For many promising students, those scraps never arrive.

When I reached IIT Delhi, the difference was immediate. Yet even here the system sometimes falters. We booked a facility for a one-day experiment; multiple approvals stretched it into weeks. Even for an institution of IIT Delhi's calibre, navigating approvals may take weeks — not because of inefficiency, but because much of India's university system still operates within outdated administrative rules. Now imagine Tier-2 and Tier-3 colleges. Small delays turn promising projects into missed windows of discovery.

Money and predictability matter as much as infrastructure. India's gross expenditure on R&D is roughly 0.6–0.7 per cent of GDP, far below the US (~3.4 per cent), China (~2.6 per cent) and Israel (>6 per cent). The All India Survey on Higher Education recorded about 2.12 lakh PhD registrations in 2021–22, yet converting that pipeline into stable careers is far from guaranteed. In early 2024, 7,60,000 Indian students migrated abroad, according to the Ministry of External Affairs, This signals systemic failure to retain talent.

JRF stipends are Rs 37,000 a month, but late payments (three-six months, sometimes up to a year), short contracts, and uncertain post-PhD options make it insufficient for those supporting families. For many researchers in their mid-20s, the unpredictability makes even basic decisions, including marriage, housing, and long-term planning, feel impossible. There is a cultural dimension as well. A friend of mine with a BSc in Zoology aspired to be a biologist but now prepares for government clerical exams because a steady salary feels more realistic than five precarious years of research.

I have seen seniors leave for Oxford, Max Planck and Rice. They do not leave because they love India less — they leave because the system makes staying harder than going. If a credible opportunity arose, I would seriously consider leaving — and that thought breaks my heart.

The government has signalled it recognises the problem. A proposal under discussion would invite Indian-origin researchers back with set-up grants, autonomy and flexible terms — a welcome shift amid global changes in higher education. But this is an early-stage measure and cannot substitute for predictable day-to-day systems. A one-time grant may attract a few returnees; it will not fix stipends that arrive months late or procurement delays that stall experiments. The scheme asks, "How do we bring back the best?" The more urgent question is: "Why does the system make staying so difficult?"

The following are not complaints; they form a compact, actionable reform agenda. One: Guarantee predictable pay. Auto-disburse fellowships monthly; index to city cost-of-living (separate tiers for different cities). Two: Remove procedural friction. Speed up procurement for lab materials, set clear timelines for approvals. Reduce paperwork delays so research doesn't get held up for months. Three: Build early-career pathways. Fund multi-year postdoctoral fellowships and bridge grants with mentorship.

Research is often seen as a risky detour, not a stable career. That perception will change only when dignity and clear career paths become the norm. If a Rs 1,400 course and perseverance could change the trajectory of my life, it shows how much potential is lost when opportunity depends on chance.

Research is often seen as a risky detour, not a stable career. That perception will change only when stability, dignity and clear career paths become the norm

The writer did his master's in Physics from IIT Delhi

PIONEER (P-8), 03 DECEMBER 2025

Value-based education: Essential for a civilised world

RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

History shows that for ages, human beings have exploited other human beings and living creatures on the basis of gender, caste, creed, race, physical or mental strength, economic power, organisational abilities or unity. Similarly, powerful and mighty nations and communities have exploited weaker and poorer nations and communities because of their vulnerabilities. Exploitation of illiterate and poor people is a known reality across the world.

As we all know, powerful or so-called educated people have long used uneducated, illiterate, and socially backward groups as slaves or bonded labourers, forcing them to work under inhuman conditions simply to make life easier and more comfortable for themselves. As landowners, men have exploited the tillers of the soil. As industrialists, they have extracted labour from the working class at extremely low wages.

As capitalists and moneylenders, they have demanded high interest rates on money and real estate. As heads of multinational companies, they have imported raw materials and labour at cheap rates and exported manufactured goods to global markets, filling their own coffers at the cost of semi-industrialised or unindustrialised nations. In pursuit of exploitation, no limits have ever been set. It is not only exploitation but also active persecution of the weak by the strong. Even when offering something to others, the hidden aim was often to gain name, fame, praise or credit and to be rewarded sooner or later. Only rarely have individuals made sacrifices out of pure love, sympathy, compassion or concern. This demonstrates that money, machines, resources, military strength and political influence have repeatedly been used by selfish individuals to exploit others. Exploitation causes widespread trouble and turmoil. Can it be eliminated to save humanity? Many social, economic, political and interpersonal problems can be solved only if universal love replaces exploitation. If abundance and affluence remove all incentive to exploit, exploitation can end. How can the feeling of universal love be ignited worldwide? The key is education.

Awakening and strengthening the emotion of love can be achieved only through education that ennobles emotions. Without values-based education and practical methods to refine or spiritualise love, crime and lawlessness will increase. Discussions on human rights are meaningless without this education. Any society, however developed, will be riddled with crime if its people lack proper values education. Unfortunately, those in power often overlook how deeply progress, peace and happiness depend on emotional training and values education, especially the teaching of love.

Governments and organisations spend trillions annually to solve conflicts and problems, yet exploitation continues because conflict resolution lacks genuine moral and spiritual education. It is time for leaders to understand this and act seriously to protect future generations from ongoing devastation. This approach to education builds character, empathy, responsibility and emotional intelligence, shaping individuals who choose ethical paths and contribute positively to society. Value-based education offers the essential foundation to overcome exploitation and create a civilised, harmonious world.

The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist

PIONEER (P-9), 03 DECEMBER 2025

Kashi Tamil sangamam 4.0: A dialogue India needs

CHAMU KRISHNA SHASTRY

As India navigates a moment of renewed cultural assertion and rising linguistic anxieties, the Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) returns at precisely the right moment. Its fourth edition, beginning in December 2025, arrives at a time when debates about regional identity, linguistic pride and national integration have become sharper, sometimes even polarising. In such a context, KTS stands out not merely as a festival, but as a vital civilisational bridge, reminding us that India's unity is an enduring cultural inheritance.

A Counter-Current in Divisive Times

The past few years have seen language enter public discourse more forcefully, often sparking heated debates over recruitment rules, competitive exams, mediums of instruction and digital platforms. Social media frequently amplifies these issues into regional flashpoints, creating a misleading impression of a North-South cultural clash. This narrative, while emotionally charged, ignores the centuries of dialogue, migration, learning and exchanges that have shaped our civilisation. KTS serves as a powerful counter-current to this polarisation by demonstrating that the Tamil and Hindi-speaking regions do not stand in contrast, but rather in constant conversation and agreement.

A Vision Rooted in Continuity

Conceptualised under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and organised by the Ministry of Education, with IIT Madras and BHU as knowledge partners, KTS aligns perfectly with the ethos of Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat. Far from being merely symbolic, it revives a civilisational relationship between Tamil Nadu and Kashi, two ancient centres of learning whose interactions have shaped Indian thought for millennia. The corridor between the South and Kashi is not a modern creation; it has long been a home for Tamil poets, saints and scholars. It was here in Varanasi that Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi found his intellectual awakening and where Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a towering Tamil philosopher, led Banaras Hindu University. This living history challenges simplified binaries about regional isolation.

Why Language Matters Now

Language is once again central to India's social discourse. With increased interstate migration, multilingual workplaces, digital classrooms and a growing national labour market, linguistic literacy is no longer optional. While state-level identity politics has sharpened linguistic boundaries, KTS's renewed focus, "Learn Tamil - Tamil Karkalam", comes as a timely intervention. Recognising Tamil as a national treasure rather than a regional language is crucial for India's emotional integration — an approach that extends to all Indian languages. Celebrating one language does not make another smaller, but instead enriches the entire national linguistic ecosystem.

KTS 4.0 places this exchange at the centre of cultural unity, encouraging youth, students, educators and scholars to treat Tamil, Hindi, Sanskrit, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali and all Indian languages as relatives within one Bharatiya Bhasha family.

KTS's key contribution is its ability to humanise history, enabling participants to rediscover shared civilisational roots through methods such as cultural immersions, seminars, poetry recitals, temple visits and academic interactions. It reminds us that Siddha and Ayurveda evolved through cross-lingual knowledge sharing and that Tamil grammar's ancient roots converse deeply with Panini's linguistic tradition. Furthermore, it highlights how temple architecture, music, ritual practices and storytelling traditions between the North and South overlap far more than they differ.

The Needs of a Changing India

India today is far more mobile than ever before. Students from Tamil Nadu attend universities in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, while Hindi-speaking students pursue technology, medicine and the arts in Coimbatore, Chennai and Madurai. Driven by the economy's growing demand for multilingual skillsets, building cultural empathy is now a national necessity. KTS thus stands as a policy-relevant initiative that strengthens national cohesion precisely when identity markers are sharp and sensitivities even sharper.

The Sangamam challenges the flawed assumption that unity requires sameness, and instead calls for unity through understanding. Each edition of KTS proves that genuine dialogue reduces mistrust, dismantles stereotypes and builds emotional bridges. As KTS 4.0 is set to begin, it drives home the key message that celebrating Tamil enriches all of India, learning from others strengthens one's own identity, and our languages are not competing voices, but harmonising notes in the Indian symphony.

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DECCAN HERALD (P-6), 05 DECEMBER 2025

A textbook case of governance by impulse

The government's decision to reverse the order on pre-installation of the Sanchar Saathi app on all phones shows the pitfalls of arbitrary and ill-considered decision-making on matters of vital importance to people. The decision faced widespread criticism from the first day, and the government went through a series of flip-flops and cumulative climbdowns ending in its reversal. It first softened its position with the statement that those did not want the app could delete it. Then it said it could modify the decision based on public opinion. Within hours, it withdrew the order. It is clear that the all-round criticism, particularly the opposition from technology companies such as Apple and Google, forced the government to retract. The incident should serve as a lesson for the government, and even after withdrawal, it leaves some questions to be answered.

The government claimed that the app would help counter cyber fraud, give better protection to phone users, and strengthen digital trust. But it violated some basic principles of cyber conduct and fundamental rights of citizens. The government had no right to implant the app in phones without the user's consent. Minister for Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia said, after the decision became controversial, that the app was optional and those who did not want it could delete it. But the freedom to delete the app is not the same as the right not to have it on the phone without consent. The implant of the app would certainly have been a violation of the right to privacy, which is a fundamental right. It would also have given the government a backdoor entry into the citizen's private world, and a means of surveillance over people. It amounted to the government posting a policeman or installing a camera in every home to prevent theft and robbery. It may be noted that the government had faced credible allegations of illegal surveillance of politicians and others using the Pegasus software. The implant of the app would also have helped the government to do political propaganda.

Sanchar Saathi reversal shows how not to govern digital India

The question remains why the government took the decision when there were much less objectionable methods to achieve the claimed objectives. The government acted in a hurry and arbitrarily on a matter on which it should have held wide consultations with all stakeholders, including people's representatives, political parties, and technology companies, because the matter concerned the rights and lives of people. Considering the government's record on such matters, it is likely that it took the decision to backtrack more because of the refusal of technology companies to comply with it than because of the backlash from others. Hopefully it will learn the right lessons from the controversy.

DECCAN HERALD (P-6), 05 DECEMBER 2025

DECOLONISING THE MIND

India must outgrow, not erase Macaulay

Modi's call highlights the need for cognitive decolonisation beyond political freedom

GURUCHARAN GOLLERKERI

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently called for a national effort to 'free ourselves from the mindset of slavery that Macaulay imposed on India,' he tapped into intellectual discourse that stretches from Africa to Asia, from Frantz Fanon to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, from Ashis Nandy to Partha Chatterjee. The anxiety that colonialism left deep imprints on the imagination — on what a society values, and whose knowledge it considers legitimate — has animated scholarship for decades. It has sought to re-centre cultural confidence after centuries of epistemic displacement.

Yet India's case is distinctive. The Macaulay system, introduced in 1835, did more than change the medium of instruction. It reshaped aspirations, professional hierarchies, and perceptions of civilisation. English education opened doors to modern science and global mobility, but it also produced generations who associated advancement with distance from their roots. The concern — that a colonial mindset lingers long after the Union Jack was lowered — is genuine. Political decolonisation (the exit of colonial rulers) is only the beginning; the harder task is cognitive decolonisation.

Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o called this effort *decolonising the mind* — the recovery of cultural confidence after years of learning to see oneself through an outsider's gaze. Frantz Fanon warned that colonial rule generates 'Black skin, white masks' — a metaphor for the psychological cost of internalised inferiority. Ashis Nandy argued that colonialism 'colonised the Indian imagination', privileging certain ways of reasoning and diminishing others. The Subaltern Studies questioned why India's knowledge traditions had been marginalised. In short, why we remain coconuts — brown outside, white inside.

Modi's remarks gain significance because they arrive at a moment when India has the capacity to define its own trajectory — economically, strategically, and intellectually. If there was ever a time to ask how India ought to think, create, and educate in the 21st century, it is now. The core challenge is to banish the idea that India must choose between modern knowledge and its own civilisational heritage. The choice is not between English and Sanskrit, between STEM and the Upanishads, between global science and indigenous epistemologies. The real choice is between a borrowed model of modernity and a self-confident, plural, inventive Indian modernity shaped by dialogue, not deference. Fanon never argued for rejecting Western knowledge; he argued against uncritical admiration. Ngũgĩ did not oppose learning English; he opposed the unthinking elevation of English over one's mother tongue. Amilcar Cabral insisted that 'returning to the source' does not mean romanticising the past, but retrieving the cultural confidence necessary to shape the future.

For India, the task is not to erase Macaulay, but to outgrow him.

To outgrow Macaulay means acknowledging both the gains and the losses of the colonial encounter. English gave India access to global science and technology; it built bridges across linguistic communities; it fuelled India's entry into commerce, and diplomacy. But it also displaced Indigenous knowledge systems; narrowed definitions of merit; and embedded the idea that achievement lies in imitation of Western institutions, not in reinvention.

To outgrow Macaulay means recognising that the 'mindset of slavery' is not merely a linguistic issue. It shows up when an Indian researcher hesitates to publish in an Indian journal because foreign journals carry greater prestige. It surfaces when Indian universities are judged primarily by how closely they resemble American ones. It appears when social science frames local problems through imported theories without asking whether India's own intellectual archives offer deeper insight.

Modi's call opens three lines of national introspection.

The first is educational. India's National Education Policy (2020) already attempts to expand the intellectual canvas — mother-tongue instruction, classical languages, Indian knowledge systems, liberal arts, and multidisciplinary universities. But the deeper shift is epistemological. Decolonising the curriculum requires not merely adding ancient texts, but asking foundational questions: What counts as knowledge? Whose voices are stored in the syllabus? Why do we read Aristotle and not Kautilya with equal seriousness? Why are Indian systems of logic, medicine, mathematics, aesthetics, and governance treated as cultural artefacts rather than as living knowledge traditions with analytical value?

The second is institutional. Indian universities often remain tethered to colonial-era bureaucratic structures — rigid hierarchies, credentialism, and excessive dependence on foreign validation. A decolonised higher education system would reward original thinking over conformity, research rooted in local realities over derivative scholarship, and institutional autonomy over bureaucratic micromanagement. It would cultivate confidence without indulging chauvinism.

The third is imaginative. As thinkers like Achille Mbembe remind us, decolonisation is fundamentally about re-imagining horizons. It asks: What futures can we envision when we no longer see ourselves as inheritors of someone else's model of progress? For India, this means reclaiming its own archive not as nostalgia but as generative inspiration. India's intellectual traditions — whether the rationality of *Nyaya*, the pluralism of the Sramana traditions, or the environmental ethics of indigenous communities — offer conceptual resources for everything from sustainability to artificial intelligence ethics. They are not relics; they are assets.

But decolonisation must guard against an equal and opposite danger: indulging in civilisational insularity or cultural triumphalism. Decolonising the mind is about building self-confidence, not self-enclosure. This is where the prime minister's 10-year horizon gains significance, not as a political timeline; it is an intellectual one. It signals the need for patient reconstruction — of curricula, institutions, research priorities, and social attitudes. It invites the country to imagine an India that is neither derivative nor defensive but comfortably itself. Modern India need not reject the English language to reclaim its mind. What it must reject is the assumption that progress lies only in foreign paradigms. A confident civilisation learns from the world without losing its centre of gravity. Decolonisation, at its best, is the art of recovering that centre.

We cannot undo the past. But we can build a future in which the Indian mind — curious, inventive, global — no longer needs Macaulay as its reference point. That is the true measure of intellectual freedom, for India and the world.

(The writer is Director, School of Social Sciences, Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences)

5/12/25

PIONEER (P-9), 05 DECEMBER 2025

Reclaiming India's role as a global education hub

VK PAUL, SHASHANK SHAH & OSHIN DHARAP

India carries a formidable legacy as the cradle of ancient knowledge systems and universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, Vikramshila and Odantapuri. For millennia, it has sustained multidisciplinary higher learning that reached far beyond the subcontinent. Today, the global skills and talent landscape is being reshaped at a dramatic pace. This moment offers India an opportunity to reclaim its heritage as a civilisational educator and position its higher education institutions as global hubs of knowledge, research and innovation in the 21st century.

Over the last seventy-five years, India's higher education system has expanded enormously. With the launch of the National Education Policy 2020, the country has taken a decisive step towards future readiness by identifying the internationalisation of higher education-especially "internationalisation at home" — as a key driver of systemic transformation. An overwhelming 97 per cent of Indian students study in Indian institutions.

They will form the backbone of India's workforce and contribute to the global talent pool as well. Ensuring that their academic experience meets world-class standards is therefore not just a matter of educational quality but of national competitiveness. Yet, a sharp disparity persists in student mobility. Outbound student numbers have surged, with more than 13.35 lakh Indians studying abroad in 2024, predominantly in Anglophone destinations such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In contrast, India hosted only about 47,000 foreign students in 2022, nearly a third of them from Nepal. For every international student studying in India, approximately twenty-eight Indian students are enrolled abroad. This is despite regulatory provisions that allow supernumerary seats for international students and a variety of scholarships to support their education in India. The imbalance underscores both the challenge of retaining talent within the country and the difficulty of positioning India as an attractive host destination.

Several forces continue to push Indian students overseas: the appeal of immersive international exposure, the lure of post-study work opportunities and the perception of higher academic quality abroad. The financial implications of this trend are significant. Indian families spend between US$47-70 billion annually-equivalent to ₹3.8-6 lakh crore-on overseas education in tuition fees and living expenses alone. This outflow is estimated to be eight to twelve times the central government's higher education budget. Addressing this imbalance makes internationalisation at home not merely desirable but necessary, both for fiscal prudence and systemic strengthening.

Recognising this urgency, India has initiated several major reforms in recent years. The establishment of the IFSCA GIFT City framework in 2022 and the UGC's regulatory framework in 2023 paved the way for international universities to enter India. Deakin University and the University of Wollongong became the first foreign institutions to start operations in GIFT City. The University of Southampton set up the first international branch campus in Gurugram, and several more-including the University of Liverpool, University of York, University of Aberdeen, University of Western Australia, Illinois Institute of Technology and Istituto Europeo di Design — have announced plans to launch campuses in Bengaluru and Navi Mumbai's emerging International Education City.

The National Forensic Sciences University opened a campus in Jinja, Uganda, in 2023. IIT Madras and IIT Delhi have launched campuses in Zanzibar and Abu Dhabi, while IIM Ahmedabad has established a presence in Dubai and IIT Bombay in Sendai, Japan. Joint, dual and twinning degree programmes are now possible through collaborations between Indian and foreign universities, and the newly notified Equivalence Regulations 2025 offer clarity on recognising foreign qualifications. For India to evolve into a genuine global education destination, it must strengthen the larger ecosystem. This requires world-class infrastructure, cutting-edge research ecosystems, globally competitive curricula and the ability to attract and retain top faculty, including members of the Indian diaspora. Regulatory processes — from visa facilitation to qualification recognition — must be simplified, and internship opportunities for international students must become more accessible.

India must also strategically fund international research collaborations, global teaching exchanges and faculty mobility to ensure sustained knowledge flows. Equally important is a strong branding and outreach strategy that communicates India's distinctive academic strengths and showcases the achievements of global alumni who studied at Indian institutions. Tailored academic offerings — whether STEM and Bharatiya Gyan Parampara programmes for Western learners or specialised courses in agriculture, healthcare, education and digital finance for African students-can help India address diverse global needs. Looking ahead, India must aim to triple inbound international student enrolment to at least 1.5 lakh by 2030. With the right systemic reforms, regulatory coherence and institutional strategies, India has both the heritage and the capability to re-emerge as a global centre of learning-well before 2047.

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Shrinking space for the Humanities

A better understanding of the complementarity of science and the Humanities is essential for a functional and progressive society

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Higher education across the world has, of late, been witnessing a significant shift toward disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These disciplines foster technical knowledge and analytical skills and are much sought after because they are considered job-oriented. Modern universities, driven by global economic uncertainties and market forces, and seeking external funding and research grants, seem to be under pressure to prioritise programmes based on these disciplines. Besides, elite private universities, eager to justify exorbitant tuition fees, offer state-of- the-art courses aligned with the STEM trend.

It is unfortunate that the excessive patronage extended to such new-generation programmes is at the expense of the Humanities, which includes subjects such as history, philosophy, language and literature. There has been a systematic and organised attempt to marginalise and deprioritise such academic disciplines. Such discrimination is evident in the slashing of departmental funding and downsizing of the faculty – developments that inevitably lead to declining student enrollment, programme termination, and, ultimately, the closure of entire departments.

The Humanities engage with human culture, history, and experience through critical and interpretive enquiry. They explore human values, expressions, and societies to deepen our understanding of what it means to be human. Studying the Humanities develops critical thinking, cultural awareness, empathy, ethical intelligence, and strong communication skills, shaping learners into well-rounded individuals. Endowed with historical perspective, moral sensibility, and creativity, such individuals stand ready to bring qualitative changes to social life.

Though these attributes may not always ensure lucrative jobs, unemployment is not particularly widespread among Humanities graduates. Their versatility, general awareness, leadership qualities, and flair for languages are indeed marketable. They have the potential to become great teachers who can mould the minds of millions; statesmen who think about the next generation and not just the next election; intellectuals who raise the level of public discourse; and social activists driven by justice, equality, and democratic values.

Social harmony

The decline and devaluation of the Humanities and the shrinking space they occupy on university campuses does not augur well for social harmony and peace. The trend reflects a moral ambivalence and cultural degeneration, often camouflaged by the ostentatious display of material prosperity.

The diminishing role assigned to disciplines other than science, technology and business studies can undermine the cause of social justice and bring about cultural disintegration and moral corruption. It might spawn a generation that is too positivist and desensitised. A system that focuses solely on the creation of a knowledge economy would produce enormous wealth but promotes endless mass consumption, an outcome of a commercialised education system.

A better understanding of the complementarity of science and the Humanities is essential for a functional and progressive society. A convergence of the head and the heart, intellect and emotion, what Matthew Arnold called "sweetness and light" would be the panacea for a wounded civilisation. Scientific temper blended with creativity is essential for the modern man.

In this context, it might not be out of place to recall the insightful observations made by Jawaharlal Nehru, the visionary leader of India, on the need to combine scientific temper with the emancipatory potential of the Humanities. According to Nehru, a university must stand for humanism, tolerance, reason, adventure of ideas, and the quest for truth. He visualised the harmonious coexistence of the Humanities and science and technology on Indian campuses. He believed that critical thinking, humanism and social responsibility would humanise technology.

Herbert Marcuse, the German-American social critic and political theorist of the 'Frankfurt School', posited that denial of the study of Humanities and the broader philosophical capacity for critical thinking, contributes significantly to the creation of the "one-dimensional man", who seldom questions the status quo and always accepts the dominant social order.

Modern society, propelled by technological rationality and consumerism, focuses on what is immediately useful. The prevailing education system that dispenses with critical thinking will promote a utilitarian culture that produces individuals who are unable to recognise their own alienation or challenge the social control under which they are reduced to blissful slaves.

Scientists seek to unravel the mysteries of the physical universe. But empathy, emotional intelligence and intuition nurtured by the Humanities are needed to know the inner universe, to strike a chord with the "still sad music of humanity" and to probe the possibility of a more fulfilling existence on this planet.

TELEGRAPH (P-12), 07 DECEMBER 2025

The English public sphere in India has a curious presence

First language

MUKUL KESAVAN

The scope of English in India includes Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, whose most recent books have been named as two of *The New York Times*' ten books of the year, and the Amazon delivery man who understood the one-time password I had to give him better in English numbers than their Hindi equivalents. Snigdha Poonam has written of the growing cottage industry in English learning and teaching in India in her book, *Dreamers*, as young Indians not socialised into English try to acquire functional fluency in the language spoken by the country's elites.

English is an Indian language but it is so joined at the hip with status and power that the English public sphere in India — the zone of discourse created by a language in which ideas are exchanged in the media, in educational institutions, in bookshops and cafés, where public opinion is shaped — has a curious presence. The public sphere of any language is likely to be an unequal place because that is the nature of human society, but the English public sphere in India is a little like a levitating bubble. Unlike a bubble, it is resilient and in no danger of popping but it does tend to float above the vast majority of the people that it discusses, makes policy for and creates public opinion about; the public that it addresses consists of the Indian people minus everyone who doesn't speak or read English. Numerically, this is still a lot of people because India is a massive country, but it is still a very small fraction of the country's population.

This is not unique to India; all formally colonised countries tend to be administered by a class descended from formerly collaborating elites fluent in the language of the colonising country. What is interesting about the Indian instance is the ability of its anglophone elite to create and sustain an English-speaking world that is to some degree independent of the English-speaking world of the West where newspapers like *The New York Times* make canonical judgments about culture and history and politics.

English-language publishing houses in India publish fiction and non-fiction for a mainly Indian audience. For the most part, being published in India is not contingent on the book being accepted elsewhere in the West. The oeuvre of the hugely influential Subaltern Studies Collective was published by publishing houses in India long before it found an audience abroad. Some of these publishers were affiliated with Western university presses and publishing houses, like the Oxford University Press and Penguin, but their Indian arms functioned as editorially autonomous organisations. The role of OUP India, Permanent Black, Kali for Women and Seagull Books, to name just a few, in creating a circumstance where Indian writers and scholars could publish for Indian readers without looking over their shoulders at editors and publishers Elsewhere helped build an English public sphere local to India. But for them, the history of South Asia and subcontinental fiction in English, to take just two kinds of writing, would be less various and rich.

That said, the siloed nature of the English public sphere in India and its distance from adjacent Indian languages is, or ought to be, startling. There is a kind of apartheid that exists in metropolitan culture where English speakers and writers and 'creators' inhabit separate spaces. Seminars, panels, conferences, think tanks, book discussions, and bookshops are fairly rigidly divided by language. This is probably truer of Delhi and Mumbai than it is of Calcutta or Kochi, but I don't think it's controversial to say that there is remarkably little crossover between the public spheres of English and other Indian languages.

Generationally, this separation seems to be growing. I can testify to this in an anecdotal way. My aunt, who was a lecturer in Hindi in the University of Delhi, translated fiction and non-fiction from Bengali and Urdu into Hindi. Her shelves were, therefore, filled with books in English, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu. My father, who used to half-jokingly say that he spoke English in five Indian languages, had a study piled high with books in scripts I couldn't read. In his retirement, he attempted a history of modern printing and publishing in India which resulted in shelves that illustrated the difference between his multilingual world and the monoculture I voluntarily inhabited.

Ramachandra Guha has written about this tendency towards the English-only 'new intellectual' and it's important to say here that there are many first-rate minds in India that traffic in several languages. But it is possible to discern a trend, to see that bilingual scholars and writers tend to produce their important work in English. Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, U.R. Ananthamurthy and Mahasweta Devi are obvious exceptions to this rule. Geetanjali Shree and Banu Mushtaq, both of whom won the International Man Booker Prize for their fiction, carry this tradition forward; they might even presage a change, given the long overdue attention and admiration that the prize has brought in its wake.

But it is still worth saying that the bookshop I visit offers *Tomb of Sand*, the translation of Geetanjali Shree's *Ret Samadhi*, not the original. This is because the bookshop only stocks English language books. In this it isn't exceptional: apart from railway station bookstalls, every bookshop in Delhi that sells English books *only* sells English books. In the heart of Hindi's heartland, there is never any sign of the Nagari script. Through my reading life in Delhi, I've only once encountered a bookshop that stocked English books alongside whole shelves of books in Hindi. It closed after a few gallant years and thereby hangs a lesson.

The exclusion of Hindi books isn't the fault of the bookshop owners; it is down to their clientele. People like me don't buy books in Hindi. Amitabha Bagchi, who writes novels in English, has spoken of the sense of intimacy he experiences when he reads Hindi novels. Why do English readers who know Hindi deny themselves that pleasure? I can only imagine that the cachet of English and a lack of practice are part of the answer. In Bangalore, I imagine, there are nominally bilingual Kannadigas who, likewise, never buy a book in Kannada. In my generation, this wasn't wholly true of middle class Bengalis. Bengali contemporaries in college used to write letters home to their parents in Bangla and even if the books they were reading in their hostel rooms were all in English, they always claimed familiarity with the Bengali canon. Anecdotally again, their children seem to be lost to English.

If anything, the alienation from *desi* first languages seems to be accelerating in this thin demographic. The new, expensive, international schools are designed to physically export their young customers to the Western metropolis, not merely to culturally alienate them. It's worth reminding ourselves that in a digital environment where content is increasingly consumed visually and aurally, gatekeeping the exclusively English public sphere is a doomed enterprise. In a world where an online influencer like Dhruv Rathee and a YouTube anchor like Ravish Kumar reach millions more people than the best-known anglophone intellectuals, this exclusivist, incurious enclave courts irrelevance. Like all bankrupts, we risk going out of business, first gradually and then all at once.

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DECCAN HERALD (P-6), 08 DECEMBER 2025

FUTURE PROOFING EDUCATION

Pvt or govt school? How parents in K'taka decide

A new survey shows that parents prefer govt schools and move to private institutions only under certain conditions

PRAMOD SRIDHARAMURTHY AND SUDHIRA H S

For years, there has been a familiar debate in Karnataka's public education circles. News reports, education officials, and public discussions often claim that parents are steadily abandoning government schools for private ones. It is a view repeated so often that it feels like settled truth.

A new statewide study covering 14,149 parents across 34 education districts now complicates that narrative. The findings reveal that most parents still prefer government schools and move to private institutions only when certain conditions push them to do so.

The data is clear. Families earning less than Rs 10,000 a month show a strong preference for government schools. Middle-income families do the same unless certain concerns grow too large. Only high-income families move almost entirely towards private schools. The idea that parents have lost faith in the public system does not hold up against the numbers. Instead, the findings suggest that trust is present but somewhat fragile.

One of the strongest reasons behind the shift to private schools is the demand for English medium instruction. This choice is not rooted either in status or appearance. Parents see English as essential to future opportunities. Even families that are satisfied with many aspects of government schools feel they must switch if English medium options are not available.

Another factor is the perception of teaching quality. Many parents believe private schools offer better teaching even though government teachers are better qualified, receive regular training and often perform better in national assessments.

The perception gap may exist because these strengths are not visible to parents, who judge what they can observe directly. They notice punctuality, notebook checks, homework follow-up, classroom order and regular communication.

The study also captures the strengths of government schools. A large majority of parents appreciate the midday meal programme; they also value the sports opportunities provided; two-thirds said that government schools complete the syllabus on time; and thirty-four percent of parents said that proximity and ease of access influenced their decision.

Families also recognise the presence of trained teachers and a generally safe environment. Despite these strengths, government schools are still often viewed as welfare-oriented institutions rather than quality public services.

Teacher availability stands out as another concern. Seven in 10 parents worry about shortages, frequent staff changes or uncertainty in staffing. Many also believe that government teachers handle a significant amount of non-teaching work, which affects how they view teaching consistency.

Seventy-one percent of parents list teaching quality as a concern. Most cannot evaluate teaching techniques, so they rely on visible cues, such as school building, classroom order, homework follow-up and general discipline.

Parents also feel that private schools respond faster, share updates regularly and keep communication simple.

About half the parents say that the lack of CBSE or ICSE options in government schools influences their decision. Many families see these boards as offering better opportunities, even though both follow the NCERT framework.

Parents also feel they have more influence in private schools. In government schools, many are unsure about their own role.

The study also shows that some perceptions around why parents choose private schools are often misunderstood. Only a small proportion of parents see private schooling as a status choice, and most disagree. For these families, the shift to private schools is driven mostly by practical concerns rather than image.

Taken together, the findings show that parents are making practical decisions. They recognise the strengths of government schools but worry about consistency, language opportunities, responsiveness and predictable teaching.

The data points to a few areas where focused action could strengthen government schools and reinforce confidence among families.

The first is a practical approach to the demand for English medium. Instead of positioning language choice as a cultural conflict, the state could consider making mathematics and science textbooks bilingual in the early grades. This gives children conceptual clarity in Kannada while building comfort with English terminology. From high school onwards, especially in Classes 9 and 10, these subjects can be offered fully in English. This phased approach gives families a credible alternative within the government system.

The second involves reframing the strengths of government schools. Free education, midday meals, sports facilities, accessibility and reliable syllabus completion should be presented as markers of quality rather than as welfare benefits.

When strengths are seen as welfare, families underestimate their value.

Teacher availability needs improvement as well. Filling vacancies is important, but stability throughout the year matters just as much. Ensuring that guest teachers are appointed before the year begins and preferring candidates who have cleared eligibility tests can make a noticeable difference. Publishing teacher availability at the school level can also make progress visible to parents.

Physical conditions strongly shape perception. Clean classrooms, proper toilets, lighting and basic teaching materials matter to families. CSR funding should support minimal infrastructure improvements across many schools rather than deep upgrades in only a few.

Communication is another area where improvements can help. Many parents are unaware of existing initiatives and student achievements in government schools.

Parental participation matters. Beyond formal parent teacher meetings, schools can create flexible PTM days. SDMCs can be strengthened through periodic training and more structured involvement.

(The writers are with India Literacy Project, a non-profit that works towards enhancing the quality of education in government schools)

HINDU (P-5), 08 DECEMBER 2025

Pavithra M.B.

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Protection, not surveillance

Why it is important to teach digital dignity in educational institutions

Rights do not retire at the campus gate; they accompany every citizen into every space where power operates, even the digital ones. Today's education is mediated by machines. Attendance is marked by facial recognition, learning apps track keystrokes, and CCTV cameras watch with eyes that never tire.

Dignity is the life-breath of liberty. Once, dignity in education meant freedom from ridicule and discrimination. Today, it also means freedom from invisible eyes, silent profiling, and digital footprints. A student's daily life is observed, recorded, and stored. When dignity migrates to the digital world, so must its protection. Dignity shrinks when a human being becomes a data point, and shrivels entirely when they become a product.

Dignity and privacy

Digital dignity ensures that the student remains a human being first and not just data. It demands respect for autonomy in online interactions, fairness in algorithmic decisions, and transparency in institutional digital systems. It insists that no learner should feel embarrassed, profiled, monitored, or manipulated simply because learning has shifted to screens and apps. In short, digital dignity is the guarantee that technology will not diminish the learner's worth.

Data privacy is the legal architecture that upholds digital dignity. It gives every student the right to know what information is collected, for what purpose, how securely it is stored, and whether it is shared with third parties. Privacy does not hide wrongdoing; it protects personhood. A photograph, voice clip, Aadhaar number, or keystrokes must not become commercial commodities. Privacy, in its digital form, is not a technical privilege; it is a human right.

Though linked, they are not identical. Digital dignity is the principle; the moral claim to respect in online spaces. Data privacy is the mechanism; the enforceable safeguard that ensures this respect translates into practice. Dignity defines who the student is; privacy defines what may be done with their information. Together, they guard the child both as a person and as a data subject.

In school and college

In schools, digital dignity begins with simple lessons on consent, helping children understand what it means to say "yes" or "no" to sharing. Students must learn to recognise unsafe online behaviour, including cyber bullying and manipulative messaging. Teachers can use examples such as classroom WhatsApp groups to show how easily information spreads. Explaining digital footprints – how data travels and rarely disappears – gives younger learners a sense of responsibility and caution.

In colleges, digital education must move beyond technical skills to deeper ethical awareness. Courses across disciplines should integrate AI ethics, informed consent, transparency, accountability and the constitutional values behind privacy rights. Classroom discussions must also address deepfakes, misinformation, targeted advertising and how data-driven profiling can shape opportunities or discrimination. The goal is not to fear technology but to humanise it.

The NCERT's Digital Wellness Curriculum introduces responsible digital behaviour at the school level, and the UGC's draft guidelines emphasise cyber hygiene and ethical technology use across higher education. The DPDP Act provides statutory grounding for informational privacy.

The Union Government's recent move to mandate Sanchar Saathi as a pre-installed smartphone app designed to help users verify mobile connections and block stolen phones ignited national debate and drew criticism from digital rights experts who warned that any tool with deep device access must operate within constitutional safeguards. Their concern was simple: digital safety cannot be separated from digital autonomy.

Protection cannot demand the surrender of control. Safety tools must empower users; not overpower them. A student cannot be truly safe if they cannot know what data is collected, decide what to share, opt out, uninstall a tool, or understand how a system works. Safety without autonomy becomes surveillance, not protection. Thus, digital dignity and privacy are not only academic concepts; they are constitutional expectations.

Build awareness

Awareness of data rights is still low among students, teachers and parents. Many institutions rely excessively on CCTV networks, biometric scanners, and behaviour-tracking apps, normalising surveillance rather than safety. Unequal access to devices and connectivity deepens old social inequities under a new digital mask. Algorithmic bias continues to influence admissions, evaluations, and opportunities, often invisibly. Adding to this is the rising commercialisation of student data by edtech platforms that treat learning profiles as marketable commodities rather than protected personal information.

Educational institutions must adopt mandatory Digital Dignity Codes and ensure every digital tool used on campus is built with privacy-by-design. Let there be "digital drills" in educational institutions to train students to spot manipulative permissions, detect misinformation, and exercise their right to opt out. Institutions should designate a student digital ombudsman, to ensure that grievances about tech misuse are heard impartially. In a world where a young person's first footprint is often digital, the protection of that footprint becomes a sacred educational duty.

Digital dignity is not the luxury of the future; it is the discipline of the present. In teaching it, we do not merely modernise our classrooms; we moralise our future.

Views expressed are personal

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What are concerns over the draft ISI Bill, 2025?

Why did the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation release the draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025, repealing the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959? Why are students and academicians protesting? How will it affect the revenue generating mechanisms of the institute?

EXPLAINER

Shiv Sahay Singh

The story so far:

On September 25, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025. The Bill has been met with strong protests by academicians as well as students of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) who claim that the move is aimed to strip the institute of its academic autonomy by converting it from a "registered society to a statutory body corporate".

What is the significance of the ISI?

The ISI was founded in December 1931 by P.C. Mahalanobis in Kolkata and has since grown into one of India's most prestigious academic and research institutions. The institute was originally registered in April 1932, under the Societies Registration Act of 1860, and later re-registered under the West Bengal Societies Registration Act of 1961. Being a society provided the institute its own memorandum of association, bye-laws, and regulations. Parliament enacted the Indian Statistical Institute Act, 1959, declaring ISI as an Institution of National Importance (INI).

Many scholars link the origin of the institute to the Bengal renaissance and credit the institute with shaping India's planning and policy apparatus. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) was developed at ISI, establishing the foundation of India's official statistical system. Other than P.C.Mahalanobis, the institute has produced legendary scholars such as Professor C.R. Rao and S.R.S. Varadhan.

With about 1,200 students and six centres across India, ISI offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Statistics, Mathematics, Quantitative Economics, Computer Science, Library and Information Science, Cryptology and Security, Quality Management Science and Operations Research.

Major changes: The Kolkata-based Indian Statistical Institute. FILE PHOTO

Why are academicians protesting?

The primary concern of those opposing the draft Bill is how the ISI's institutional status will change, from a "a registered society to a statutory body corporate".

A recent letter by about 1,500 academicians to Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State (Independent Charge) MoSPI, stated that there is no transparent reason that MoSPI should repeal the (1959) Act, abolish the society and introduce a Bill which violates the basic spirit of the agreement between the general body of the society and the government. The letter also states that the move to bypass the society registered under the WB Societies Registration Act to a "statutory body corporate" infringes upon the jurisdiction of the Societies Registration Act and is against the spirit of cooperative federalism. On November 28, hundreds of students and staff of ISI formed a human chain and held a public meeting near the institute's campus on B.T. Road in North Kolkata.

Those opposing the draft Bill point out that the governance structure, as in the existing 1959 Act, vested authority in a council with academic representation, and procedural safeguards against government overreach. The proposed 2025 Bill, however, gives power to the Board of Governors (BoG), defined under Section 15 of the Act, which is heavily dominated by government nominees sidelining the authority of faculty and academic stakeholders. Former professor of ISI and chairman of West Bengal Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation Abhirup Sarkar said that the ISI is a place of doing basic research which is a long-term process where immediate results may not be visible. Since there is a push for a corporate model of funding in the draft Bill, getting funds for basic research projects could be a problem in the future. Section 29 of the proposed 2025 Act deals with 'power to generate revenue' which includes student fees, consultancy services and sponsored research projects among others.

Another critical area raised by those opposing the Bill is that all appointments will be controlled by the Union government, through the BoG. Earlier there were 10 representatives from ISI (eight elected, one worker and one scientific worker) out of the 33 representatives on the council, a little less than one-third. Now there will be none. Professor Sarkar said that after the proposed Bill, there are apprehensions of **political interference in the appointments** by the Union Government.

What is the government saying?

The government claims that the idea behind the legislation is the vision to make ISI not only one of the best in India but one of the foremost institutes in the world as the institute approaches its centenary in 2031. A press release stated that, over the years, four review committees had examined the functioning of ISI. The most recent, chaired by Dr. R.A. Mashelkar in 2020, recommended major reforms to strengthen governance, expand academic programmes, and make ISI globally competitive.

What lies ahead?

The students and academicians are banking on the support of Opposition parties to oppose the proposed legislation. Villupuram Member of Parliament D. Ravikumar has written to the Union Minister of State (MoSPI) urging him to withdraw the draft Indian Statistical Institute Bill, 2025. Leaders from Trinamool Congress and Communist Party of India (Marxist) have also publicly opposed the draft legislation and vowed to oppose it if it is tabled in Parliament.

THE GIST

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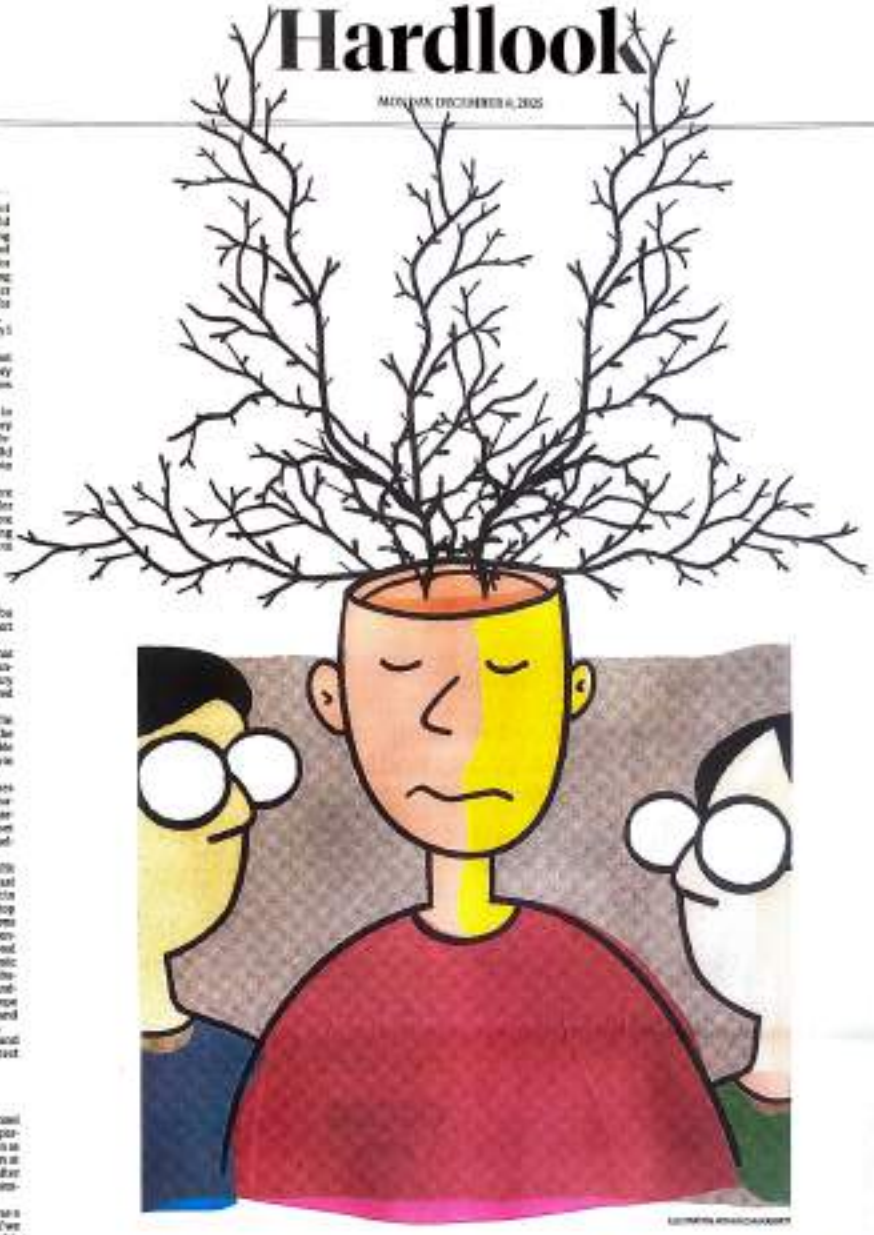
THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Hardlook

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025



'MA'AM, I AM HAVING A PANIC ATTACK'

On the frontline of the crisis in Delhi's schools, counsellors work to support a generation on the edge

Vidhooshaa Kumararaju
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 6

ONE MORNING a couple of months ago, a 15-year-old walked into the counselling room of a well-known school in South Delhi. The counsellor on record that the child was wearing long sleeves, had eyes red-rimmed in eyeliner oddities. Immediately, it was too warm for a full-sleeve shirt buttoned at the wrists.

"Ma'am," the student hesitated, "may I share something with you?"

What the counsellor heard next wasn't surprising or unexpected — it was a story that is increasingly familiar to counsellors in schools across Delhi.

"Children are resorting to self-harm to curb overwhelming thoughts, or when they feel overblown," the counsellor told The Indian Express. "If that follows this child months together the managers open eyes an stitch."

Cases such as the 15-year-old's were fewer until a few years ago, the counsellor said — things are different now, and more children are talking. "There is growing awareness... It is encouraging students to reach out, they know confidentiality will be respected," she said.

A board scribbled the counsellor's room says, "When you say how you have relieved someone is hearing you... You want to hear someone... You want to hurt yourself."

Counsellors describe a generation that walks into their rooms stressed and traumatised, using mental-health vocabulary that most of their seniors years ago discovered only in adulthood.

They will barge in saying, "Ma'am, I'm having a panic attack: my exam is in the next period," or depart into chatter unable to accept that a close friend had chosen to sit with someone else during break.

Many of them carry smart phones loaded with adult content, have vocabularies from OTT shows, and accept broken-personal by their parents' inability to set proper boundaries for them, say counsellors.

In the days after a Class 10 student at St Columba's School died by suicide last month, The Indian Express reached out to counsellors in several of the Capital's top schools. From that series of conversations emerged the portrait of a city full of teenagers grappling with significant emotional stress — the result of lingering pandemic scars, of the disconnect that exists between constant pressures and rumour, undermanaging and inspirational, and of trying to cope in the adult physical world whose perils and pressures they sense yet underestimate.

Names of students, counsellors, and schools have been withheld to protect identities.

Parents 'scared' of their own kids

A veteran counsellor at a major school in West Delhi said she has never seen parents being so careful with their children as now. This counsellor has spent 20 years in her current job, which she took up after working across South Delhi's most prestigious schools.

She cites the case of a father who was a teacher himself, telling her: "Ma'am, if we say anything to him, he locks himself in his room. What if he harms himself? Please tell us what to do."

This parent's concern that many parents feel is the outcome of "overly pampering" their children. Even as they're growing up soon, the counsellor said, "in the mother [and] the net cap, parents exhibit irrational demands or show their love, rather than teach the right life skills and values to make their children worthy citizens of the country," she said.

In despair, these parents sometimes reach out to schools, the counsellor said. They will request teachers to send scare their children' phones because they are unable to do it themselves, or call for maybe say their child is refusing to get out of bed for school.

The general intolerance of today's children seems to be devoid of an awareness of gradation, she said — many do not seem to understand the difference between teasing and bullying, and they will usually call their teachers and parents names that previous generations would not even belong.

Some of this behaviour can be traced to the pandemic, the counsellor said. "In the two years of isolation, the students-adult interaction was disturbed. Adults are no longer role models or evidence-obedience."

'They already have the answers'

A younger counsellor at a school in South-central Delhi recalled an occasion when a 16-year-old had googled exactly symptoms that she thought she had. The counsellor asked had prepared to gently help children identify and name their feelings was immediately met with the argument what was she smart enough to diagnose emotional issues with a sophisticated vocabulary adults have.

"I was stunned," the counsellor said. She realised that in some cases at least, the children's problem was not ignorance, it was saturation.

"These children come to me only after they have exhausted OTT platforms and the internet and had a chance to address and they've come out a lot worse. The Internet has offered them a solution, maybe even to panic at some level, but it has also created children who need. But it has also created children who cannot live comfortably because they are struggling with [an] every moment," said the counsellor.

The fundamental shift goes much deeper than just vocabulary. "Earlier," she said, "disparity", and "boundaries". She said, she recalled a case partially "boundaries" right-year-old who knew exactly what she liked and disliked, what she would and would not accept, whether she could tolerate a real emotional issue with a child, not just even in middle-school children five years ago.

"Every generation is supposed to evolve," said the counsellor.

'Nine hours online, then school'

The counsellor from the South Delhi school who had spoken to the student in long sleeves at the top of this report recalled the time she had spent with a child who had shown a sexually explicit photo at a classmate, several ugly (unwrecently. After identifying her for an hour, the student confessed he had picked up the expression from content that some older boys had shown him on their phones.

"Age-appropriate information and careful adult supervision are essential," said the counsellor. She said she frequently discovers the secret love-triangle affairs that many children have. "Long hours spent online, analysing between Instagram games such as Roblox and Minecraft, and social media, frequently result in increased impulsivity."

Issues of body image, seen in teens or older children and increasingly seen in the pre-upheaval in primary school. A counsellor recalled a fifth-grader with a perfectly proportionate body for her age wanting to lose 10 kilograms because she wanted "prettier from everyone".

There then are issues of interpersonal behaviour. Many students refuse to take responsibility for their actions, resort sharply to panic, and find it difficult to repair hurtful friendships, counsellors said. In several schools, counsellors have sessions on resolving conflict and disputes, and on self-esteem and accountability.

Catastrophic Covid disruption

A counsellor at another South Delhi school blamed Boomer pre-lockdown-Covid phrases in her decade of working with children. The post-Covid generation, she said, returned to school rooms under layers of developmental scaffolding.

Many couldn't sit through a full school day; they would request "half-days" become a long-time sport; with peers overwhelmed others, she said. Conflicts over the smallest matters escalated because children had limited social memory that guides them to face-to-face relationships.

Many children voice a panic in the virus, some lost both parents. The counsellor said she also started to notice a tendency to wander off issues, "a Blue Whale Challenge [online 'suicide game' like behaviour" in which children swapped rubber bands on wrists, or punched walls until their knuckles bled. "They don't know how to express what they feel," she said. "So they copy what they see."

Over, roughly within ropes, a student told the counsellor, "What's the big deal? I found this on [other] internet." Another excitedly announced in school that her parents had gone [out] to celebrate her 12th birthday with wine. "It took me a while to comprehend. I did not know how to respond," the counsellor said.

'Parents and schools, together'

And yet, by the majority of cases, the core of childhood remains unchanged, agreed all counsellors. Children still seek a place where they are not identified by their failures, where their anger is not punished, and where they can articulate heartbreak aloud. This body-wrenching stress often feel like the heart of a school — "despite all that has changed, children still want meaning," one of the counsellors quoted above said.

For parents, the counsellors have a prescription that includes more authority, but not through bans or stronger boundaries to the extent your children can learn on them. Instead, counsellors, less rigid rules, and reflection, privilege emotional grounding over emotional resolution to rebuild emotional low touch children to navigate emotion instead of fleeing from it.

In the end, all counsellors agree on the critical need for collaboration — with parents and other stakeholders — to tackle things under this age turmoil is school that is growing up too fast until we run fast enough.

• Research

ABANDONED of 31 studies published between January 2020 and August 2021 in PubMed, Scopus, Cochrane Library, and Google Scholar, cumulatively involving 20,090 school-going children and adolescents across India, documented adverse impacts of mental health outcomes.

DEPRESSION emerged as the most commonly reported condition across studies, followed by social, behavioural, and emotional problems.

COVID-LINKED patterns included unrelated problems.

CONCLUSION School mental health research intends is critical for preventative interventions.

SOURCE: ANURAG MISHRA, SOUMYA SAMBHAVI, SHUBHAM CHAUHAN AND ADITI SHARMA, A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW, 2024

• Parents' guidebook

15 NON-JUDGMENTAL DO-NOT QUESTION: Ask open questions such as 'How was today?' Listen to the answer without immediate judgment.

OFFER VALIDATION BEFORE SOLUTIONS: Begin by naming and normalising the child's emotion before offering solutions.

HAVE CLEAR ROUTINES AND BOUNDARIES. Bedtime rules calmly and ensure there is consistency of regular sleep, screen limits, and study breaks

TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO CALM, DO NOT RESCUE. Model or teach children simple tools such as deep breaths, grounding, problem-breaking. Gradually let them try solutions.

How to detect warning signs and what to do about them

EXPERT EXPLAINS
BHAVNA BARNI

COUNSELLORS IN schools across Delhi are reporting heightened levels of stress and earlier onset of anxiety among students. An eminent clinical psychologist analysed the patterns of behaviour that are visible across age groups, and listed the steps families can take to build emotional safety at home.

What emotional and behavioural issues are most commonly seen among primary and senior school children these days?

In primary school children aged 6-10, increased anxiety (separation, school phobia, social, somatic complaints (stomach/headache), 'tempers' defiance, tantrums, sleep problems, declining performance (in younger children, and withdrawal/peer problems are the most common.

Among secondary students aged 11-18, the concerns often include social anxiety, depressive symptoms, self-criticism/perfectionistic behaviour, academic stress, risky online behaviours, impulsive control issues and occasional self-harm ideation or attempts.

All these issues have evolved – online now we have excessive and earlier onset of anxiety/depression, exam-related performance and humiliation stress, and digital-fuelled peer comparisons. The presentation often amplified by constant access to media exposure and reduced unstructured peer play.

Why do children appear more sensitive or fragile today compared to a few years ago?

Several factors: disparities, late-night academic pressure and high-stakes testing, ubiquitous social media, constant comparisons, curated lives, and cyberbullying. Also, reduced free and unstructured play and less face-to-face social practice.

Parenting styles matter: both overprotection and performance-focus can limit resilience development among children.

There is the issue of stigma and low mental-health literacy (so we schools and communities, so problems go unnoticed until they have worsened significantly).

As clinicians, we emphasise early identification and intervention – small, timely parental anxiety and validation can protect children more than grand interventions done too late.

In what specific ways can parents/families/children's digital lives without becoming overwhelming?

Parents should co-create digital rules – negotiate screen times, public vs private content, and 'no-phone' zones (meals, bedtime).

The focus should be on behaviour and well-being, not spying. They should talk about online experiences and friends, show an interest in what the children enjoy.

Use collaborative monitoring – agree apps/devices that allow parental oversight (transparently). Teach children privacy, online risks, kindness, and online safety skills rather than only forbidding platforms.

Intervene when we see that interaction causes distress. Remove or restrict access temporarily while discussing the reasons.

What harm can overprotective or 'helicopter' parenting or excessive children, and how can parents find a balance?

Both parenting extremes children's resilience-building practice, fosters dependence, increases anxiety when facing failure, and can diminish self-efficacy.

The balance comes when parents support and scaffold rather than control, give graded responsibility, allow safe failure and celebrate effort over outcomes. Shift from the safety rules, step back for manageable everyday problems.

After a distressing school incident, what should parents do at home to ensure safety and openness?

Parents must pause rush to explanations, and protect children from graphic details. Provide the child reassurance with words like 'You might be worried... What's on your mind?' and validate their emotions and normalise the wide spectrum of a school environment or disruption.

What are the early warning signs that parents should never ignore?

Red flags could include sudden dependence, 'I won't/I wouldn't here', etc. A sudden/sustained withdrawal from family or friends, serious school refusal, significantly reduced activities, are signs.

Watch out for significant changes in sleep, appetite, academic performance, or marked mood swings. Also, increased aggression, aggressive outbursts, or giving away personal possessions.

Dr Barni is a senior clinical and child psychologist, and the founder of Manodarpan Clinic. She spoke to Vidhooshaa Kumararaju

PIONEER (P-9), 08 DECEMBER 2025

Time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset and restore cultural confidence

GEETA BHATT

As the Dharma Dhwaj rose high into the sky during the flag-hoisting ceremony marking the completion of the Ram Temple Complex in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked that nearly 190 years ago, Macaulay had sown the seeds of uprooting India from its civilisational roots. The very questions raised about the existence of Shri Ram and the prolonged struggle and delay in the construction of the Ram Temple after Independence were, he said, consequences of the "Macaulay mindset." This mindset was cultivated through the "Minute on Education" introduced and authored in 1835 by Thomas Macaulay in his capacity as a member of the Executive Council of the then Governor-General William Bentinck. It fostered an attitude of apathy towards Bharat's native knowledge systems and languages, shaping generations under a framework that devalued their own cultural, religious and intellectual heritage.

The conviction and self-belief of a nation are rooted in the socio-cultural footprints of its history. Yet, in the decades following Independence, India's education and administrative systems continued to bear deep colonial imprints. The language, curriculum and work culture remained largely unchanged even as white sahibs were replaced by brown sahibs. Macaulay ultimately succeeded in advancing what he had envisioned: the establishment of an intrinsic superiority of the Western model and the English language, while Sanskrit, Arabic and other classical traditions were sidelined. Our ancient knowledge systems-ranging from science and mathematics to philosophy-were dismissed as outdated, irrational or merely religious, weakening the confidence of posterity in their own cultural and intellectual heritage.

The Charter Act of 1813, passed by the British Parliament to renew the East India Company's mandate in Bharat, introduced a significant clause that provided for the allocation of one lakh rupees annually for the revival and improvement of education among its Indian subjects. In the decades that followed, the debate over how this fund should be used intensified. Thomas Macaulay vigorously campaigned for directing this financial support exclusively towards English-medium education and Western literature, arguing against the continuation of funding for classical Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian learning. Macaulay prevailed, and state patronage for Oriental texts and traditional learning centres declined sharply, marking a decisive shift in education policy. Macaulay's education policy was not confined merely to creating "brown sahibs" to serve as a British-oriented workforce. It carried a deeper, concealed objective: to undermine and ultimately displace the existing socio-cultural foundations of Bharatiya society.

A letter written by Thomas Macaulay to his father on 12 October 1836, published in The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay by his nephew George Otto Trevelyan, clearly reveals how a larger ideological agenda was being embedded into Bharatiya society through British education policy. In this letter, Macaulay candidly states:

"Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully. We find it difficult-indeed, in some places impossible-to provide instruction for all who want it. At the single town of Hoogly, fourteen hundred boys are learning English. The effect of this education on the Hindoos is prodigious. No Hindoo who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy; but many profess themselves pure Deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that, if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any effort to proselytise; without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

It is rather ironic that while Macaulay dismissed the traditional knowledge systems and culture of this land, the very foundations of national schooling in England and several European countries were inspired by Indian educational practices-particularly the methods of "monitor", "slate", and "group learning." Dr Andrew Bell, a chaplain with the British Army, arrived in Madras in 1787. During his stay, he observed local children learning their alphabet by drawing letters in sand, guided by the brighter students in the class. Struck by the efficiency of this method, he adapted it into what he called the "New Schooling System" and introduced it in England. The model became highly popular and soon spread across Europe. Known as the "Madras Monitorial System," it offered an economical and scalable approach to mass education. Dr Bell later established a college in Scotland, naming it "Madras College," which still exists, in recognition of the system's origin. His student, Mr Lancaster, promoted a similar method, which became widely known as the "Bell and Lancaster Model." Yet neither Bell nor Lancaster acknowledged the Indian traditional schooling practices that inspired their innovations. Brigadier-General Alexander Walker, who served the British administration in Bharat between 1780 and 1810, offered a remarkable testimony on the indigenous education system in the Malabar region. He observed: "The children are instructed without violence and by a process peculiarly simple. The system was borrowed from the Brahmans and brought from India to Europe. It has been made the foundation of National Schools in every enlightened country. Some gratitude is due to a people from whom we have learnt to diffuse among the lower ranks of society instruction by one of the most unerring and economical methods which has ever been invented." Walker further noted that "no people probably appreciate more justly the importance of instruction than the Hindus." His account stands as a powerful acknowledgment of the effectiveness of traditional modes of education that later inspired key models of mass schooling in Europe, even as they were undermined by the colonial education policy imposed on us.

Dr S. Radhakrishnan, as Chairman of the first University Education Commission constituted after Independence, stated in its 1949 report that higher education should be imparted through the regional languages, and that English as the medium of instruction in higher education should be replaced by an Indian language as early as practicable. The challenge is not English as a language, but its long-standing dominance as the primary marker of intellect and academic success in the seven decades since Independence. Had the recommendations of this Commission been implemented earnestly in the early decades after Independence, the "Macaulay syndrome" that continued to shape our intellectual and cultural outlook might well have faded away by the twenty-first century.

The National Education Policy 2020 has acknowledged and endorsed the traditional Bharatiya Knowledge Systems, integrating them with the contemporary global knowledge ecosystem that has evolved through experimentation, innovation and cross-cultural exchanges. For the first time, Bharatiya languages have been given a level playing field in education, and the vision and ingenuity of an education policy have begun to reverse the long colonial practice of undermining our native knowledge, sciences and skills — a practice that left a lasting dent in the foundation required to strengthen our national consciousness. Rebuilding this confidence demands that we reclaim and restore the intellectual traditions that once nurtured a vibrant, self-assured civilisation. It is time to bid adieu to the Macaulay mindset.

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

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PIONEER (P-11), 08 DECEMBER 2025

AI is teaching a generation to sound smart. That's not the same as being informed

As students worldwide turn to AI for learning, the divide isn't between users and non-users — it's between those who can question algorithmic output and those who must accept it - education systems aren't prepared for the consequences.

NISHANT SAHDEV

Artificial intelligence didn't storm into education. There was no grand moment when classrooms suddenly changed. Instead, AI arrived slowly — through shortcuts during late-night study sessions, through apps that explained equations more patiently than tutors, through quick rewrites before a deadline. Over time, these small interactions added up. What once felt novel became routine. For many students today, AI is simply part of how thinking happens.

A final-year engineering student in Delhi said something recently that captured this shift perfectly: "Sometimes I'm not sure where my thinking ends and where the AI's suggestion begins." She wasn't admitting guilt. She was trying to describe a new intellectual experience — the sense that the boundary between her own reasoning and digital assistance is fading.

The numbers across India and globally show just how quickly this shift has taken root. In the US, surveys of teens show that one in four now uses generative AI for schoolwork, double the number from 2023.

Adults, too, are interacting with AI at unprecedented rates, with more than 60 per cent saying they use it several times a week. In India, AI adoption in schools and colleges is accelerating even faster. A national survey reported that over 70 per cent of Indian teachers already use AI tools for creating lesson plans or automating administrative work, with the figure even higher among experienced teachers.

In higher education, more than half of Indian universities now permit students to use AI tools and many institutions are incorporating generative AI into curriculum design and learning materials.

The Indian market shows this momentum. AI in education here was valued at roughly $196 million in 2024 and is projected to cross $1.1 billion by 2030 — a compound annual growth rate of more than 30 per cent. That growth is driven by scale: India has over 40 million higher-education students and one of the world's largest school systems, with 260 million schoolchildren and more than 8.5 million teachers. When a technology touches this system, even quietly, the effects ripple widely. But numbers only tell part of the story. What matters more is what AI is doing to the inner life of education — the process of thinking itself.

The Pioneer
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

For centuries, education relied on a simple assumption: the work that mattered happened inside the student. The essay or the problem set was just evidence of that internal struggle. Learning meant grappling with ideas, wrestling with confusion, taking wrong turns and correcting course. It was slow, often frustrating work, but it built the kind of understanding that stays with a person for life.

AI scrambles this logic. It can produce clean, fluent, confident answers instantly. A student need only provide the prompt.

Studies from leading universities have found that AI-generated essays now match or outperform undergraduate writing in structure, clarity, and argumentation. Students who use AI to improve their essays often submit stronger work— but when asked to explain the same ideas orally, their understanding is noticeably weaker. The surface looks polished, but the depth is missing.

Students feel the difference. Surveys in India and abroad show increasing anxiety: many students worry that AI is dulling their ability to think independently. A large majority say they often cannot tell how much of their work reflects their own reasoning. And this isn't laziness; it's human psychology. When a system gives a smooth, immediate answer, it's difficult to resist trusting it, especially under academic pressure. The trouble is that AI is not always correct. Large language models still generate fabricated information — so-called "hallucinations" — with surprising confidence. Depending on the question, error rates can range from a few percent to nearly a quarter. But students rarely have the time or context to verify every detail. When uncertainties are wrapped in fluent language, they blend into the student's mental model without detection.

This challenge is magnified in countries like India, where access to high-quality teaching remains uneven. UNESCO reports that hundreds of millions of students globally lack regular access to trained teachers and India alone faces a massive shortfall at multiple levels. In such environments, AI sometimes becomes a substitute for human instruction.

That can be a powerful equaliser — AI can deliver explanations anytime, in multiple languages, tailored to a student's pace. But it also carries risks. When students rely on AI without the conceptual framework to evaluate it, they may absorb inaccuracies that weaken their foundations. This creates a new kind of inequality. In well-resourced institutions — elite engineering colleges, private universities, top public universities — students often use AI thoughtfully.

They test ideas, refine drafts, or explore alternative approaches. In under-resourced settings, students may use AI as a primary teacher. The difference is not access; it is epistemic resilience — the ability to question the information a system gives you.

Meanwhile, universities are struggling to respond. Some tried banning AI, but detection tools remain unreliable and risk penalising honest students. Other institutions welcomed AI but did not rethink how assignments are designed, even though many traditional tasks no longer measure what they once did. If a machine can produce a persuasive answer in seconds, what does an essay or a problem set really test?

International organisations have begun sounding alarms. Analysts warn that without assessment reform, countries could see a decline in deep literacy, reasoning skills, and independent thinking. These warnings apply strongly to India, where millions of students will interact with AI daily long before institutions fully adapt.

So what would meaningful change look like?

First, we need to redesign assessments so that they capture reasoning, not just results. Oral exams, in-class analytical tasks, multi-stage assignments with required reflections and reasoning logs bring the cognitive process back into view. These practices won't eliminate AI use, but they make it harder for AI to replace thinking.

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Please read the complete article online in www.dailypioneer.com

TRIBUNE, (P-6), 08 DECEMBER 2025

Jails as classrooms

Promise of a social reset in Punjab, Haryana

A quiet but significant transformation is underway in the prisons of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh. With the rollout of 11 in-prison Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), vocational courses aligned with national skill standards and certification under NCVET/NSQF, the region is beginning to reimagine jails not as sites of punishment, but as spaces of possibility. Over 2,500 inmates are expected to receive training in trades ranging from plumbing and welding to cosmetology and tailoring. This shift marks one of the most ambitious correctional-reform initiatives in the country.

This reform is anchored in a simple but powerful idea: crime reduction is not achieved by harsher incarceration, but by equipping individuals with the tools to rebuild their lives outside the prison walls. Skill development, counselling, behavioural training and post-release placements through tie-ups with government ITIs or MSME schemes are not concessions; they are investments in safer communities. A prisoner who exits with certified skills, dignity and a sense of purpose is far less likely to reoffend than someone released into the same inequalities that once pushed him into crime.

For this vision to succeed, the state must confront the deeper barriers that await inmates outside: social stigma, employer hesitancy, inadequate job-absorption capacity and the absence of long-term monitoring of reintegration outcomes. Rehabilitation cannot end at the gate; it must extend into society. Industries must be incentivised to hire reformed inmates and communities must be sensitised to recognise rehabilitation as a collective responsibility. Punjab and Haryana now stand at a policy crossroads. They can allow this initiative to remain a symbolic reform, or they can turn it into a structural transformation that redefines justice itself. True correctional justice lies not in confinement, but in restoring citizens to society with dignity, opportunity and hope.

INDIAN EXPRESS (P-10), 09 DECEMBER 2025

To fulfil STEM potential, India must cast the net wider, go to the roots

A RECENT NEWS report says that the government has asked ministries and departments to re-examine how guides for doctoral degrees are selected. According to it, the government intends for research to be largely confined to "topics that fit emerging needs and priorities of the country", believing that PhD programmes should be "reoriented to promote innovation and development of new relevant ideas and technologies".

That research of direct relevance to the country should be supported and promoted is inarguable. It is a good starting point to ask where public money is being spent — it should be in ways that can be explained to the public. This also includes communicating the importance of research that has no foreseeable application. This is as true for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects as for non-STEM ones.

The obvious areas of immediate relevance to India include renewable energy, battery technology, sustainable agriculture, and health technologies. These areas tend to be well-supported anyway, though mainly through a variety of national missions spread across several ministries and government departments. Standard government grant mechanisms can be enhanced easily if additional support must be directed to such areas. But direct approaches such as these can be subtly flawed. This is because they are targeted to the present and not to the future. Thinking long-term, there's a broader virtue in building the imagination and agility to respond to what might unfold in the future rather than to simply go with what we see most clearly now.

In science, developments in applied areas typically lag basic research, sometimes by decades. This year's Nobel Prize in Physics is a good example. An experiment, done in the 1980s, that demonstrated that quantum mechanics could manifest at a scale much larger than that of single atoms, is of relevance to quantum computers, an application that wasn't even referred to in the original papers.

The success of Bell Laboratories, an American industrial lab that once held some of the most impactful patents globally (for example, the transistor, the laser, and optical fibre technology), was due, in large part, to a culture of basic research that was aided by considerable freedom to explore directions of no immediate relevance to the company. Concentrating on identifying areas that seem obvious at present is superficially attractive. For one, progress can be easily quantified. But a more measured approach would recognise the value of indirect approaches, those that address core problems of supporting the larger enterprise of knowledge creation, whether in science and technology or more broadly.

Here's one such problem: Pick any government-funded student, one who receives a fellowship directly. Fellowships awarded by agencies such as the DST and the UGC are examples. The likelihood is that they receive their scholarships only at intermittent intervals, often separated by months. A friend, awarded a prestigious government research fellowship at one of India's most prominent public universities, has not been paid for the past nine months. Her case is not atypical.

GAUTAM I MENON

Some years ago, an innovative idea was implemented, that of transferring fellowship amounts directly to the bank accounts of PhD students. This eliminated a specific corrupt practice, whereby some institutions would siphon off a cut from the PhD scholar's stipend before paying them. However, given the payment delays that exist in practice, institutions cannot support students in the interim because of the complexities of getting reimbursed.

A large number of university-funded PhD students in India, the non-NET students, receive a stipend of Rs 8,000 per month, which is below the minimum wage. This amount has remained unchanged since 2012. To supplement this meagre income, students must take on temporary teaching appointments. This reduces the time and attention they can devote to research.

Here's another problem: Industry-funded PhDs are few and far between. They are absent altogether outside a few IITs and similar institutions. This is for several reasons, among them a historical disconnect between industry and academia and the feeling that Indian academia cannot deliver on its promises in a timely manner. There's a case for training Indian PhDs to be able to better exploit the potential for such collaborations as well as to improve the ability of institutions and advisors to manage them.

Finally, there are large parts of academic investigation that have little or nothing to do with industry or applications. These include philosophy, sociology, history, political science, and so on. Unbiased enquiry in these areas of the humanities and social sciences is an essential part of what makes us human. But these are also areas where the question of "topics that fit emerging needs and priorities of the country" is subject to most political interference. Devaluing research and training in non-STEM subjects will not help produce scientists and engineers who are in any way better placed to address India's needs.

In management theory, hygiene factors are components that, if absent or inadequate, lead to demotivation. Their presence only ensures employees are not unhappy. Specific motivators supplement them, including a supportive work environment and the conviction that one's work is important.

But there's no greater demotivator than not being paid — or being paid very poorly — for one's work. Ensuring the timely disbursement of salaries and fellowships that come from the government is a basic hygiene factor that Indian higher education needs to address. That this issue remains stubbornly unsolved signals deep problems with the way we treat the most vulnerable of our researchers.

To simply do better at what we're doing now, as opposed to finding new and more glamorous things to do, is not often prioritised. If we don't get these basics right, we will not get anything else right.

Ensuring the timely disbursement of salaries and fellowships is a basic hygiene factor that Indian higher education needs to address. That this issue remains unsolved signals deeper problems

Menon is a professor at Ashoka University. Views are his own and do not represent those of his institution

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PIONEER (P-9), 09 DECEMBER 2025

Towards a home-grown knowledge ecosystem

RAVI POKHARNA

KUNTALA KARKUN

India's Viksit Bharat aspiration by 2047 transcends traditional capital investment. While tangible infrastructure remains critical, the primary constraint to sustained, high-quality growth is the knowledge ecosystem deficit. To successfully transition from a middle-income economy to a fully developed nation, India must aggressively cultivate a robust, home-grown intellectual infrastructure; one encompassing R&D, credible think tanks, advanced data infrastructure, and scalable domestic innovation capacity.

India's gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) remains persistently low at just 0.65 per cent of GDP; far below advanced economies such as the US and Germany (3 per cent), as well as emerging markets like China (2 per cent). This places India well under the global average of approximately 1.8 per cent, reflecting a structural underinvestment in innovation. This structural weakness is compounded by a profound imbalance: only about 5 per cent of India's R&D spending comes from the private sector, compared to approximately 70 per cent in the US.

While the 2025-26 Union Budget increased national R&D allocations to ₹61,028 crore, representing only 1.28 per cent of the Central Budget, the scale is still insufficient to trigger the kind of innovation acceleration India needs. The government's announcement of a ₹1 lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund in 2025 could be transformative, but its impact will hinge on execution discipline and meaningful alignment with private-sector investment. For the fund to succeed, execution discipline must include transparent governance, mandated industry co-funding, and a focus on measurable outcomes tied to national priorities.

This chronic underinvestment depresses innovation output, technological absorption, and productivity growth. OECD studies show that a 1 per cent rise in business R&D increases productivity by approximately 0.13 per cent, and an equivalent increase in public R&D yields about 0.17 per cent productivity growth. If India does not correct its R&D deficit, it cannot realistically close its productivity gap with peer economies

India's innovation output has improved. Patent grants have grown fourfold, from 7,509 (2010-11) to 28,391 (2020-21), and patent applications have risen from approximately 39,400 to 58,500 (Economic Survey 2022). In 2023, India was among the fastest-growing patent origins globally (WIPO). The gap, though, remains large. India's patent portfolio is still only a small fraction of China's or the United States', and over 70 per cent of high-quality publications come from fewer than 200 institutions, signalling an ecosystem that remains narrow, institutionally shallow, and highly concentrated.

Yet India has proven that strategic investments yield transformative outcomes. ISRO's space programme, built on modest budgets and indigenous capabilities, has delivered world-class missions such as Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan at a fraction of global costs. India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) has revolutionised financial inclusion and service delivery and now serves as a model for developing nations worldwide. These successes demonstrate that when India invests in knowledge systems with clarity and commitment, the results can leapfrog conventional development paths. Talent is not the constraint. Institutional depth is.

The Pioneer
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A successful knowledge ecosystem requires more than isolated R&D labs; it needs the systemic translation of research into actionable policy and practice. Strong, independent domestic think tanks, policy centres, and data institutions are critical for:

- Contextualisation: Bridging the gap between academic research and on-the-ground implementation, generating timely, granular, India-focused data for evidence-based governance, which global firms often lack.
- Diffusion: Ensuring technology and best practices are adapted and diffused to MSMEs and lagging regions, mitigating the concentration of innovation within a few large firms or urban centres.
- Intellectual sovereignty: Protecting India's development agenda from being shaped by foreign-funded or non-contextual research, and offering a cost-efficient alternative to large, protracted global consulting engagements for structural and social reforms.

India's current policy research landscape remains fragmented. While NITI Aayog plays an important role in policy formulation, the broader ecosystem of independent think tanks and research institutions operates at a limited scale with constrained resources. Many rely heavily on external grants, limiting their ability to pursue long-term, strategic research agendas.

Global studies show that a 1 per cent increase in R&D intensity typically delivers a 0.13-0.17 per cent annual boost in productivity growth (OECD). Raising R&D spending could help India break into the upper-middle-income bracket, strengthen industrial competitiveness, and power high-skill job creation in digital technology, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and clean technology

To realise this vision, policymakers must act with long-term focus. Key steps should include:

- Raising R&D investment to globally competitive levels. Set a clear national target for R&D intensity; for example, gradually increasing from approximately 0.65 per cent to at least 2 per cent of GDP by 2047, with an increasing share from the private sector. This will require not only higher government outlays but also incentives such as tax credits, grants, and public-private partnerships.
- Institutionalising long-term funding for domestic think tanks and policy research bodies. Create a dedicated Viksit Bharat Knowledge Fund or similar endowment, allowing multi-year grants, seed funding for new institutions, and stable operating resources.
- Building a National Knowledge Ecosystem. Link universities, research institutes, think tanks, industry, and government into a network that facilitates research, innovation, technology transfer, policy formulation, and diffusion of knowledge, especially to MSMEs and lagging regions.
- Promoting technology diffusion beyond large firms. Provide support for smaller firms and regional enterprises to adopt or adapt technologies through subsidies, incubation, outreach, and technical assistance.
- Expanding the notion of a "domestic Big Four" beyond consulting firms. Encourage the emergence of large, credible, Indian-owned knowledge institutions and think tanks that can compete globally in consultancy, policy research, data analytics, design, and technology transfer.

India's CSR spending has grown sharply, from ₹26,278 crore in FY22 to ₹34,909 crore in FY24 (Bharat CSR Performance Report, 2024), yet less than 3 per cent of this pool supports research, policy, or knowledge infrastructure. Redirecting even 5-10 per cent of CSR funding towards knowledge creation-such as think tanks, public data systems, applied research labs, and digital public goods-would significantly strengthen India's intellectual capacity. In parallel, industry must deepen its own R&D investment by leveraging fiscal incentives, building in-house research capabilities, and expanding industry-academia collaboration. Together, these shifts would reduce dependence on imported technologies and external consulting, while building the long-term competitiveness required for India's innovation-driven growth.

For India to become a developed nation, it must invest as much in brains, ideas, and institutions as in roads, ports, and industrial parks. Countries that mastered the knowledge game-South Korea, Germany, and Japan-used it to leapfrog into high-growth, high-productivity, high-innovation economies. India's story must now follow that path. Viksit Bharat requires Viksit Buddhi; a developed nation needs developed minds. The time to build is now.

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An Indian Nobel~I

Politics and personal preferences within R&D institutions hinder progress. Leadership positions and funding decisions are sometimes influenced by non-scientific considerations, which undermines meritocracy and discourages talented researchers. Bureaucratic control over research programmes and budgets is another major hurdle. Government assessments reveal that top institutions like IITs and IISc are bogged down by complex accounting rules, rigid General Financial Rules, and low researcher compensation. These constraints discourage innovation and make it difficult for scientists to pursue ambitious projects

India is home to some of the brightest scientific minds in the world, yet it has struggled to win international recognition in the form of Nobel Prizes in science. Since the Nobel Prize was first awarded in 1901, only 12 individuals of Indian origin have received it, and just five were Indian citizens. Among them, only one – Dr. C.V. Raman – won in the science category, way back in 1930 for his discovery of the Raman Effect. Nearly a century has passed since then, and despite many promising discoveries, Indian scientists have not returned to the Nobel stage. This raises a crucial question: why does the Nobel Prize continue to elude Indian scientists, and what can be done to change that?

To understand the issue, we must first look at the broader context of scientific research in India. The country has made significant strides in applied science and technology, especially in areas like space exploration, pharmaceuticals, and information technology.

However, the Nobel Prizes in science typically honour fundamental research that opens new frontiers of knowledge. That kind of research requires long-term investment, intellectual freedom, and a culture that encourages bold thinking. Unfortunately, India still faces several challenges in these areas.

One major issue is the nature of research itself. Much of India's scientific output involves adapting foreign technologies to local conditions rather than developing original, foundational innovations. This is partly because funding is limited and often only sufficient for small-scale, test-tube-level experiments. Large-scale, high-risk research projects that could lead to transformative discoveries require sustained investment, which is currently lacking.

According to the Economic Survey 2024–25, India's R&D spending remains at 0.64 per cent of GDP, far behind countries like China, the United States, and Israel. Without adequate funding, researchers are forced to work within narrow constraints, which stifles creativity and ambition.

Promotion and recognition within research institutions also play a role in shaping the kind of work scientists pursue. In many cases, career advancement is tied to the number of papers published rather than the impact or applicability of the research.

This creates a system where researchers prioritize quantity over quality, often focusing on lab-scale studies that are easier to complete and publish a paper. While publications are important, they should not be the sole metric of success. A more balanced evaluation system that includes patents, technology transfers, and real-world impact would encourage scientists to pursue more ambitious and commercially relevant projects.

The lack of industry's confidence in Indian scientists compounds the problem. Private sector involvement in R&D is minimal, and companies often prefer to license foreign technologies rather than invest in domestic research. This preference is driven by concerns over quality, scalability, and the commercial viability of Indian innovations. In fact, many companies include R&D allocations in their budgets primarily to claim tax deductions under Section 35 of the Income Tax Act.

A 2024 study noted that these incentives are frequently misused, with little accountability for actual research outcomes. As a result, the link between academia and laboratories and industry remains weak, and lab-scale research rarely translates into market-ready solutions.

Politics and personal preferences within R&D institutions further hinder progress. Leadership positions and funding decisions are sometimes influenced by non-scientific considerations, which undermines meritocracy and discourages talented researchers.

Bureaucratic control over research programmes and budgets is another major hurdle. Government assessments reveal that top institutions like IITs and IISc are bogged down by complex accounting rules, rigid General Financial Rules (GFR), and low researcher compensation.

These constraints discourage innovation and make it difficult for scientists to pursue ambitious projects. Decisions about funding and programme direction are often made by administrators with limited scientific expertise, leading to misaligned priorities and underutilised talent.

O PRASADA RAO

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To address the above issues, India needs a multi-pronged strategy. Tax incentives must be linked to measurable research outcomes – such as patents, publications, or technology transfers – rather than just budget line items. The government must create dedicated grant schemes for high-risk research, with peer-reviewed selection and long-term support.

The research institutions should be granted autonomy in budget management and project selection, with scientists, not bureaucrats, leading the process.

Even though uncertainty is inherent in all scientific inquiry, Indian funding agencies tend to favour safe, incremental projects that promise predictable results. High-risk, high-reward proposals – often the kind that lead to Nobel-level discoveries – are rarely supported.

Even with the launch of a Rs 1 lakh crore Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Scheme Fund to catalyse private-sector investment in science and technology, experts opine that without structural reform, the funds may not reach projects that truly push boundaries.

To nurture scientific talent, India must focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) education from an early age. Programmes like the Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KVPY), which identified and supported gifted students in science, must be revived and expanded.

Schools should promote inquiry-based learning and provide opportunities for students to engage in research projects. Scholarships, mentorships, and exposure to real-world science can help nurture Nobel contenders. India must also offer competitive salaries, research autonomy, and clear career paths to retain talent. Awards and recognitions should be linked to performance and innovation, not seniority or bureaucracy.

Building world-class research institutions is essential for fostering Nobel-level work. While India has prestigious institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), many of them are focused on teaching and applied research.

There is a need to create Centres of Excellence that prioritize fundamental research and interdisciplinary collaboration. These centres should have state-of-the-art labs, international faculty, and strong postdoctoral programmes. They should also be given autonomy to recruit talent, set research agendas, and manage resources without political interference.

International collaboration plays a key role in scientific recognition. Many Nobel-winning discoveries are the result of joint efforts across countries and disciplines. Indian scientists must be encouraged to work with leading researchers around the world, including Nobel laureates. A proposed "1000 Scholar Programme" could help young Indian scientists intern with top research groups globally. This would not only expose them to cutting-edge techniques but also raise India's profile in the global scientific community. Hosting international conferences, joining global consortia, and co-authoring papers with foreign institutions are other ways to increase visibility.

(To Be Concluded)

STATESMAN (P-11), 09 DECEMBER 2025

From creativity to resilience:

Why life skills are the real game-changer in modern education

RITU JAWA

The early development of children is the building block for the future, but what children learn in schools often only goes as far as structured assessments. Today, education must refocus away from being just ready for assessments toward being ready for life; able to deal with differences, change and the unpredictable. Textbooks give us facts; life involves adaptability, how one thinks, feels, and responds when the script runs out. Transforming education from information delivery to holistic human development ensures that academic knowledge serves a larger purpose: thriving in an unpredictable world.

Beyond cognitive learning

Schools have long prioritised cognitive learning, or the 'what' of learning, to the exclusion of the 'how' and 'why.' Memorising facts does not prepare learners for the technological disruption, complexity of social behaviour, or mental health pressures. To cultivate confidence and connectedness, underlying life skills should be embedded in the curriculum, and resilience, creativity, empathy, and collaboration should be the foundation.

Creativity and resilience: The core duo

Creativity stands at the core of this shift. It sparks innovation and independent thought, urging students to explore original solutions rather than recite answers. Paired with resilience, the capacity to view failure as feedback and persist through setbacks, this combination fosters a growth mindset, where effort outweighs outcome. Students learn to think of hurdles as iterations - not endpoints - fostering the resolve to adapt for life.

Empathy and collaboration: Building relationships

In the same way, empathy helps people to understand and handle their feelings and interact authentically with other people. It forms a basis for connections in difficult times, enabling secure and equitable communities while valuing a variety of viewpoints for the benefit of all. This seamlessly transfers into collaboration; students learn to work together as designers, navigating differences while relying on one another's assets, a true reflection of what it is like to be part of teams and communities outside of the classroom.

The transformative impact of technology in education

Education today is being enhanced more and more through technological advances, which greatly contributes to developing these vital life skills. Digital technologies stimulate engagement through personalised and interactive learning while providing opportunities for collaboration that transcends the physical classroom. Technology reinforces independent problem solving and draws upon creativity by diversifying resources and perspectives that students can access. Additionally, its use helps students develop digital literacy as a significant competency for living in the world of the 21st century. A combination of technological fluency and the foundational hallmarks of humanity makes students stronger and more resilient regarding education and life.

The broader impact on individuals and society

These traits, resilience, creativity, empathy, and collaboration, are just as important for societal impact as they are for individual growth. Rounding out the toolbox for learners are decision-making, critical thinking, and clear communication, all geared toward being able to sift through information, share ideas, and act intentionally. Research has shown that social-emotional learning improves academic performance outcomes and is associated with long-term career satisfaction and civic engagement.

Shaping tomorrow's contributors

Schools are the architects of tomorrow's citizens. By infusing lives with skills, they aren't producing simply top performers, but thinkers who settle disputes, advocate for belonging, and combine knowledge with wisdom. The truest reflection of education is in how students apply their learning to a reality; knowledge doesn't provide resilience, nor can we script creativity in advance. When an education around readiness for life takes the reins, we are not producing livings for students, we are teaching students to live well.

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INDIAN EXPRESS (P-10), 10 DECEMBER 2025

India's small enterprises hold key to job growth

FARZANA AFRIDI AND JYOTI THAKUR

THE NEW labour codes are likely to transform the employment landscape of India. Our discourse on employment, however, primarily centres on the need to "create more jobs". A closer look at the workforce reveals a more fundamental challenge —most working Indians are self-employed in unincorporated household enterprises that operate with low levels of capital, productivity, and technology adoption. These enterprises form the backbone of the labour market, absorbing more than 12 crore workers in 7.3 crore enterprises across India in 2023-24. Yet, their potential for growth and job creation remains severely constrained.

The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises (ASUSE) provides a granular breakdown of the dynamics of these non-agricultural businesses. Own Account Enterprises (OAEs) — those that do not hire workers — make up 87 per cent of all non-agricultural enterprises. Not surprisingly, a small minority, the Hired Worker Enterprises (HWEs), operate at a scale where they employ workers and generate nearly 7.5 times the gross value added (GVA) produced by OAEs. These numbers underline an uncomfortable truth: India's self-employment dominance is a symbol of economic necessity, not entrepreneurial dynamism.

Rather than viewing employment generation solely through the lens of large industry or government programmes, policy must confront the reality that employment generation is tied to improving the productivity of its smallest enterprises. Our analysis reveals that a 10 per cent increase in GVA is associated with a 4.5 per cent increase in the number of hired workers — when small businesses grow, they start hiring labour. With nearly nine out of 10 enterprises hiring no worker, enabling even a fraction to upgrade into HWEs could dramatically expand employment opportunities.

The entrepreneur's choice to remain unregistered is a liability. While the government has championed "ease of doing business", a significant portion of our economy remains trapped in a low-growth cycle because the perceived costs of formalisation outweigh the immediate benefits. High non-recovery of dues — a perennial issue faced by the MSME sector — weighs on non-formalisation and is a key factor affecting growth, as per the RBI 2019 report on MSMEs.

The challenges are compounded by two structural constraints: Access to credit; technology adoption and usage. ASUSE data show that only about 10–12 per cent of unincorporated enterprises have outstanding loans, indicating limited access to formal credit that not only restricts capital investment but prevents enterprises from reaching an efficient scale of operation. Our analysis shows access to formal credit can be transformative. For a medium-sized enterprise, access to institutional credit lifts predicted GVA from Rs 3 to Rs 5 lakh, a 72 per cent increase. For large enterprises, the GVA jumps more than threefold, from Rs11 to Rs 36 lakh.

Further, firms that adopt even basic ICT tools see higher GVA. The gains are especially pronounced for larger firms which have more capacity to leverage digital tools for efficiency. Bringing micro enterprises into the digital fold, through online marketplaces, or digital payments, can be a major lever for transformation.

India must focus on lifting productivity among OAEs through ease of doing business, improving credit and technology access along with vocational training. While the MUDRA scheme's classification of loans into Shishu, Kishor, and Tarun is a useful framework for loan segmentation, the real challenge lies in ensuring that credit matches the enterprise's evolutionary stage — shifting from microcredit for subsistence to providing working capital for stabilisation and, most crucially, growth capital for expansion. Credit must be differentiated and responsive, not just categorised.

Further, existing programmes like Digital MSME, UPI incentives, UDYAM, ONDC and DISHA need adaptation to deliver real gains. Beyond payments, enterprises require digital skills, handholding support through local facilitation, and clear market linkages so that technology translates into higher productivity and business growth.

What emerges is a simple but powerful insight — India's employment prospects lie not in a handful of large factories but in millions of small enterprises that form the bedrock of its economy.

Rather than viewing employment generation solely through the lens of large industry or government programmes, policy must confront the reality that employment generation is tied to improving the productivity of its smallest enterprises

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MILLENNIUM POST (P-7), 10 DECEMBER 2025

SELECTION RETHINK

A Hard Look at UPSC

As lakhs chase a few hundred UPSC seats each year, the widening attempt window and heavy syllabus burden call for an urgent rethink of what India wants from its bureaucracy

ALOK RANJAN

THE WRITER IS A FORMER IAS OFFICER WHO SERVED AS THE CHIEF SECRETARY, GOVT OF UTTAR PRADESH

The UPSC civil services exam has transformed into a long, uncertain marathon that absorbs candidates' most productive years

Just a few days ago, the results of the main written examination of the civil services were declared by UPSC, and now about three thousand aspirants shall compete for about 700-800 vacancies. Their hopes are riding high, and frantic preparation for the personality test and interview is going on. Candidates are attending mock interviews and also practising their communication skills. Finally, a few months from now, the final results will be announced, and less than a thousand from about ten lakhs who started the race will finally cross the finishing line. There will be joy and ecstasy in several homes, but there will be despondency and a sense of failure in a much larger number of homes.

The UPSC exam for the civil services is perhaps one of the most gruelling tests of a candidate's endurance, intelligence, resilience, determination, and above all, the capacity for hard work and self-belief. A minuscule number gets selected, while thousands keep giving one attempt after another, spending their entire youth in this preparation. Those who manage to clear the exam on their first attempt feel vindicated, but those who struggle year after year without succeeding are left stranded in the journey of life without any destination in sight. Some of them become victims of depression, as they do not have any promising alternative available at that stage.

Due to various reasons, the number of attempts allowed to a candidate has increased significantly over time. When I wrote the IAS exam and got selected in the first attempt in 1978, the maximum number of attempts allowed to a general candidate was three, which has now been increased to five. For BC candidates, seven attempts are allowed, and for SC/ST, an unlimited number of attempts are allowed. This creates a situation where a candidate keeps trying their luck right up to middle age. If fortune does not favour her, then she is left in an unenviable position. The best part of the youth has gone into preparing for the exam, and a lot of energy and time have been spent without any tangible results. Most such candidates end up getting jobs that are far below their aspirations and potential. I see no reason why we cannot restrict the number of attempts to three for general and five for others. This would leave enough time and space for an unsuccessful candidate to pursue another decent career option for which she has the time to acquire the necessary skills.

Overburdened syllabus drives years of preparation, deterring talented students

In my time, the minimum age was 21, and the maximum was 26. We can revise these age limits. Currently, a general candidate can take the exam till the age of 32, a BC candidate till 35, and a SC/ST candidate till 37. For the reserved candidates, the maximum age limit could be raised to 28. This would imply that even if a candidate is not successful, she has time on her side to take up another career. Today, there is no shortage of excellent professions, and civil service is not the ultimate career.

There could be political reasons for these high age limits and the number of attempts allowed, but this matter needs to be seriously considered by UPSC in the interests of both the services and the candidates. In Government service, you retire at the age of 60. Joining the service in the mid-thirties shortens the career significantly, and such candidates would scarcely be able to rise to the top posts in their service. This could be a hugely demotivating factor. With a middling career apparent, the officer is more than likely to use his time and energy in activities related to personal gain rather than public interest.

When I joined the service at 21, I was full of idealism to serve the country, and my mind was like an empty cup which the training process and seniors were able to fill with ideas of ethics and also public service. You would appreciate that by the mid-thirties, the mindset of an individual has been formed, and there is no scope for changing it. Very often, such candidates have seen so much of the real world that they develop a very different attitudinal framework, which is not conducive to a career of integrity.

The question arises: why are so many attempts required currently to succeed in the UPSC exam? In my time, a large percentage of people succeeded in the first attempt, and many in the second. Today, a very small number of candidates succeed in the initial attempts, and more often than not, a candidate needs 3–4 attempts to succeed. This is not something that we should be happy about. UPSC should review the examination scheme to evolve a selection procedure which allows candidates to succeed in the first few attempts rather than keep slogging for years. Maybe the number of general studies papers could be reduced. Also, choices can be given in the papers. Today, a candidate has to assimilate a huge amount of knowledge and information. A system can be devised which reduces this burden. I find that many bright students do not write the UPSC exam because of the years of single-minded preparation that the scheme of the examination seems to demand. As a corollary, the civil service is deprived of the talent of many brilliant candidates.

Another troubling statistic is that around sixty per cent of the candidates selected are Engineers. The humanities students are now finding it extremely difficult to succeed in the civils. Whereas I appreciate the technical knowledge, analytical and logical mode of thinking of Engineers, I feel the civil service is missing out on an understanding of History, Society, and other aspects of humanity, which a student of liberal arts would bring to the service. My experience has been that administration is first about people and then about technology or systems. Ideally, there should be a blend of candidates from different streams in the civil service to make it more diverse, creative, and humane. There is a clear indication that the current examination scheme is loaded in favour of Engineers. UPSC needs to analyse this and take a call.

In the past, UPSC has reviewed and revised the scheme of civil services exams several times. It needs to realistically assess the situation today and once again come up with new ideas because somewhere the current system seems to be having apparent flaws.

Views expressed are personal

STATESMAN (P-6), 10 DECEMBER 2025

An Indian Nobel~II

Just like spotting talent in sports early helps children become champions, recognizing a child's interest in research and innovation is key to shaping future Nobel Prize winners. When children show curiosity, ask questions, and enjoy solving problems, it is a sign of a scientific mind. Encouraging this from a young age – through experiments, reading, and creative thinking – builds a strong foundation. With the right support, these children can grow into scientists who make big discoveries

Perhaps the most important factor in nurturing scientific excellence is the culture of research itself. In India, scientists are often encouraged to pursue safe, incremental projects that guarantee results and funding. This discourages risk-taking and innovation. Nobel-worthy research usually involves bold ideas that challenge existing paradigms.

It may take years to bear fruit and often faces initial scepticism. To foster such work, India must create grant schemes that support high-risk, high-reward projects. Scientists should be given the freedom to explore unconventional ideas without fear of failure. Bureaucratic hurdles must be minimized, and research management should be streamlined to allow scientists to focus on discovery.

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Encouraging this from a young age – through experiments, reading, and creative thinking – builds a strong foundation. With the right support, these children can grow into scientists who make big discoveries. The Nobel Prize often goes to those who have spent years exploring ideas, so nurturing talent early is important for creating future leaders in science and innovation.

Another critical issue is brain drain. Many of India's brightest scientists leave the country for better opportunities abroad. In 2024, more than six lakh people emigrated from India to countries like the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and UAE.

A significant portion were highly educated professionals – including scientists, doctors, and engineers. Further, India has only 260 scientists per million people, ranking 81st globally. In contrast, countries like the United States and the United Kingdom have over 4,000 scientists per million. This gap is not just about numbers – it reflects the lack of infrastructure, funding, and career prospects for researchers in India.

Talented scientists often find it difficult to secure grants, set up labs, or pursue independent research. To retain talent, India must offer competitive salaries, research autonomy, and clear career paths.

Recognition and reward systems also need reforms. The newly launched Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar is a step in the right direction, aiming to honour excellence in science and innovation.

However, its credibility depends on transparent selection processes and independence from political influence. Awards should be based on scientific merit, citation impact, and peer recognition. Showcasing Indian scientists who are already making waves globally – such as those listed in Stanford's top 2 per cent of cited researchers – can inspire others and build a culture of excellence.

A total of 5,352 Indian scientists featured in the 2024 edition out of 223,252 scientists worldwide with China having the highest number of 10,687 – twice that of India – across all disciplines from physics and medicine to engineering and social sciences. So, India has the intellectual capacity and scientific talent to produce Nobel Prize-worthy research, provided we continue to nurture innovation, invest in R&D, and support researchers with robust infrastructure and international collaboration.

Science communication is another area that deserves attention. Many Indian discoveries go unnoticed because they are not effectively communicated to the public or the global scientific community. Scientists must be trained to present their work in accessible formats, engage with media, and participate in public lectures. Translating complex research into simple narratives can help build public support and attract young minds to science.

Despite these challenges, there are signs of progress. Initiatives like the Research Development and Innovation scheme aim to bridge the gap between laboratory research and commercial viability by using public procurement to create demand for indigenous technologies.

O PRASADA RAO

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Digital platforms like LabStack are also being developed to streamline R&D processes and improve collaboration across institutions. However, these efforts need to be scaled up and supported by a broader policy framework that prioritizes original research, industry partnerships, and global engagement.

Over the past five years, Nobel Prizes in science and medicine have honoured discoveries that deeply reshaped our understanding of nature and health. Few examples are given here along with the relevant research being carried out in India.

In medical sciences, breakthroughs like mRNA vaccine technology (2023), got the Nobel Prize. India contributed to vaccine production but lagged in platform innovation and fundamental immunology research.

In biology, the 2022 Nobel for sequencing the Neanderthal genome highlighted evolutionary genetics. India has strong labs in population genetics but lacks access to ancient DNA and long-term funding for paleo genomics – the study of ancient DNA to reconstruct and analyse the genomes of extinct species and ancient populations.

In chemistry, Nobel-winning work on click chemistry and quantum dots emphasised molecular innovation. India excels in applied chemistry, especially pharmaceuticals, but rarely leads in original molecular discoveries. In physics, prizes for quantum entanglement and climate modelling showcased deep theoretical and experimental work. Indian physicists participate in global collaborations like Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), yet such breakthroughs are limited.

Overall, India has made progress in applied science and public health, but Nobel-level recognition demands long-term, curiosity-driven research, global collaboration, and original contributions.

With its growing talent pool and infrastructure, India has the potential. It now needs sustained vision and support to convert promise into global impact.

In conclusion, India has the talent and potential to produce Nobel-winning scientists. What is missing is a coordinated, long-term strategy to nurture that talent, support bold research, and connect with the global scientific ecosystem.

By reforming education, retaining talent, increasing investment, building world-class institutions, and encouraging risk-taking, India can create an environment where groundbreaking discoveries are not just possible but inevitable.

India must shift from a compliance-driven model to an innovation-driven one. Only then can it unlock the full potential of its scientific community and compete globally. The Nobel Prize should not be seen as an elusive dream – it should be a natural outcome of a thriving scientific culture.

(Concluded)

STATESMAN (P-6), 10 DECEMBER 2025

Visa roadblocks

The latest move by Washington to tighten screening for H-1B visa applicants marks a sharp turn in the way the United States is redefining its anxieties about immigration, technology, and free expression. What was once a visa category judged largely on skills and employer demand is now being pulled into America's domestic culture wars, with foreign workers unexpectedly positioned at the centre of a debate that was never really about them.

The recently issued directive instructing consular officers to examine applicants' résumés and online profiles for any association with content moderation, misinformation control, fact-checking or online safety is more than a bureaucratic change.

It is an ideological filter dressed as a security measure. By framing such work as potential "censorship," the administration is blurring the line between legitimate enforcement of platform rules and political suppression. For thousands of Indian tech workers, many of whom occupy precisely these roles in social media, fintech and digital compliance, the implications are immediate and unsettling.

These functions are now a standard part of the digital economy. Companies cannot operate without teams that enforce platform policies, counter fraud, remove harmful content or comply with regulatory demands. To turn this into evidence of ideological misconduct places applicants in an impossible position: they can be penalised for performing the very jobs global companies require, simply because those tasks intersect with America's shifting definitions of free speech.

The policy also raises fundamental questions about consistency. If the concern is suppression of protected expression in the US, it is unclear how consular officers – already under intense workload pressure – are expected to judge complex decisions made in distant corporate settings or automated moderation systems. The risk of subjective interpretation is high, and the consequences for applicants could be severe.

A single keyword on a LinkedIn page may end up weighing more heavily than years of skill-building, education, and professional credibility. For India, the stakes are not merely individual but structural. The H-1B programme remains a critical bridge between Indian talent and global innovation ecosystems.

Any politicisation of this channel affects not only workers but also the Indian IT and startup sectors, which rely on cross-border mobility to maintain competitiveness. If the process becomes unpredictable, companies may think again about sending employees to the US or hiring for sensitive roles that would later be weaponised against them in visa screenings.

The broader trend is unmistakable: immigration policy is being repurposed to enforce cultural positions on speech, accountability, and platform governance. By folding these debates into visa decisions, Washington risks undermining the economic rationale of the H-1B system itself. Skilled mobility works when decisions are made on competence, not conjecture. Turning visa vetting into an ideological loyalty test serves neither American innovation nor its relationships with countries like India that have long supplied the talent the US economy relies on.

ECONOMICS TIMES (P-6), 11 DECEMBER 2025

How India Subverted Macaulay

Arnie Guha

What an idea, Sirji!

Toronto: In 1835, when Thomas Babington Macaulay submitted his now-infamous 'Minute on Indian Education', he could not have foreseen the world he was helping to conjure. The document is often recalled for its hauteur — that single shelf of English books allegedly outweighing all the learning of India and Arabia. But a quieter line sits, almost shyly, alongside the bluster: his hope that Indians educated in the English language would 'form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern'.

His dream was small, almost bureaucratic. He imagined an auxiliary class to shore up an empire.

Macaulay imagined a small cadre of intermediaries who would help a foreign power govern millions. What emerged, instead, was a global Indian intelligentsia — academics, founders, surgeons, technologists, civil servants, authors and even heads of government — shaping the futures of countries that were never theirs to inherit.

When Salman Rushdie published Midnight's Children in 1981, English encountered, for the first time, an Indian imagination that refused to stand at the colonial periphery

It is worth lingering on this inversion today, as India re-examines the cultural and political legacy of Macaulay with the fervour of a nation preparing for its next ascent. For some, Macaulay represents the great erasure: the colonial interruption that displaced indigenous traditions, marginalised Sanskritic and Persianate scholarship, and seeded a lingering sense of civilisational self-doubt.

For others, he is an unlikely midwife of present-day Indian success, the man who inadvertently placed in Indian hands a linguistic key to the doors of global modernity. Both narratives contain truth. The deeper story lies in their collision.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the rise of the Indian diaspora, arguably the most successful large-scale migrant community of the last half-century. Across continents, Indians have not merely assimilated, they have also excelled at the commanding heights of the global economy.

In Silicon Valley, Indian-origin CEOs guide companies that define our technological epoch. In medicine, Indian doctors form the backbone of Britain's National Health Service, and a remarkable share of specialist care in the US. In finance and consulting, they lead trading floors and global practices. In academia, they chair departments, direct research institutes, and shape the intellectual climate of the English-speaking world. And in politics — from former prime ministers Rishi Sunak in Britain and Leo Varadkar in Ireland — Indians have now led the very nations that once stood as arbiters of the imperial order.

This ascent is not cosmetic. It is structural. English-language education, initially introduced as an imperial tool, became the foundation of a transnational Indian professional class. It offered entry into the world's most competitive universities, laboratories and entrepreneurial ecosystems. A generation of Indian engineers, scientists, lawyers and founders used that foothold to build companies, patents, platforms and possibilities.

The result is visible in every major innovation corridor. Indian entrepreneurs launching unicorns. Indian VCs shaping capital flows. Indian technologists driving breakthroughs in AI, biotech, fintech and clean energy.

But politics and professions tell only one side of the story. Literature tells the other, and perhaps more dramatically. When Salman Rushdie published Midnight's Children in 1981, English encountered, for the first time, an Indian imagination that refused to stand at the colonial periphery. Rushdie folded Hindi cinema, Urdu lyricism, Bombaiya argot and subcontinental myth into sentences that startled Britain out of its grammatical garden. Under his hand, English did not merely describe India, it also absorbed, stretched and reconfigured itself around India's multiplicities.

English-language education, initially introduced as an imperial tool, became the foundation of a transnational Indian professional class

This is the part Macaulay could never have imagined. His English was meant to discipline. India's English was meant to create. The lineage that followed — Amitav Ghosh's tidal prose, Arundhati Roy's subversive lyricism, Jhumpa Lahiri's chiselled restraint (she also writes in Italian) — forms a body of work that contradicts every colonial assumption embedded in the Macaulay Minute. The language of empire did not flatten India. India enriched the language of empire.

So, perhaps, the real story is neither Macaulay's arrogance nor nationalist resentment, but India's astonishing capacity to alchemise injury into advantage. English, once imposed, became a field for reinvention. The diaspora became its global laboratory. Politics carved pathways. Literature broadened imagination. Through both, India performed a civilisational aikido: it used the momentum of colonial intent to reverse the historical vector.

This is not to deny the wounds. Erasure of indigenous knowledge systems, narrowing of educational canons, persistent divides between English and vernacular worlds — these remain unresolved and demand thoughtful redress. Decolonisation cannot be a romantic return. It must be a reconstruction.

But neither should India overlook its own triumph. If Macaulay hoped to produce intermediaries, India produced innovators. If he imagined subordinates, India gave the world leaders. If he sought interpreters, India built a global, multidimensional intelligentsia.

And, so, we return to that modest sentence in Macaulay's Minute: the hope of creating interpreters between ruler and ruled. Nearly two centuries later, that class exists, but not in any form he could have anticipated. They interpret not downward, nor upward, but across the world. As equals, creators, leaders and authors of their own destiny.

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INDIAN EXPRESS (P-11), 11 DECEMBER 2025

Amid Macaulay row, let's not forget, India increasingly speaks in English to itself

THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

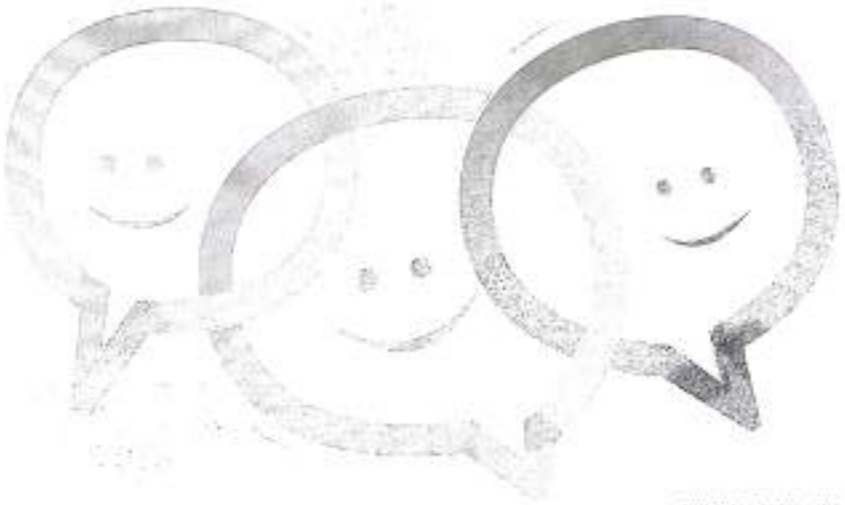

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's recent denunciation of the "Macaulay mindset" — first at the Ramnath Goenka Lecture and then at the Dharma Dhwaj unfurling in Ayodhya — has reignited a debate about the place of English in India. The timing is apt: As India strides into global prominence, it must reckon with the legacy of a language that was once imposed to subjugate, but has since been appropriated to liberate, challenge, and even charm.

The irony is delicious. Thomas Babington Macaulay, in his infamous 1835 Minute on Indian Education, proposed the creation of "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". His goal was not cultural upliftment but colonial convenience — a cadre of clerks and collaborators who would serve the British Empire more efficiently than the British themselves. He dismissed centuries of Indian learning with breathtaking arrogance, declaring that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia".

Yet history, like language, has a way of turning tables. The language of the rulers was appropriated by the ruled and used as their own; the very class Macaulay sought to create became the vanguard of Indian nationalism. And English, far from remaining a tool of subjugation, became a weapon of resistance. Ramnath Goenka, whose name adorned the lecture where Modi launched the first salvo, used an English-language newspaper — The Indian Express — to challenge the British Raj and later, the Emergency. The irony was not lost on anyone who listened closely.

But Macaulay's legacy was not just linguistic, it was epistemic. The education system he inspired privileged Western knowledge and denigrated Indian traditions. Well into the post-Independence decades, Indian children in English-medium schools learned Shakespeare but not Kalidasa, read the Bible (or at least Bible stories) but not the Ramayana, studied the greatness of Greece and Rome but remained ignorant of the Mahabharata. Even the best-educated knew more of Plutarch and Pliny than of the Puranas or the Upanishads.

This was not the fault of English per se. All these Indian texts are available in excellent English translations. The problem was — and remains — the mindset: A colonial hangover that equated English with superiority and Indian knowledge with quaintness. It is this mindset, not the language, that deserves the Prime Minister's ire.

When I published *The Great Indian Novel* in 1989 — a satirical retelling of the Mahabharata as a parable of 20th-century Indian history — I argued that the epic itself should be compulsory reading for every Indian school child, regardless of the medium of instruction. Thirty-six years later, that plea remains unheeded.

English occupies a curious place in contemporary India. It is denounced by politicians who thunder against colonial residues, even as rickshaw-pullers scrape together tuition fees to send their children to third-rate "English-medium" schools. One prominent leader even suggested Indians should be "ashamed" to speak English. But shame is not what the rickshaw-puller or domestic servant feels when he dreams of his child learning English to become a software engineer in Bengaluru or a nurse in Toronto. For him, English is not a betrayal — it is a bridge to opportunity, to better jobs than pulling a rickshaw or making tea (or beds).

> We must teach Kalidasa alongside Shakespeare, the Upanishads alongside Plato, the Ramayana alongside the Bible (And yes, the tales of Laila-Majnu, the Sufi saints and the Bhakti movement as well)

Indeed, English has served India well. It has given us access to global knowledge, enabled our IT boom, and allowed us to punch above our weight in diplomacy, academia, and literature. It is the language of our Supreme Court judgments, our scientific papers, and our bestselling novels. It is the medium through which India speaks to the world — and increasingly, to itself.

But it must no longer be the only medium through which we validate ourselves. The new National Education Policy's emphasis on mother tongues is a welcome corrective. Nations like Japan, China, and South Korea embraced modernity without abandoning their languages. India must do the same — not by discarding English, but by dethroning it from its sole place on the pedestal. We must see English as a useful key to open important doors for us — in life, and to the world. But we must neither abandon the languages that root us to our soil nor the culture and habits that can only be meaningfully expressed in those languages.

We must shed the Macaulay mindset, not the English language. We must neither discard English nor the treasures it gives us access to; but we must learn of ourselves too, and imbibe the rich and heady waters of our own civilisation. We must teach Kalidasa alongside Shakespeare, the Upanishads alongside Plato, the Ramayana alongside the Bible (And yes, the tales of Laila-Majnu, the Sufi saints and the Bhakti movement as well; our civilisation is vast, eclectic and multi-religious). We must ensure that our children know the stories of their land before they learn the myths of another. And we must do so in every language, English included.

For English is no longer foreign. It is Indian in accent, idiom, and imagination. It is the language in which we mourn our tragedies and celebrate our triumphs. It is the language in which I write this article — and in which I once retold the Mahabharata.

So let us not be ashamed of English. Let us be ashamed only if we use it to forget who we are. Let us not discard the language that connects us to the world. Let us discard the mindset that disconnects us from ourselves.

In the end, Macaulay gave us a tool. We turned it into a weapon, a bridge, a mirror. Now, it is time to wield it wisely — and to remember that the soul of India does not reside in any one tongue, but in the stories we choose to tell, and the truths we dare to teach.

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PIONEER (P-8), 11 DECEMBER 2025

Breaking away from Macaulay

The Prime Minister has urged the nation to fully free itself from the psychological and cultural imprint of Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 educational blueprint by 2035 — two centuries after it was crafted to entrench colonial dominance in India

JS RAJPUT

The Prime Minister exhorts the countrymen to move out of its demoralising influence fully and completely by 2035, when Macaulay's strategic planning completes its 200 years in India. That the PM should be talking about it in all seriousness reaffirms once again the ingenuity and acumen in the futuristic educational planning contained in Macaulay's Minutes of 1835, intended to cement English rule in India by demolishing Indian education and knowledge systems, hitting at the very roots of India's history, culture, scriptures, and individual self-respect. One of the most well-established villains of Indian educational discourse in the post-independence era has been Thomas Babington Macaulay and the contents of his Minutes of 1835.

The great success of Macaulay in his mission is crystal clear: India acknowledges the need in 2025 to proceed in a national mission mode to move out of the influence of slavery and self-negation that has engulfed the Indian mind-set and persists even after independence, and the National Education Policies of 1968, 1986/92, and NEP 2020. The relevant challenge is to analyse why India could not wash off the influence of an alien strategy even after serious intentions to do so were expressed earlier in policies and by policymakers in their discourses.

The widespread impact of Macaulay's ingenuity and foresight was so clinical, incisive, and widespread that it impeded the spread of the strength of the Indian knowledge quest to global knowledge and its civilisational contribution to the world outside. It was demoralisingly infectious to India and Indians, though vehemently beneficial to the empire. India needs to analyse it in the contemporary context and comprehend the strength of the ingredients contained in the Minutes of Macaulay that could transform the psyche of Indians and seriously injure a great tradition of knowledge quest. Not only this, it made Indians drift away from a sense of pride in their spiritually enriched culture that firmly believes that "Truth is one; the learned reveal it in various ways".

Could we take a view on how to refurbish the sense of pride and inspiration in Indian culture to this day? The manner in which Sanatan is shamelessly despised, and even Vande Mataram is detested, says a lot about the inadequacies in the intent, civility, and culture of the admirers of Macaulay's ingenuity and influence.

Macaulay, his ingenuity, and outcomes offer a great learning opportunity for policymakers and implementers working in the arena of education, culture, social cohesion, and religious amity in India. One insists on it while fully appreciating how seriously injurious but effective were his skills in demoralising an ancient people and making them shift their reverence to an alien and subjugating culture and language. The respect for the English language that traversed to every home and hearth in India-including the illiterate-owes it completely to this one-man ingenuity.

> THE WIDESPREAD IMPACT OF MACAULAY'S INGENUITY AND FORESIGHT WAS SO CLINICAL, INCISIVE AND WIDESPREAD THAT IT IMPEDED THE SPREAD OF THE STRENGTH OF THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE QUEST TO GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE AND ITS CIVILISATIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE

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Even today, practically everyone in India is convinced that the passage to a better future lies in learning the English language. This is what made the PM mention why it is also necessary to refurbish linguistic pride, as that alone offers a sound basis for cultural renaissance. Why do we need to refer to Macaulay for it? Yes, we do, and we need to do so with real sincerity and commitment. Even after eight decades of independence and repeated emphasis in NEP 2020 on the mother-tongue medium, the rush for admissions to English-medium schools in the capital city of Delhi from day one of schooling is just rising-and rising further. It represents the national urge.

And why should it not be? In the first week of December 2025, the media reported that for 613 positions of assistant professors in Haryana government colleges, 17,195 candidates applied, but only 151 could clear the English qualifying test. In the SC category, only two out of 60 qualified. English separates them and prevents them from entering the system, which is their rightful constitutional due. This is just one of numerous instances that could be cited as the suffering inflicted by the craze for English that persists practically unsullied even after independence, in spite of assurances being made in favour of the mother-tongue medium.

The rush for English-medium private schools and the social upliftment it assures lucky families remains a queer phenomenon across the spectrum. The great rush for urbanisation has generated numerous socio-cultural contexts that indicate the urban mindset. Preferred house-maids are those with skills to place orders in English to home suppliers and read and understand items, expiry dates, etc., English being the preferred language of most malls and other home-delivery suppliers.

It was only a casual acquaintance with Macaulay in my university days, as I was studying and researching physics in the sixties of the last century. The compulsions of the English medium were naturally serious deterrents to most of us in acquiring the desired level of comprehension, forcing refuge in learning by rote. As one transitioned from physics to the arena of professional education, teacher education, and educational administration, one had to read Macaulay in detail and in depth. It became a professional requirement with increasing involvement and association with aspects such as curriculum development, teacher preparation, education policy formulation, and institution building. It was interesting to observe that everyone around-in institutions, meetings, and conferences-was keen to blame Macaulay for practically every misery that was thrust on India and its people by the British. Macaulay was "accepted" by practically most educationists and educators in India as the father of the doctrine: "To subjugate India, Indians must be delinked from India." Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 were implemented rather ruthlessly.

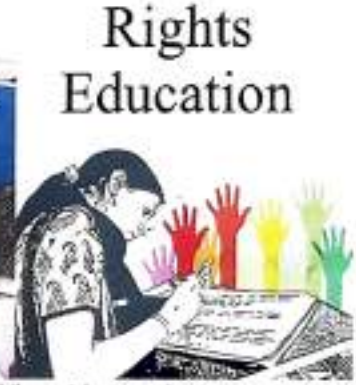
The English language, Western literature, Western civilisation, and culture were to be firmly established in India as the only path to becoming advanced and superior human beings. Not that everyone who mattered agreed, as some were interested in supporting Sanskrit and Arabic, but they were ignored and left to their fate under the argument that these needed financial support, while English schools had a rush of fee-paying students from the upper echelons of society. It is a long story that has established Macaulay even in schemes of futuristic educational planning.

He succeeded in creating "a class of people, Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Over the last eight decades, India could not wriggle out of the clutches of the "Western cultural superiority syndrome". Will the PM's call make a difference? It could, only if serious efforts are initiated urgently to transform the institutional work culture in a mission mode. Further, individual inspiration and recognition could work wonders. NEP 2020 has the strength to achieve the target indicated by the PM within ten years. There are, however, certain basic systemic requirements to do so: cleaning up the regulatory mechanism, streamlining teacher recruitment systems, filling up all vacant teaching positions, appointing succeeding heads of institutions one month before the incumbent relinquishes charge, and imposing a strict ban on irregular, low-honorarium-based teachers at every stage.

STATESMAN (P-6), 11 DECEMBER 2025

Teaching Rights

Human rights education is crucial for young people, who will shape the moral and political landscape of the future. Introducing such education in school curricula empowers children to understand concepts such as equality, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, and gender justice from an early age. Instead of memorizing rights as abstract listings, students are encouraged to analyze real-life scenarios, debate ethical dilemmas, and recognize injustice in their surroundings. Such exposure creates socially responsible citizens



Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter from a Birmingham Jail in April, 1963 famously declared that 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' As we observe Human Rights Day on 10 December this year, our thoughts go not only to human rights achievements and violations in equal measure, but also to the path that needs to be covered to extend human rights to all sections of the community across political or geographical divides.

It is a common discourse today that in an increasingly interconnected yet conflict-ridden world, human rights education (HRE) has emerged not just as an academic necessity but as a social imperative. It represents a powerful tool for building awareness, fostering empathy, and strengthening democratic values. From classrooms and community centres to workplaces and digital spaces, human rights education lays the foundation for a society that recognizes dignity, equality, and justice as non-negotiable principles.

Despite the presence of human rights clauses in constitutional frameworks across nations, violations continue to occur daily – sometimes due to systemic failures, sometimes due to ignorance. This makes human rights education indispensable, especially in countries with vast social diversity, entrenched inequalities, and rapid transitions such as India.

At its core, human rights education seeks to make individuals aware of their rights and responsibilities as members of society. It teaches people about the rights guaranteed to them by national constitutions, international conventions, and ethical norms. More importantly, it equips individuals with the skills to identify violations, demand accountability, and advocate for change. This aligns with the broader vision of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (2011), which underscores education as the primary route for cultivating universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Human rights education is crucial for young people, who will shape the moral and political landscape of the future. Introducing such education in school curricula empowers children to understand concepts such as equality, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, and gender justice from an early age. Instead of memorizing rights as abstract listings, students are encouraged to analyze real-life scenarios, debate ethical dilemmas, and recognize injustice in their surroundings. Such exposure creates socially responsible citizens who are less susceptible to radicalization, misinformation, and prejudice. In pluralistic societies, this becomes vital for promoting communal harmony and reducing biases rooted in caste, religion, gender, and ethnicity.

Teachers and educational institutions play a pivotal role in this process. Schools that integrate human rights principles in their teaching methods – not just textbooks – create safe and inclusive environments. Students learn through experience that respect, consent, and empathy are not theoretical concepts but everyday values. For instance, a classroom where students participate in decision-making, resolve conflicts peacefully, and celebrate diversity becomes a living model of human rights in practice. This experiential approach often has a more profound impact than formal instruction alone.

Beyond formal education, human rights learning must extend to communities. Many rights violations occur because vulnerable populations are unaware of their entitlements, or because authorities exploit this lack of knowledge. Grassroots human rights literacy programmes empower marginalized communities such as women, migrant labourers, indigenous groups, and persons with disabilities to recognize discriminatory practices and seek institutional support.

Community awareness campaigns about rights related to wages, healthcare, education, land, and citizenship not only protect individuals but promote a culture of accountability in governance. Non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and social workers have long championed such initiatives, but the need today is for large-scale, collaborative efforts involving state agencies, educational institutions, and civil society.

Human rights education also strengthens democratic values. A democracy thrives when its citizens actively participate in the political process, question unjust policies, and hold power to account. Human rights education teaches individuals how democratic institutions function and encourages them to engage critically with public life. It emphasizes the responsibilities that accompany rights, such as respecting the rights of others, participating peacefully in civic processes, and safeguarding constitutional values. Societies that invest in human rights education tend to have stronger rule-of-law institutions, more transparent governance, and citizens who resist authoritarian tendencies. At a time when misinformation and polarization are weakening democracies worldwide, human rights education acts as a moral compass guiding public discourse.

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Moreover, human rights education is indispensable in addressing contemporary global challenges. Issues such as climate change, digital privacy, refugees and migration, gender-based violence, and artificial intelligence raise complex questions about rights and ethics. For example, understanding environmental rights helps communities demand cleaner air and water; awareness about digital rights allows individuals to protect their privacy online; and knowledge of gender rights enables women to confront systemic discrimination and violence. Without widespread human rights literacy, public responses to such challenges remain inadequate or misguided.

Workplaces also benefit significantly from human rights awareness. Training employees and employers in rights-based frameworks creates healthier, more equitable professional environments. It reduces harassment, discrimination, and exploitation while promoting gender sensitivity and mental well-being. Corporations that uphold human rights standards tend to be more socially responsible and ethically resilient, enhancing their credibility among consumers and investors. With the rise of ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reporting, businesses across the globe are now expected to align themselves with human rights principles, making human rights education a valuable tool even in the corporate sector.

A strong legal and judicial framework, while crucial, cannot alone guarantee respect for human rights; social acceptance and cultural internalisation are equally important. Laws are effective only when people understand them, value them, and feel empowered to invoke them. This makes human rights education a long-term investment – not just in legislation but in societal transformation. It fosters cultures where discrimination is challenged, empathy is cultivated, and violence is rejected.

Governments must therefore prioritize human rights education through comprehensive policies. India's National Curriculum Framework already recognizes the importance of constitutional values in education, but implementation remains uneven. There is a pressing need for teacher training, age-appropriate textbooks, digital HRE resources, and partnerships between schools and community organizations. Policymakers should ensure that human rights learning is integrated across subjects rather than confined to civic education alone. Similarly, universities should incorporate human rights modules in disciplines ranging from law and social sciences to technology and business studies.

Media plays a crucial role too in this crucial area of human rights propagation. Responsible journalism can amplify human rights discourses, expose violations, and highlight stories of resilience. Human rights education for journalists ensures ethical reporting, sensitivity towards victims, and a commitment to truth. In an age where sensationalism often overshadows accuracy, this becomes essential.

Ultimately, human rights education is not just an academic subject but a transformative approach to building humane societies. It nurtures individuals who value freedom, equality, and justice – not only for themselves but for others. It encourages collective responsibility towards creating a world where every human being can live with dignity. At a time when violence, discrimination, and inequality continue to challenge humanity, human rights education can be a force-multiplier, offering a pathway to peace and coexistence.

Human rights education is, therefore, not a luxury but a necessity. It must be embraced by schools, communities, governments, and individuals alike. A society that is educated in its rights is a society equipped to protect them. And a society that protects human rights lays the groundwork for lasting peace, justice, and human dignity.

TIMES OF INDIA (P-15), 11 DECEMBER 2025

In govt schools, a playful app is closing early learning gap

An initiative in some Ghaziabad schools uses mobile phones to gamify education, boosting foundational skills in maths, Hindi, and English for early-grade students, mostly from underprivileged backgrounds

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"Look, look, how the monkey is dancing!"
— *Yug, a Class 1 student, to a classmate*

"May I use your phone to do some maths? Maths puzzles and games are my favourite."
— *Ravi, a Class 1 student, to his mother*

Outside, the roads of Bhojpur, Ghaziabad, are buzzing. But down a narrow lane, in a school you would miss unless someone pointed it out, children are quietly stepping into the digital world. What's unfolding in Composite School, Begamabad, isn't limited to just this lane. Across Bhojpur, the Central Square Foundation (CSF) is supporting the district education office in 15 govt schools — and more than 3,000 kids — to take a playful step into a digital world and bridge early learning gaps. Children are discovering concepts through a method that's delivering promising results.

The initiative focuses on strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy among early-grade learners in low-resource settings — primarily Class 1 and 2 students — using a digital, game-based learning app called Chimple to bridge the gap in subjects like maths, Hindi and English, as well as digital skills.

The idea, say the brains behind the initiative, is to "gamify" learning — to make kids forget that they are studying, in a fun, engaging and interactive manner.

"We have seen a huge difference in students' learning curve, and in how actively they participate," says Mahima Dayal, block education officer, Bhojpur, adding that teachers, parents and local leaders have rallied behind the initiative. "This is showing us how to make our children future-ready and help them explore the digital world through interactive learning."

"But hurdles remain," Dayal adds. "Only 50% can participate because of resource constraints and other challenges. Still, when children see their peers engaging, they become eager, and that helps."

The Digital Step

At the Begamabad school, this shift has been relatively seamless. "Those who had phones would use it on their own and, for those who didn't, we made sure they could practise in class on our phones," says headmaster Shashi Bala Yadav. "Resources remain a challenge, but students who are familiar with the app really enjoy it."

A 2022-23 randomised controlled trial across 34 Satya Bharti schools in Haryana documented meaningful improvements in mathematics learning, particularly in those who started out with the lowest scores.

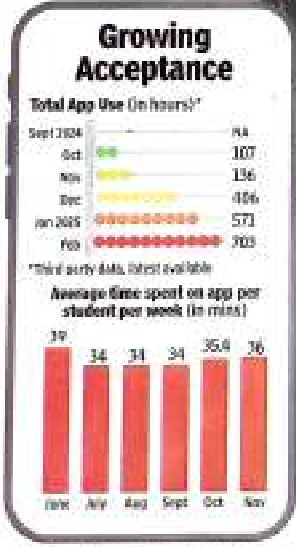
The findings were clear in teacher-led, home-based learning across the 15 schools. Class 1 students using the app showed a 0.20 gain over the average in mathematics, mirrored by the same improvement in Class 2 English. The most striking leap came from the lowest-performing quartile in Class 1 maths, where scores rose by 0.33 over the average.

A Fun Way To Learn

The app builds its learning experience around a lively little chimp — a virtual avatar who becomes the child's guide, cheerleader and companion. The mascot reacts, celebrates, nudges and encourages, turning lessons into a playful journey rather than a formal classroom task. The app uses a mix of simple, intuitive games: matching shapes and numbers, tracing letters, solving puzzles, arranging sequences, and completing drag-and-drop challenges that gradually grow in complexity.

Children swipe across the screen to match colours, letters, sequences and more, each action turning core concepts into game-like interactions that build skills almost without them realising it. "I know how to trace all letters on the app," says Class 1 student Nagarikta, who practises on her father's phone. "I love joining the letters of the Hindi alphabet, and the train game, where we have to match colours," her classmate Ansh chimes in.

But the shift didn't happen overnight. In Sept 2024, the first month of rollout, only a handful of students logged in. But by Oct, the numbers began to climb. As many as 107 hours of use were recorded on the app, 85 students engaged and completed nearly 1,000 assignments. Nov saw sharper growth, with over 136 hours' use and more than 1,500 assignments. Usage exploded in Dec and Jan. The app was used for 406 hours in Dec and over 571 hours in Jan 2025. More students joined, assignments shot up and, most tellingly, time spent on the app soared — from just a few minutes to nearly half an hour per session. By Feb, usage had grown even more, with students engaging deeply with the content, submitting close to 5,000 assignments and logging more than 700 hours in all. "The initiative now supports over 3,000 students across 180 govt schools. Children are learning anywhere, anytime, with a smile," says Srikanth Talapadi, the app's founder & CEO.



Challenges

Device & Access Constraints

- Men often own the only smartphone; mothers/children have limited access
- Phones often damaged, out of charge, or locked, disrupting learning
- WhatsApp-dependent access means if messages are deleted, children cannot enter app

Low Digital Literacy

- Many mothers fear phones getting 'spoiled'
- Some teachers also struggle
- Few children can navigate app independently

Usability, Navigation Issues

- Drag-and-drop tasks sometimes confusing
- Audio instructions often unnoticed; key features underused

Strengthening Govt School System

"Chimple is showing how digital tools can strengthen the govt school system," says Abhinav Gopal, chief development officer for Ghaziabad.

Parents have become important partners in the process. Some families even made small but significant adjustments. "He enjoys it a lot," says Shalu, whose Class 1 son, Garvit, uses her phone for practice. "He plays it like a game and spends about 20 minutes on it every day." "Kids like doing homework on this, and it doesn't seem like a task," adds Manisha, another parent.

Teachers, of course, form the backbone.

Students in a school in Modinagar play a game to augment their learning

"I send daily homework on the app," says Sunaina, who teaches Class 2. At a nearby PM Shri school, headmaster Sandeep Kumar Bansal notes, "Many of our students come from poor households, so they aren't able to access all the benefits. Those who can are doing very well."

Learning From Challenges

The challenges, however, were equally instructive. Device access was the biggest barrier. In many families, men owned the only smartphone, leaving mothers and children with limited access. Phones broke, batteries died, and WhatsApp links got deleted, cutting app entry. Low digital literacy compounded the issue: many mothers feared "spoiling the phone", and nearly half the teachers did not know how to use the dashboard.

"It's a strong initiative, but it will need more resources and sustained effort to deepen its impact," says a teacher. "The lack of smartphones or network in some homes is a major barrier."

Usability issues surfaced as well. Drag-and-drop tasks confused younger children, who resorted to random tapping. Audio instructions sometimes went unnoticed. In schools where headmasters and teachers were less proactive, usage dropped sharply, sometimes to nearly zero.

Even with these hurdles, the benefits are only too obvious. For these young kids, the classroom turns into a playground, where a mistake doesn't invite embarrassment. Often, three or four kids huddle over one device, breaking into a giggle when the mascot pops up with a lively jig.

Even kids who rarely speak up in class have seem to have loosened up. "Some of them talk more to the on-screen character than they do to us," a teacher said.

As a Class 1 student put it: "I love doing tables in maths, and I learnt counting up to 100 just because of this app!"

A PAL for kids in Andhra & UP

Central Square Foundation (CSF) has also partnered with the Andhra Pradesh govt to leverage something called 'Personalised Adaptive Learning (PAL)' for improving students' learning. PAL provides content tailored to each student's level, identifying both strengths and learning gaps — enabling real-time remediation, ensuring individual support and continuous progress for every learner.

The programme began in 2023 with 20 schools, and was expanded to 200 more schools by July-Aug the same year. By early 2024, the programme was scaled up to 380 schools, and to 708 new schools in 2024 under the SALT (Supporting Andhra's Learning Transformation) programme.

More than 4,000 teachers across 26 districts received in-person training, and a teacher professional development course was rolled out in 564 schools, achieving 100% completion rate. PAL usage data reflects strong engagement: 91.4% of 1.6 lakh non-residential students used it actively, logging a cumulative 3.9 million learning hours, an average of 12.5 hours per student.

Among 51,403 students in residential schools, nearly 99.3% engaged with PAL, recording 1.3 million hours in all, with an average of 32.5 hours per student.

In UP's Jhansi, CSF partnered to develop and build an AI-powered teacher coach called 'Sakhee' for govt schoolteachers, which helps provide actionable feedback to improve classroom practice.

Earlier this year, CSF launched a targeted pilot programme in Jhansi district to test app usability, accuracy and usage over an eight-week period. — Meghna Dhulia

TRIBUNE, (P-6), 11 DECEMBER 2025

A red herring called Macaulay

India should focus on an education system that fosters scientific temper and creates an inclusive society

AJAY K MEHRA
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THE Ramnath Goenka Memorial Lecture, delivered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, has opened a Pandora's box regarding the enduring legacy Thomas Babington Macaulay left behind in India — his 'Minute on Education' (February 2, 1835) and the legal system framed in 1860 and later.

His legacy to India's education system, which existed in diffused and disintegrated forms with a mix of excellence and ancient tradition, is claimed to be continuing despite a dozen changes suggested by various commissions and committees as well as new frameworks introduced in post-Independence India.

The focus has not merely been on pedagogy, which is value-neutral, but also in terms of what the students imbibed as ideas and practices through printed literature and other sources.

The PM accused Macaulay of '*Shiksha vyavastha ka samool naash*' (destruction of the education system), breaking the back of *kaushal* (skill), shattering self-confidence, throwing the entire knowledge system into the dustbin, condemning Indian heritage and culture instead of taking pride in them and rejecting local languages. All these developments produced an inferiority complex among Indians, he claimed. Blaming previous governments, particularly those of the Congress, the PM said these tendencies were concretised after Independence.

It is indeed welcome that the Prime Minister is turning his attention to the state of education in the 12th year of his reign. Alas, the reality is not very bright. On October 19, 2020, addressing the centenary convocation of the University of Mysore, PM Modi highlighted the growth of higher education institutions such as IITs, IIMs, AIIMS and IIITs across the country during his rule. However, faculty appointments, admissions, funds and infrastructure as well as controversies regarding textbooks continue to cast dark shadows. The number of government schools has decreased (around 90,000 fewer between 2014-15 and 2023-24), while the number of private schools has gone up. These are serious imbalances.

PIONEER: Thomas B Macaulay (1800-59) laid stress on Western institutional education in India. SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

As a Law Member of the Governor-General's Council of India, British historian, poet and Whig politician Macaulay claimed to have presented his Minute on education that changed the entire course of education in India. Addressing the Committee of Public Instruction, he based his argument on the central theme of the Charter Act of 1813 that set aside a sum "for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories".

However, it is doubtful whether he said what is being attributed to him: "I have travelled across the length and breadth of India... I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation." That's because on February 2, 1835, he was in Calcutta, not in London.

> The PM recently accused Macaulay of destroying the education system and breaking the back of *kaushal* (skill) in India.

Indeed, in referring to "the learned natives of India", he set the tone for racial superiority even before he came to his central argument. The essential argument of his Minute was regarding not wasting public money on education in 'Sanscrit' and Persian. He stressed spending public funds on an education system that imparted education in science and the contemporary knowledge system in the West in English.

He mentioned in the document: "I would strictly respect all existing interests. I would deal even generously with all individuals who have had fair reason to expect a pecuniary provision. But I would strike at the root of the bad system which has hitherto been fostered by us. I would at once stop the printing of Arabic and Sanscrit books. I would abolish the Madrassa and the Sanscrit College at Calcutta. Benares is the great seat of Brahmanical learning; Delhi, of Arabic learning. If we retain the Sanscrit College at Benares and the Mahomedan College at Delhi, we do enough, and much more than enough in my opinion, for the eastern languages."

He further said: "If the Benares and Delhi Colleges should be retained, I would at least recommend that no stipends shall be given to any students... The funds which would thus be placed at our disposal would enable us to give larger encouragement to the Hindoo College at Calcutta, and to establish in the principal cities throughout the Presidencies of Port William and Agra schools in which the English language might be well and thoroughly taught."

He argued that a lac (lakh) rupees granted by the Government of India must not be wasted on scholarship for the students of 'Sanscrit' and Persian and on the publication of books in these languages, since the books in English sold more. Then came his aim, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect". Further, his pithy remark, "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia", indeed offends us as Indians.

Howsoever racist Macaulay must have been, the statement above sounds more from the pen of an administrator, contemplating a utilitarian logic for the fund having been allocated for education. The colonial administration he represented stood for extracting resources for the metropolis, not for charity. We should ask ourselves in the same spirit: did it harm us?

I will conclude with two personal experiences with two generations. A product of Macaulian education from my parents' generation, a doctor was well-versed in Urdu, but he quickly learnt administrative Hindi. My father, an officer in the Bihar Police, had proficiency in English, Hindi and Sanskrit. Beginning my education in Bihar, I found that Hindi-medium textbooks inculcated nationalism.

Instead of drawing a red herring, we should keep building and refining an education system that is modern, contemporary, fosters scientific temper and creates an inclusive society.

School of Good Eating

Pawan Agarwal & Pulkit Mathur

India stands at a turning point in its nutrition journey. Undernutrition persists even as childhood overweight, obesity, early-onset diabetes and fatty liver disease are rising. A November 2025 Lancet 3-paper series, 'Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health', warns that children are consuming unprecedented levels of packaged, salty, sugary and fatty foods. In India, these foods appear in school tiffin, canteens and shops, shaping habits before adulthood.

This is why lessons from Japan and Vietnam matter. These two Asian countries show what becomes possible when schools serve as the frontline of nutrition and food culture — not just places where meals are served, but where lifelong habits are formed.

Japan's kyushoku (school lunch) system is perhaps the world's strongest school-nutrition model. Children receive a freshly cooked, balanced meal each day — rice, vegetables, protein foods, soup, and fruit or milk — designed by nutritionists. But Japan's true innovation is behavioural: food is served in classrooms, children take turns distributing it, handwashing and hygiene are mandatory, and teachers explain where ingredients come from and why balance matters.

This routine is anchored by shokuiku, Japan's national food-education policy, which was started with Basic Law of Shokuiku in 2005, and followed with School Health Law in 2008. Shokuiku embeds food literacy, gratitude, manners, slow eating, seasonality and waste reduction into everyday school life. Japan continues to record among the lowest childhood-obesity rates in the developed world.

Vietnam has adapted Japan's principles into a practical, scalable model. The country's National Institute of Nutrition and Ajinomoto Vietnam support schools in providing balanced meals with standardised portions, child-friendly preparations and strict hygiene. Schools follow 45-min seated lunch breaks, classroom serving and daily handwashing.

Food education runs across the curriculum, with children learning about nutrition, sustainability and hygiene. Families pay modest meal fees, keeping the system viable. Vietnam proves that structured school meals and daily food education are possible even without large budgets.

In India, government schools run PM POSHAN (midday meal scheme), the world's largest feeding programme, covering 118 mn children across 11.2 lakh schools. Yet, quality, safety, vegetable diversity and eating time vary widely. Private schools rely almost entirely on home-packed tiffin that have UPFs, bakery items, instant noodles or leftovers. School canteens often sell foods high in salt, sugar and unhealthy fats.

These inconsistent food environments contribute to India's rising childhood metabolic disease. Supply-side measures — front-of-pack labelling (FoPL), sugar advisories or junk-food restrictions — cannot succeed unless schools also reshape eating habits. Many schools offer only 15-20 mins for meals, encouraging rushed eating and waste.

India needs two approaches to build strong nutrition habits in children: one for government schools, and another for private schools.

- In state schools, PM POSHAN must be strengthened through a simple, balanced-meal framework developed by nutritionists. PPPs can diversify meals and improve quality. These upgrades must include better kitchens, clean drinking water and proper handwashing stations. Training cooks in healthy, child-friendly preparation, and ensuring a 30-min lunch break will help children eat calmly and develop mindful routines.
- Private schools should be encouraged to introduce classroom-based meal catering — through on-site or centralised kitchens — while still allowing home tiffin aligned with balanced guidelines. Ban UPFs. Classroom serving creates a calm, structured food environment, and for working parents, school catering also reduces morning stress while ensuring that children receive nutritious and equitable meals every day.

Both types of schools can add 10-min nutrition mini-lessons before lunch, linked to the day's meal and taught through stories, simple activities, food facts, farm insights, gratitude practices and table manners.

Japan and Vietnam demonstrate that improving what children eat must go hand in hand with improving how, where and why they eat. Habits form through routine, repetition and role-modelling. India can adapt their core principles: balanced meals, calm lunch breaks, nutrition mini-lessons, classroom-based serving, limits on UPFs, and teaching hygiene and table manners as part of food culture. India now has both the opportunity and the responsibility to create its own school-food revolution.

Wholesome education

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HINDU (P-8), 12 DECEMBER 2025

The stark reality of educational costs in India

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Article 21A (86th Amendment, 2002) of the Constitution of India provides the Right to Free and Compulsory Education for children of ages six to 14 years. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 expands this vision to cover children from ages three to 18 years, thereby extending the goal of universal education from pre-primary to higher secondary (Class 12). The NEP aims to achieve this universalisation of school education up to the secondary level by 2030. Although education is meant to be free, many students still attend private schools, where substantial fees are charged. In addition, due to several reasons, many students also go for private coaching, which adds to the financial burden.

Given the constitutional guarantee of free education, how expensive is basic schooling in India? How much do parents actually spend to send their children to school – an obligation that, in principle, lies with the government as mentioned in the Constitution? The NSS 80th Round (April-June 2025) survey, on "Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education", offers the latest data to explore these questions.

Enrolment trends in schools

At the national level, 55.9% of students are enrolled in government schools, 11.3% in private aided schools, and 31.9% in private unaided schools. Enrolment in private schools is much higher in the urban sector than in the rural sector. Among the total schoolchildren in urban areas, 51.4% are enrolled in private school, while this share is 24.3% in rural areas. However, the gender gap in private school enrolment is relatively small – 34% of boys and 29.5% of girls.

In the rural sector, children are enrolled more in government schools than in private schools. Private school enrolment is 28.1% in pre-primary, 25.9% in primary, 28% in middle and secondary, and 25.8% in higher secondary. In contrast, in the urban sector, the share of children enrolled in private schools is much higher – 62.9% in pre-primary, 55.3% in primary, 49.8% in middle, 44% in secondary, and 42.3% in higher secondary. As education levels increase, private school enrolment declines in urban areas.

When compared with the earlier round of the NSS Survey on Education (75th round; July 2017-June 2018), we observe an increased share of children enrolled in private schools. In rural areas, the share of children enrolled in private schools increased from 20.9% to 25.9% in primary level, from 16.7% to 28% in middle level, and from 17.3% to 21.1% in secondary level. In urban areas, the share of children enrolled in private schools increased from 50.5% to 55.3% at the primary level, and from 41.8% to 49.8% at the middle level. This rising enrolment in private schools is leading to the increasing costs of education.

Enrolment in government and private schools is closely linked with educational expenditure.

A finding of the NSS 80th Round survey, on 'Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education', is growing inequalities in access to quality education

The survey asked whether students had to pay any course fee. In rural areas, 25.3% of government school students and 98.2% of private school students reported paying course fees. In urban areas, 34.7% of government school students and 98% of private school students reported paying course fees.

The survey reveals that for fees per academic year in government schools, rural fees range from ₹823 (pre-primary) to ₹7,308 (higher secondary), while urban fees range from ₹1,630 (pre-primary) to ₹7,704 (higher secondary). In private schools, rural fees start at ₹17,988 (pre-primary) and go up to ₹33,567 (higher secondary), while urban fees range from ₹26,188 (pre-primary) to ₹49,075 (higher secondary).

When these figures are converted into monthly terms, the financial burden of private schooling becomes even more apparent. In rural areas, monthly expenditure on private schooling ranges from ₹1,499 for pre-primary to ₹2,797 for higher secondary. In urban areas, these figures rise significantly, from ₹2,182 to ₹4,089. When compared to the Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24 survey, it is evident that the cost of private schooling at the pre-primary level is roughly equivalent to the monthly income of the poorest 5% of households, while the cost at the higher secondary level aligns with the MPCE of households in the third income decile. This stark contrast underscores the financial strain that many families face in accessing quality education.

Incidence and cost of private tuition

The survey collected information on whether a student was taking or had taken private coaching during the current academic year. In this survey, information on private coaching was collected separately and not as a component of expenditure on school education. The survey found that 25.5% of children in rural areas and 30.7% in urban areas take private coaching. In the rural and urban sectors, the proportion of students taking private tuition increases as we move from lower to higher levels of education. In rural areas, it is 10.7% at pre-primary, 21.6% at primary, 29.1% at middle, 36.7% at secondary, and 33.1% at higher secondary. In urban areas, it is 13.6% at pre-primary, 26.6% at primary, 31% at middle, 40.2% at secondary, and 44.6% at higher secondary.

The average expenditure on private coaching per reported student during the current academic year is higher in the urban sector than in the rural sector. It is ₹13,026 in urban areas and ₹7,066 in rural areas. The average expenditure on private coaching increases as we move from lower to higher levels of education. In rural areas, it is ₹3,980 for pre-primary, ₹4,825 for primary, ₹6,043 for middle, ₹8,616 for secondary, and ₹13,803 for higher secondary. In urban areas, it is ₹5,815 for pre-primary, ₹7,947 for primary, ₹10,765 for middle, ₹16,415 for secondary, and ₹22,394 for higher secondary.

Research shows that higher household income, better educated parents, and urban residence are strongly correlated with a greater demand for private tuition. Studies also observe a positive and significant effect of private tutoring on students' learning outcomes.

Consequently, parents who place a high value on education and possess the financial resources are more likely to invest in private tutoring for their children. Thus, the tendency to seek private tuition is particularly higher among students enrolled in private schools. Although private schooling charges relatively high fees, many teachers in private schools are underpaid and often underqualified, which leads students to rely on private tutoring for academic support. Further, some scholars argue that private tuition has also become a symbol of prestige among families.

Strengthen publicly funded schools

The findings of the NSS 80th Round Survey highlight the stark reality of educational costs in India. Despite the constitutional guarantee of free education, a significant proportion of students, (24.3% in rural and 51.4% in urban), attend private schools that require substantial fees. With private tuition further burdening household finances, education is becoming increasingly unaffordable for many families, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds.

This trend is not only exacerbating inequalities in access to quality education but also threatening the very principle of basic and universal education. As government schools face declining enrolment, children from economically disadvantaged families are being pushed into the private education system, often at the cost of significant financial strain.

Additionally, the growing private tuition phenomenon contributes to widening learning inequalities, where the wealthy have an undeniable advantage over disadvantaged households. Thus, strengthening the quality of learning in publicly funded schools can arrest this trend.

Addressing these challenges requires urgent reforms. Strengthening the quality and accessibility of government schools is paramount to ensuring that education remains a right, not a privilege. A 2024 study by economists Ankush Agrawal, Parul Gupta, and Debasis Mondal published in *The Journal of Development Studies* finds that private tuition is negatively associated with school quality indicators. This implies that students at 'better' schools rely less on tutoring. Thus, strengthening the quality of learning would help bridge the widening gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. It is only through these efforts that we can move toward achieving truly equitable and inclusive education for all children in India.

INDIAN EXPRESS (P-12), 12 DECEMBER 2025

Party-state is marching into public universities. There is no one to say no

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE INDIAN public university is being quietly consigned to oblivion. The long-term structural pressures, political interference, and academic abdication across all regimes have been hollowing out universities at least since the 1970s. The crisis that first engulfed state universities in the 1960s slowly percolated to the central universities. Tragically, it was UPA-II — with its penchant for centralisation masquerading as reform — that laid the foundations for the assaults that would follow. Despite all this, the public system remained obstinately enduring.

This column has, over the years, dwelt on the systemic issues facing Indian universities: Governance structures, funding cuts, and so forth. But even then, there were modest hopes for a turnaround. The expansion of institutions created severe pedagogical stresses; everyone worried about access, almost no one about quality. But the churn in the social composition of universities was an opportunity. Students, unlike in the "time-pass", strike-ridden culture of the 1970s, were keen to learn.

Economic growth raised the penalty for not learning. Faculty quality was uneven, but legendary teachers still owned their classrooms. For all its faults, the university was still, in a manner of speaking, a free space. There was enough of a recognisable institutional structure to keep it functioning. We assumed, perhaps naively, that there was a bottom beyond which universities would not fall.

That assumption no longer holds. Conversations with colleagues in public universities across the country are now uniformly bleak. Even the minimal institutional form of the university seems to be disappearing. This newspaper yesterday carried a story about the removal of five vice-chancellors (V-Cs) in Rajasthan, prompted by ABVP protests. The episode exposed two trends everyone privately acknowledges but few publicly confront.

The first is the collapse of even the most stolidly boring administrative norms. It used to be a basic procedural principle that inquiring officers had to be senior to those being investigated. Even this norm has been discarded when governments want to dismiss V-Cs.

The second is the unprecedented veto power the ABVP now wields in many universities. Student unions have always been significant actors in campus life. But almost every public university professor I speak to, across several states, now says the ABVP has a virtual veto over what happens in their institutions. Pre-censoring of speakers is routine, driven by real or imagined fear of protest. In Rajasthan, the allegations go further: That the ABVP effectively functions as a front for political extortion. Perhaps the only historical precedent for this level of domination is the Left Front's decimation of what should have been a global education hub in Kolkata. What was once practised in some states is now the national norm. Students ought to engage in politics; it is an extraordinary civic education, and many will, in their individual capacities, work for political parties. But we must still ask whether the form of party politics that dominates student life in India is counterproductive. Should student bodies be formally affiliated with political parties at all?

Part of the decimation of the university stems from the fact that both student and teacher politics became partisan all the way down. Student politics was a conduit to political careers; the reverse was also true, with parties using unions to control universities or manufacture mayhem. This is as true of the SFI and the NSUI as it is of the ABVP.

Students ought to engage in politics; it is an extraordinary civic education, and many will, in their individual capacities, work for political parties. But we must still ask whether the form of party politics that dominates student life in India is counterproductive. Should student bodies be formally affiliated with political parties at all?

The largest unintended casualty of this arrangement was the disappearance of the "student" as a category in public consciousness. Student unions were mostly about everything except protecting the long-term interests of students. Teachers' unions, also party-affiliated, fared no better. As a result, the two groups that ought to have had the strongest stake in academic excellence — students and professors — could rarely speak as collective academic actors. They existed as individuals, but their collective avatars were party appendages. The tragedy of the Indian public university is that the very constituencies that might have defended it were structurally prevented from doing so.

The state universities are, of course, undergoing their moment of schadenfreude, as they watch party rule descend upon once-hallowed institutions like Delhi University and JNU. As this column has argued before, these universities were far from perfect; they were unconscionably short-changing their students. In some areas, there are, of course, pockets of achievement. But to hear about their current condition is to descend into a kind of unimaginable institutional dystopia: Students afraid to organise seminars; faculty required to submit papers months in advance for pre-clearance; pressure to attend RSS-sponsored events; the absolute decimation in the quality of appointments, even by previously uneven standards. The pedagogical mission is more confused than ever: CUET is an exam machine, not a pedagogical solution to any problem. V-Cs behave as if their job were to perform the home ministry's functions, pointing fingers at ideologically inconvenient faculty.

These can only be reported as conversations, but they are harrowing ones, cutting across the political spectrum. As one colleague put it, "there are increasingly three degrees you need: RSS, Modi and money". I have seen an economist from the Delhi School of Economics in tears, contemplating what the School once was and what it has become. A left-right confrontation over the university might not be ideal. But at least it could have intellectual content and be compatible with some threshold understanding of what a university is. The worries colleagues now express are far worse.

Perhaps those of us who exited the public system have forfeited the right to speak about it. But the true tragedy is public silence. Delhi University, once a cacophonous arena where a V-C could not move a flower pot without sparking protest, now lies inert before the party-state. The university has been domesticated. And all this in the name of a "Bharatiya tradition" that once insisted rulers lay down their arms before entering a place of learning. We are witnessing a reversal of that ethic: Power marching into the *gurukul* fully armed, and finding no one left willing to say no. There are no professors or students, only partisans, or worse, nationals and anti-nationals.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

PIONEER (P-8), 12 DECEMBER 2025

Should India ban social media for kids?

Tech addiction demands layered responses – digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign

Once it was alcohol, then it was drugs; now addiction has a new name-social media. Its addicts are everywhere-across age groups, classes, and cities. It is an epidemic that spread before anyone even realised it. India, like other nations, is hooked 24x7 to social media, and this is more prominent amongst young children who are now exposed to all the good and bad the digital world has to offer. In this scenario, Australia's decision to ban social media access for children under 16 has reignited a global debate on how societies should confront the escalating crisis of tech addiction and its psychological repercussions.

The Australian government's move is undeniably sweeping and disruptive in its implications, even though its intent is clear: to protect young users from the toxic digital environment and online harm that has come to be accepted as digital normal. The factors that pushed Australia to ban social media for children may be just as relevant for India. While there is little disagreement on the need to limit children's access to social media, enforcing a blanket ban could be excessively harsh and may be counterproductive. That said, the case for intervention is undeniably strong and is the need of the hour. Psychologists worldwide have been sounding the alarm for years. Clinics now report children as young as eight showing symptoms of mental illness: hyperactivity, violent behaviour, throwing tantrums when devices are taken away, and an inability to disengage from screens.

Regular access to social media is changing cognitive and emotional development amongst children in a big way. Declining attention spans, inability to form coherent sentences, and eroded real-world communication skills are becoming disturbingly common. The picture becomes even murkier when you include incidents like the Blue Whale challenge or misogynistic school group chats-proof of how an immature mind can be drawn into, or even trigger, serious harm. Australia's ban may not be a panacea, as even the strictest age ban can be circumvented, and children adept at navigating technology may find proxy routes sooner rather than later. Indeed, no law can compensate for what is lacking at home, in classrooms, or in broader digital culture, but government intervention paves the way for incremental reforms in schools, colleges, and even at home.

India's challenge is more complex: its vast population, socio-economic diversity, and uneven digital literacy make a ban impractical and insufficient, though action is essential. Some progress is emerging through bottom-up efforts, with over 5,000 parents joining support groups to build healthier digital habits, reinforcing families as the first line of defence. Tech addiction needs layered solutions-digital literacy, parental involvement, psychological support, and educational redesign-because while a ban may raise awareness, it cannot replace the long-term task of building resilience and autonomy in young users. India must craft its own path.

PIONEER (P-8), 12 DECEMBER 2025

Why educating girls is not enough: Bridge the skill gap

DEVENDRA KUMAR

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

India has spent decades strengthening girls' access to education. Through scholarships, awareness drives, and community-level campaigns, the country has succeeded in bringing more girls into classrooms than ever before. Enrolment rates for girls have risen at primary, secondary, and even higher education levels. Yet a stubborn gap remains: while more young women finish school and college, far fewer make it into the workforce. This disconnect reveals a hard truth-education alone cannot guarantee employment. For Indian girls, skill development is the missing link between learning and livelihood.

Across the country, thousands of young women hold degrees but remain unemployed. This reflects a deeper structural issue: literacy and academic qualifications, although essential, do not automatically translate into employability. Many graduates lack the practical, digital, and workplace skills demanded by contemporary industries. Compounding this are entrenched social norms and cultural expectations that often overshadow the benefits of education. For many girls, familial restrictions, gender stereotypes, and ideas about "appropriate" work limit their ability to turn education into financial independence.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

These social barriers shape everything-from whether a woman is allowed to work to what kind of job she can accept. Families frequently avoid roles that involve travel, physical tasks, or late hours, forcing even educated women into narrow, low-growth career paths. Confidence-building and communication abilities-skills critical in today's work culture-are rarely nurtured in traditional classrooms, making skill development programmes essential.

The reality becomes even harsher in India's vast informal sector, where more than 90 percent of working women remain concentrated. Most are unskilled and engaged in low-paid, insecure jobs-domestic work, agriculture, tailoring, construction, home-based production, or micro-enterprises. In rural areas especially, women face severe skill deprivation and remain trapped in unstable jobs with little chance of mobility. Skill development can change this trajectory. Training in digital literacy helps women shift from low-productivity work to stable, better-paying opportunities. Today's industries-whether healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality, technology, or retail-demand a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and skill training provides this bridge.

When women acquire skills, the impact extends far beyond employment. Skilled women strengthen economic productivity, innovation, and inclusive growth. Within families, a working daughter or mother enhances financial security and decision-making power. Moreover, skilled workers are better positioned to negotiate fair wages, resist exploitation, and move into formal employment.

The next step for India must be to integrate skill development into every stage of education. Rural training centres must be expanded, especially for girls with restricted mobility. Partnerships with industry can ensure training aligns with real job market needs. Crucially, communities and families must be sensitised to value skill training as essential-not secondary-to education. For India's girls, skill is the pathway to independence, confidence, and security.

The writer is the founder of the Ladli Foundation

STATESMAN (P-6), 14 DECEMBER 2025

How to bridge education and employment in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's inability to create adequate opportunities for its young population has moved far beyond an economic concern. It represents a significant social and political challenge for the country. Persistent and high rates of youth unemployment expose deep structural weaknesses in an economy that has failed to translate its growth into more jobs. Instead of benefitting from the country's development gains, crores of young people find themselves excluded from productive work, which creates frustration and undermines weakened social cohesion. If this disconnect continues, it will jeopardise Bangladesh's long-term development trajectory and erode the very demographic dividend that should have been one of its greatest strengths.

The statistics paint an even starker picture of the employment situation. The Labour Force Survey 2024 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) indicated that in 2024, the unemployment rate was 3.66 percent compared to 3.35 percent in 2023. Of this, the rate of literate unemployment is 4.17 percent and of non-literate 1.39 percent. Unemployment among the educated is higher, indicating greater competition for jobs among educated people. Another striking fact is, although the unemployment rate appears low, youth unemployment and youth inactivity are very high. Unemployment rate among youth aged 15-29 years is 8.07 percent. However, the share of young people aged 15-29 years who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is 20.3 percent. The distribution of unemployment by educational level shows that, among the 26.24 lakh unemployed, graduates account for the highest share at 8.85 lakh.

The roots of Bangladesh's youth unemployment crisis lie in a longstanding mismatch between education and labour-market needs. The education system continues to emphasise degrees rather than practical, job-ready skills, which leaves many graduates without the competencies employers expect. Employers often report a shortage of candidates with technical abilities, digital literacy, or industry-specific training. Technical and vocational institutes, which should fill this gap, remain underfunded, outdated, and weakly linked to industry. As a result, young people are unprepared for emerging opportunities in a changing economy. Another critical issue is the immense pressure on public-sector employment. For many young Bangladeshis, government jobs are considered the only viable route to stability, recognition, and social prestige. Moreover, the private sector has not been able to generate enough high-quality jobs to absorb new entrants since private investment remained stagnant for over a decade due to various policy and regulatory shortcomings. Most youth who find work end up in informal, low-paying, insecure employment. They earn too little to build a future and receive none of the benefits or protections that come with formal work. High informality, weak social protection, gender disparities, and significant rural-urban inequality hamper Bangladesh's labour market.

Beyond American dreams: Indians doing a rethink on study abroad plan

For decades, studying abroad meant one destination for many Indian families — the United States. The plan was almost ritualistic — secure admission, take an education loan that stretched household budgets, pray for a visa, and trust that work experience, residency, and even citizenship would follow. That script was so deeply embedded in the middle-class imagination that the American university route was a default pathway. However, over the last couple of years, that assumption has begun to crumble under the weight of policy unpredictability, lengthy visa queues, and a more intense global climate surrounding migration.

Let us now take a closer look at the numbers to understand the current landscape. In 2024, an estimated 13.36 lakh Indian students were pursuing higher education overseas. Of them, Canada hosted approximately 4.27 lakh, while the United States accounted for around 3.38 lakh. The UK had about 1.85 lakh and Australia 1.22 lakh Indian students. However, in 2024, the number of students leaving India fell by nearly 15 per cent, compared to 2023, from 8.95 lakh to 7.6 lakh, as reported by the Bureau of Immigration. The decline was visible across major destinations, though not uniformly. Still, the trend reveals a significant shift — even the United States, once considered the unquestioned first choice, is now being scrutinised more thoughtfully by Indian students.

Parallel to this slowdown, other destinations are gaining attraction. Germany is the finest example. In the 2023-24 winter semester, German universities hosted 49,485 Indian students, a 15.1 per cent increase from the previous year and nearly double the figure from five years ago. Indians now form the largest international student group in the country. The drivers are clear: low or zero tuition at many public universities, robust engineering and research ecosystems, and post-study work pathways that are less opaque than the H-1B lottery. France, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries are also attracting more Indian students, with English-medium programmes in technology, business analytics, design, AI, and sustainability, often backed by scholarships. The standardisation of quality across many European public universities reduces the risk of paying premium fees for a mediocre degree, a risk that Indian students have occasionally faced in the US.

Why this rebalancing? Because the American visa process now feels like a gamble. Even academically strong applicants face unpredictable outcomes, long queues and sudden rejections. Add rising tuition, soaring rents in cities and a weakening rupee, and the US route suddenly looks far riskier than before. More than admission, the calculation is about the total cost, post-study work feasibility and the realistic odds of migration.

So, the shift of Indian students to look beyond the US can be beneficial. By consciously widening their lens, students not only manage financial and visa-related risks, but they also discover alternative pathways with equal or better career potential. Germany, for instance, offers affordability, structured post-study work visas, and a growing Indian peer community. The Netherlands, Sweden and Finland emphasise research-led programmes in emerging fields such as AI, clean energy, and sustainability. West Asian countries, including the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, are investing heavily in STEM education, hosting branch campuses of major Western universities, and providing job-seeker or long-term residence visas tied to skills.

Singapore, while highly selective, provides access to a growing Asian market and stable work pathways. By diversifying their options, students reduce dependence on a single country or system and create multiple avenues to achieve their career and life goals.

Of course, the traditional Anglo-American destinations haven't disappeared, but they no longer enjoy unquestioned primacy. Canada, Australia, and the UK remain attractive, yet the risk-return equation has shifted. Visa rules, living costs, post-study work rights, and settlement norms must all be evaluated along with academic reputation. What was once a straightforward aspiration has evolved into a comparative exercise in risk, return and sustainability. In this context, the decision to look beyond the US is as much about pragmatism as opportunity.

Another noticeable shift is in how students pursue foreign education. Twinning programmes allow them to split their degree between India and abroad, easing the cost and reducing visa risks.

Many now choose hybrid models, such as one year online and one year on campus, or short, job-oriented courses. These flexible formats enable students to gain global exposure without straining their finances, allowing them to build a varied educational profile instead of relying on a single destination. The evidence of change is clear. The number of Indian students overseas increased from approximately 9.07 lakh in 2022 to 13.36 lakh in 2024. Interest remains high, but the choices are wider. The old US-centred dream has shifted to multiple destinations, as students now compare courses, job prospects, and costs with far greater care. Studying abroad is no longer a status symbol. It's a strategic investment.

This does not render the United States irrelevant. Thousands of Indian students continue to aspire to study there. It's just that the path has narrowed, and the cost-benefit ratio is harsher. The old assumption of inevitability is gone. For parents and students, the shift is both philosophical and practical — all the decisions must be strategic, not sentimental. Understandably, therefore, the focus is on the afterlife of the degree — debt load, employability, visa security, and long-term alignment with career and life goals. It is appreciable that Indian students have learnt to balance aspiration, practicality and opportunity. In such a scenario, looking beyond the US undoubtedly promises greater resilience and better alignment with personal, academic and career goals.

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS

The Big Picture

Macaulay and a Medical College

In the days that led up to Macaulay's much-maligned Minute on Education was a little-known debate: whether the Calcutta Medical College should teach Western medicine in English or an Oriental language. MANOJ MITTA draws on historical research from that period to show how a cultural contest that rages today was once firmly rooted in questions of science

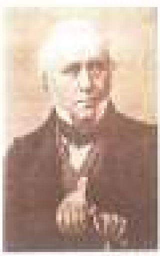
John Tytler, a vocal Orientalist, lobbied with Macaulay even at a late stage to drop the idea of introducing English as the medium of instruction in the medical college

A push for Arabic

Macaulay's pushback

The birth of the Minute

English vs Arabic: How Macaulay had his way



HINDU (P-18), 15 DECEMBER 2025

R. W. Alexander Jesudasan

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Fuel a knowledge economy

Why the One Nation One Subscription should be extended to private universities and colleges

With over 1,100 universities and nearly 45,000 colleges catering to around 4.5 crore students, India continues to strengthen its position as one of the world's largest education hubs. The country also aims to achieve 50% gross enrollment ratio (GER) in higher education by 2035. To achieve this target, India must strengthen all areas of higher education. Government and private institutions are working towards this, through various initiatives such as the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS).

What is ONOS?

The scheme aims to provide nationwide access to major scholarly e-journals from prominent publishers across disciplines such as STEM, Medicine, Management, Social Sciences and Humanities. The UGC's Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) centre is to act as the implementing agency for ONOS. The scheme will give 6,400 institutions across the country (including central and state universities, colleges and research institutions) and 1.2 crore students, faculty, and researchers access to over 13,000 top journals including global ones such as *Elsevier*, *Springer-Nature*, *Taylor & Francis*, and *Wiley*. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) Act seeks to boost research HEIs in smaller towns with plans for central funding to support Indian authors in paying Article Processing Charges for quality open-access journals. However, private universities have been left out of the ambit of ONOS.

Before the 1990s, the higher education landscape was dominated by government-funded institutions. Economic liberalisation also led to various transformational measures including establishment of private universities and colleges. As a result, today, around 80% of students pursue higher education in private universities and colleges. In the last two decades, the number of these colleges and universities has expanded in response to the increasing demand for higher education.

Research focussed

Apart from offering programmes in emerging fields such as Robotics, AI, Fintech, Precision Technologies, Cybersecurity, Design Thinking and more, they also offer international exposure, industry-linked learning, interdisciplinary and flexible academic options and other benefits to students. Many of these institutions are located in urban and semi-urban areas and account for nearly 36% of the student population. Apart from this, many private universities have positioned themselves as research- and innovation-focussed, as Bansal et.al. (2019) note.

Some are very large with multiple campuses, modern infrastructure, and faculty members enabling them to compete with and match the research output of well-known government-funded institutions. Some even project themselves as the second-largest contributors to India's research output after the IITs. Quality publications, spending on faculty development and infrastructure creation, automation of libraries, including establishment of digital libraries, RFID, and other technological advances have all contributed to this.

Considering that private HEIs have made immense contributions to the education landscape and the growth manifested in many areas, extending ONOS to such institutions would help the country achieve the goal of a developed India by 2035. This will not strain the country's financial resources and willhelo India develop a robust knowledge economy.

The writer is the former rector of Reva University, Bengaluru; former Pro Vice-Chancellor of HITS, Chennai; and former Principal and Secretary of Madras Christian College, Chennai.

PIONEER (P-10), 16 DECEMBER 2025

India's biggest higher education overhaul

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill is less about dismantling old institutions and more about redefining the state's relationship with higher education

India's education system has long remained under the shadow of a colonial framework designed to serve British interests. Even after Independence, the same system continued with only minor alterations. The new education bill, however, seeks to discard this legacy and mark a clear break from the past. It also aims to simplify the governance of education by bringing together various institutions responsible for regulating and framing policies for the country's higher education under a single umbrella.

The Union Cabinet's approval of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill is a definitive step towards restructuring higher education governance. By replacing the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) with a single regulator, the government wants to align higher education policy with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by a simplified single regulatory framework. At its heart, the bill seeks to end the long-standing overlapping that has defined Indian higher education.

A single umbrella regulator promises clarity – one set of standards, one accreditation framework and one point of accountability for higher education, excluding medical and law disciplines. Among the bill's key highlights is the consolidation of regulation, accreditation and quality assurance under one commission. In theory, fewer bureaucratic silos should translate into faster approvals and reduce compliance burdens and greater flexibility for institutions to offer interdisciplinary programmes. It frames higher education reform as central to India's development – linking universities not just to degrees but to skills, innovation and nation-building. For students, the new system promises quality benchmarks and makes and degrees more comparable across institutions.

Yet, the bill also raises legitimate concerns. The concentration of regulatory power in a single body risks replacing multiple small bottlenecks with a large one. This would require a robust regime of checks and balances. If it remains overly centralised or ministry-driven, the reform could end up strengthening bureaucratic control. Another important issue is funding. While regulation is being unified, financial oversight remains with the Department of Higher Education. Unless a separate Higher Education Funding Authority is created, it would render governing reforms meaningless as academic priorities must be backed by adequate and timely funding. Without transparent, performance-linked funding mechanisms, institutional autonomy may remain limited in practice.

Besides, technical institutions and teacher education, specific needs of institutions could be ignored. Ensuring domain expertise within the new regulator will be crucial to prevent standardisation from turning into oversimplification. If implemented with transparency, it could unlock long-pending reforms and align Indian universities with global best practices else it could remain yet another policy decision which could not be realised.

P-10

STATESMAN (P-14), 16 DECEMBER 2025

Deconstructing the myth of 'talent': Marksheets vs grit and a growth mindset

PREETHI RAJEEV NAIR

In today's fast-paced world, things are rapidly changing, and thoughts are quickly transforming, yet the perception of 'talented' is still confined to academic scores. A student who tops in class, board exams or entrance exams is labelled a 'talented' in a blink of an eye. Their achievement is considered evidence of being highly intellectual with an innate ability to climb the ladder of success. On the other hand, students with average or low scores are often packed in a box called - lack of ability.

It's terrifying to see how damaging this mindset could be. Academic scores are important, but these scores cannot be the sole measure of potential, the only measure of intelligence.

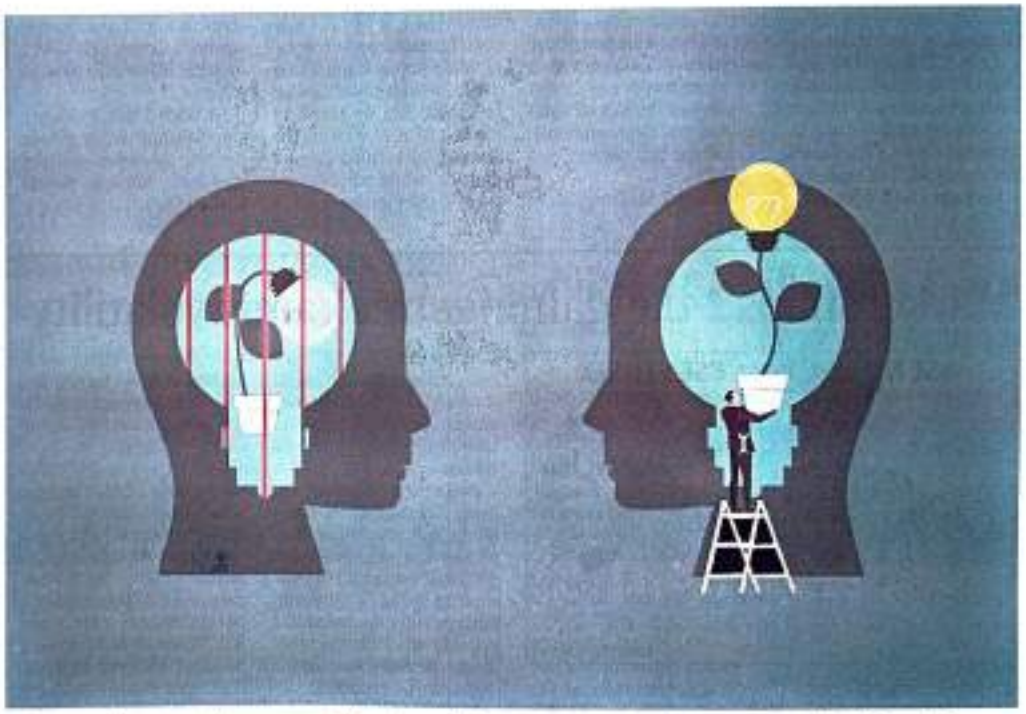
Psychological research has repeatedly proved that two qualities- grit and growth mindset are far more reliable predictors of long-term success than numbers on a report card.

With plenty of other reforms, our Indian education system is also striving to challenge the old notion that academic talent is something you're either born with or not. Instead, we must build an education culture that values effort, resilience, and the capacity to grow.

For years, from a very young age, students are trained in a system that rewards memorisation, quick results, and high scores. This system has often brought disappointment and even shame to students. They internalise that they are not 'smart' when parents, society, and teachers reinforce the belief that students' worth is defined by their marks.

Hence, it's not just important but also humane to break such myths where 'talent' is defined only by academic scores and overlooks qualities to meet real-world success- curiosity, creativity and strength to face and overcome challenges. Talent, if defined only by academic scores, becomes a narrow and misleading concept. It overlooks qualities which are critical for real-world success curiosity, persistence, creativity, and the ability to overcome setbacks.

Researchers have proven that students with grit and a growth mindset are more likely to improve their performance over time- regardless of their previous journey. Schools work on honing skills like perseverance in their students, which often matters far more than innate ability, like memorising. Hence, with perseverance, grit and a growth mindset students who might not be able to succeed on the first try, if they persist, adapt and keep learning, are often found reaching heights later. But unfortunately, our same old and rusted system scarcely appreciates and rewards resilience. At this point, the role of schools and teachers must be devoted to nurturing overall development rather than producing top scorers. It's within the boundaries of schools; students learn to inculcate a grit and growth mindset. Here, the focus shifts from "How much do you score?" to "How much are you ready to learn, create and grow?"



Hence, to deconstruct the myth that academic scores are the sole measurement of talent, educational institutions can play a vital part in shifting the focus from scores to potential and progress. Instead of only celebrating the top scorers, they must celebrate the journey of students who battled, faced hardships and improved significantly. Schools must recognise and appreciate the continuous and exceptional efforts made by students to overcome the learning gaps. However, we must keep in mind that schools can break the myth by conducting workshops to reduce parental pressure that often amplifies the marks-equal-talent mindset. Interactive sessions with prominent people from various walks of life like entrepreneurs, scientists, or civil servants, to share real-life stories of their journey to success after early failures can shift the narrative.

School and parents together can give wings to children to fly even after their setbacks by encouraging them to take risks in learning, trying new methods of learning, and exploring beyond the boundaries of the syllabus. Parents and teachers alike must learn to ask: Is my child learning to think, adapt, and persevere—or just memorising for the next exam?

Moreover, creating a safe failure environment where mistakes are seen as building blocks of learning further builds unshakable confidence in students. Exams should not be the end of the story but the new chapter to improvement, keeping aside what they got wrong. In a nutshell, it's time for our education system to stop overvaluing academic scores, as we risk leaving behind our children with immense untapped potential- just because they don't fit into a rigid mould of traditional examinations. The undeniable fact is that true education empowers students to make, break and remake, to rise after fall without fear or shame and to grow through effort. Once we deconstruct the myth of 'academic talent' by recognising that marks could not be the final verdict on a child's future, what really matters is to keep learning, persist despite setbacks and thrive. In doing so, we will not only create better students but also build stronger and more resilient future global citizens.

THE WRITER IS PRINCIPAL – CBSE, LANCERS ARMY SCHOOLS.

STATESMAN (P-14), 16 DECEMBER 2025

The curriculum as a living canvas

JITENDRA KARSAN

In today's fast-paced world, where technology is evolving rapidly and social values are changing, early education must evolve too. The early years lay the groundwork for a child's future learning, emotional resilience, and social adaptability. During this time, their minds absorb knowledge like sponges, and every experience leaves an imprint on their development. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to have tools and methodologies that are relevant and flexible to nurture their evolving interests and curiosity.

This is where the concept of a 'living curriculum' comes in; it's about creating an educational experience that evolves alongside the world around us and can cater to each child's unique learning needs.

Why must early education curriculum evolve?

Children today are living in a vastly different world from what it was 20 years ago. They can easily swipe smartphone screens even before they learn to spell out their names. Therefore, an old-fashioned curriculum, built on set topics, rigid timelines, or strict principles, cannot keep pace with the evolving landscape of early education. Additionally, lesson plans that prioritise only memorisation or mere academic achievements will no longer be enough.

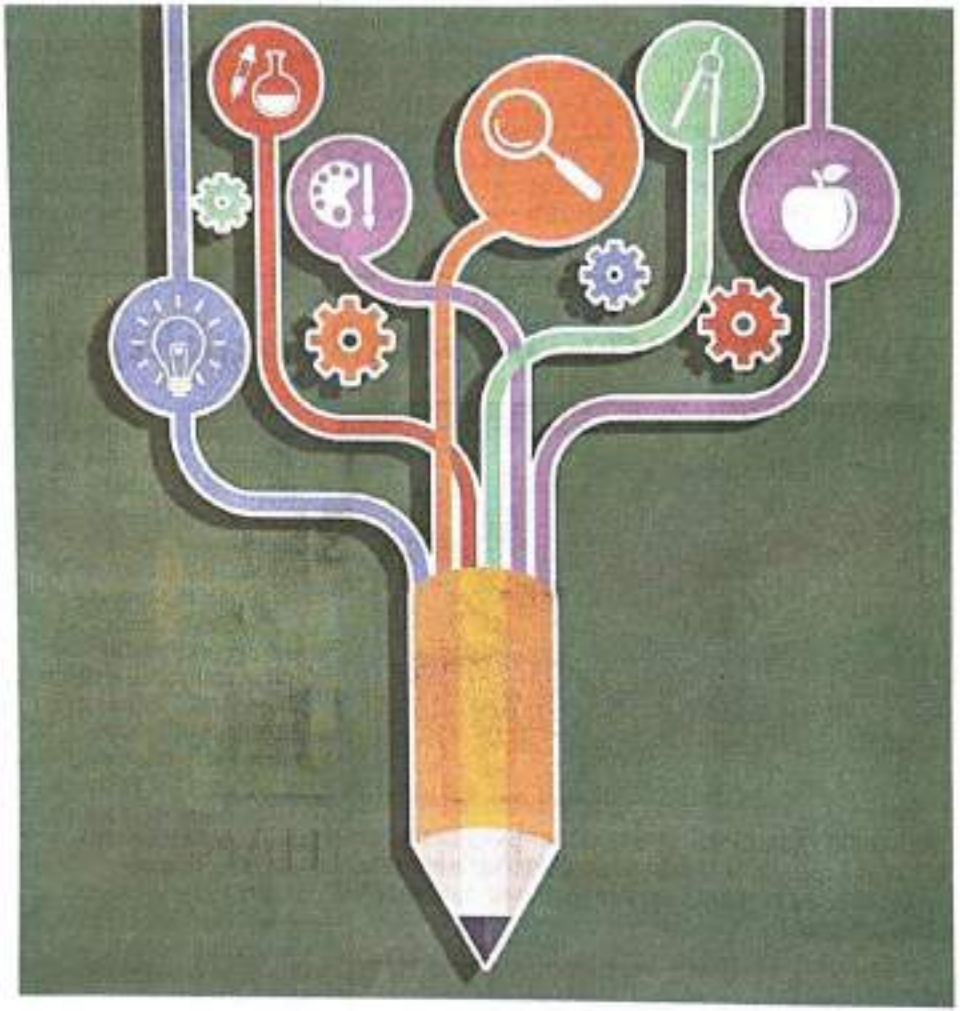
Instead, early education should prepare children to think on their own, learn to adjust to new circumstances, and cope with changes. This involves moving away from simply 'what' they learn to 'how' they learn. Encouraging children to question, explore, connect, and share their own experiences will help build resilience, empathy, and curiosity, essential for lifelong learning.

The living curriculum: Learning that grows with the child

A living curriculum goes beyond the set guidelines of textbooks or rigid lesson plans. What makes this a favourite among educators is its flexible approach that helps children understand the world around them.

In this way, teachers and students learn together as a community, through shared experiences and interests.

Furthermore, a living curriculum utilises the most up-to-date research in areas of neuroscience and child psychology. It takes into account the best practices with respect to how young minds and bodies learn through inquiry and play, discovery and hands-on experiences, and the social world. Furthermore, in this tech-driven world, it includes technology and digital media thoughtfully to enhance experiences rather than replace personal relationships.



Balancing structure with creativity

While flexibility helps to nurture, children also need structure to keep them grounded. The solution lies in creating the perfect balance between routine and free play.

When in school, teachers are responsible for this balance. Their experience tells them when to focus on activities and when to allow children the freedom to play independently. A carefully designed curriculum provides guidance but changes in response to the energy and interest of each child.

Incorporating an eclectic curriculum approach can support this balance effectively.

Reimagining early education for the future

Like an ever-changing canvas, the curriculum should always be ready for new ideas and experiences. The emphasis should be on important qualities like adaptability, empathy, and critical thinking. When children work together, share ideas, and express their feelings, they develop social and emotional skills that will guide them in building strong relationships. By trying, failing, and trying some more, they learn problem-solving skills and resilience.

Thus, a 'living curriculum' not only teaches children but also moulds them for a better future. When early education evolves with young minds, it becomes more than just a system; it's a movement. It equips young learners with new ideas and the ability to imagine new possibilities within it.

THE WRITER IS CHAIRMAN – SAFARI KID, INDIA

TRIBUNE, (P-9), 16 DECEMBER 2025

As AI replaces thinking, learning is eroding

SHOBHIT MAHAJAN

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CHATGPT and Google Gemini are rapidly becoming the go-to places for students. That by itself is not surprising — after all, generations of students have found ways to avoid rigour and skirt around academic engagement. Champion Guides (which condensed the whole course into a pocket-sized paperback) were followed by short YouTube videos.

Champion Guides at least had to be read and crammed and this took time. That changed with YouTube videos. Reading required some modicum of engagement and attention. The attention span of students, as they are used to 20-second Instagram reels, was simply not adequate to read even a page of text. A 10-minute video was all that they could possibly tolerate. That too at 1.5 times the speed! Books were simply out. In fact, the author of a popular undergraduate textbook told me that his royalties, which previously used to run into tens of thousands of rupees annually, were now down to a few hundred. And this includes e-book sales.

ChatGPT and other LLM-based AI tools are a quantum leap in this evolution. Even the limited engagement of a YouTube video is not required anymore. What is worse, one doesn't even need to formulate a proper query — a few keywords would solve the problem instantly. The issue runs much deeper than just cheating on homework assignments or presentations. It is to do with the process of knowledge acquisition.

The first step in learning is to be able to formulate your thoughts cogently in language. After all, as philosophers like Wittgenstein tell us, knowledge is about representing facts, which need a language. This is increasingly challenging for students in English and, surprisingly, even in their mother tongues. While earlier they would write and then make corrections using dictionaries and thus learn incrementally, they are not attempting this anymore.

Last month, almost all emails from my students requesting me to write recommendations were identical. They were professionally drafted and in perfect English. I was intrigued. I noticed that the mails addressed me as 'Dear Professor'. This was highly unusual for my students since we, as Macaulay's children, would never think of addressing our teachers as anything other than 'Dear Sir' or 'Respected Sir'. It was clear that the emails were generated by AI. The same is true for writing computer code in the class on computer programming. The students are not even attempting to do this anymore.

Proponents of AI tools in education could argue that writing codes as well as good prose is best outsourced to machines, leaving the student with more time to think creatively. That might be the case if the student had already developed some basic skills in language and mathematical and analytic reasoning. These skills are underdeveloped for most of our students and will become more so as these tools are used in the earlier stages of one's education. Developing these skills requires sustained engagement and effort on the part of the learner as well as the teacher. With the widespread use of these tools, this is bound to become harder.

Educationists are struggling to deal with the detrimental effects of AI tools in education. Oral presentations (instead of PowerPoint), in-class handwritten essays and computer codes are some of the ways being used since research shows that writing by hand improves cognitive ability.

We need to ask how the use of these tools, whose capabilities would only increase in the future, can be harnessed for making education more meaningful and developing the students' creative and cognitive abilities. Else we might have a generation of passive consumers, not creators. Though it is an uphill task in the face of relentless technological innovation, it is something we have to attempt. We owe it to the next generation.

Oral presentations and in-class handwritten essays are some ways to use since writing by hand improves cognitive ability.

Tri-09

TRIBUNE, (P-9), 16 DECEMBER 2025

We can't reverse AI use; we can choose how to shape it

NISHANT SAHDEV
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ARTIFICIAL intelligence seeped in quietly in education through late-night study apps, deadline rewrites and patient explanations. What was once novel is now routine. As one final-year engineering student in Delhi put it, "Sometimes I'm not sure where my thinking ends and the AI's suggestion begins." Her comment captures a deeper shift: the boundary between human reasoning and digital assistance is blurring.

Adoption is rapid. Globally, students and adults use generative AI at unprecedented rates, while in India over half of universities permit AI use and most teachers deploy it for planning or administration. India's vast education system is driving the explosive market growth.

Yet numbers mask the real issue. Education once assumed learning happened inside the student, through struggle and error. AI disrupts this by producing fluent answers instantly. While AI-assisted work often looks better, students show weaker understanding and rising anxiety about independent thinking. The risk is not laziness, but erosion of depth, judgment and the ability to question knowledge itself.

Analysts have begun warning that without assessment reform, countries could see a decline in deep literacy, reasoning skills and independent thinking. These warnings apply strongly to India, where millions of students will interact with AI daily long before institutions fully adapt.

So what would meaningful change look like? First, we need to redesign assessments so that they capture reasoning, not just results. Oral exams, in-class analytical tasks, multi-stage assignments with required reflections and reasoning logs bring the cognitive process back into view. These practices won't eliminate AI use, but they make it harder for AI to replace thinking.

Second, we must teach AI literacy — not coding, but understanding. Students need to know how these systems work, why they sometimes make things up, how bias enters training data and how to check whether an answer is reliable. India's linguistic diversity adds another dimension: tools trained mostly on English content may behave differently when asked questions in regional languages and students need to be aware of that.

> We need to redesign college assessments so that they capture reasoning, not just results.

Third, transparency must become a norm. Academic journals require authors to disclose how AI tools were used. Students could do the same. This practice restores agency and keeps the relationship between human thinking and digital assistance honest.

Fourth, India needs standards for the AI tools that enter classrooms, especially in low-resource contexts. If AI will act as a teacher for millions, even informally, accuracy, fairness and reliability cannot be optional.

The stakes go beyond education. If societies produce graduates who sound articulate but lack the ability to evaluate information, democracy becomes fragile. A recent study found that people exposed to large amounts of AI-generated content were significantly more likely to believe misinformation, even when they thought of themselves as strong critical thinkers. When everything sounds polished, it becomes harder to know what to trust.

And yet, this is not a pessimistic story. Many students are using AI in thoughtful and creative ways: testing their understanding, checking assumptions and pushing themselves to explore ideas they would not otherwise have considered. AI can sharpen thinking when used deliberately. The task before us is to build the structures that help students use it well.

AI is reshaping education, marking one of the most significant shifts in how knowledge is created, validated and passed on. We cannot reverse this transformation. But we can choose how to shape it. The future of education will depend on whether students learn to use AI without losing trust in their own minds.

INDIAN EXPRESS (P-12), 17 DECEMBER 2025

Dear students, wait, your teacher is on election duty

KRISHNA KUMAR

IF YOU are not familiar with the code of conduct that governs the work life of school teachers in India, you can't make much sense of news items about the pressure under which teachers are fulfilling their extra-professional duty as "booth level officers" (BLOs). They are updating electoral rolls and preparing the final lists of eligible voters. The deadlines are stringent, the task is tough and demands accuracy. It has nothing to do with teaching. The stress caused by this is compounded by the risks involved in delay. Some of the teachers doing this work are reported to have fallen sick and died.

Teachers and parents are often blamed for the stress and anxiety among children, but stress among teachers is seldom acknowledged. It is a common belief that teaching is a leisurely job. Equally common is the perception that government school teachers don't work as hard as their counterparts in private schools. That's why no one questions the use of government school teachers for election duty. Children who study in government schools constitute a national blind spot. How do they cope with their teacher's absence when they are placed on non-teaching duties?

Every election brings schoolteachers out of school for substantial periods of time. School heads have no choice when the order comes to relieve some of their staff for election duty. It is not the only extra-professional responsibility government school teachers carry out. Various kinds of enumerative work and supervisory duties shape the haphazard lives of teachers.

Their counterparts in private schools are free from this clutter. This dual approach has persisted since colonial times, when village teachers came in handy for all kinds of official work, including the sale of postal stationery. To this day, the government sees nothing wrong in using teachers for "office duty". They are perceived as *sarkari karamcharis*, not as professionals. Although someone who wants to become a teacher must possess special qualifications and go through in-service training, the perception of teaching as a soft profession has not changed. Why the government does not use this perception to rope in private school teachers for official work is a valid question that is never asked.

Children who attend private schools are not supposed to suffer any loss of classes. That fate is reserved for children who study in government schools. Depriving them of regular classes evokes no concern. A former student who teaches in a primary school in Delhi said bluntly: "Sir, no teaching is recognised. No teaching is possible. No teaching is expected." For officers, teaching is not a priority; documentation, digital record-keeping, testing, rehearsing children for events and functions, uploading and online communication are. When teachers are absent, the principal has to "manage" without them. And so must children, even if it is examination time. Their loss is not considered a national loss, though that is exactly what it is. No officer seems to realise that when primary school children face a gap in their learning, it can't be covered up. It is also discriminatory as their private school cohorts don't suffer.

Since Independence, schoolteachers have obediently served the duties assigned to them. They form a literate, reliable labour force the government can easily access. They have kept democracy functioning. The cost of this contribution has been paid by the children. Over the past few decades, teacher shortages in various states have meant that the cost paid by children has gone up.

When the Right to Education (RTE) Act was being drafted, there was hope that it would outlaw the assignment of non-teaching work to teachers. However, it included Section 27, which permitted the use of teachers in election-related work. Later, a court verdict permitted teachers' deployment for various duties in an election before it is notified. The glimmer of hope that RTE would establish teaching as a serious profession faded with time.

Since Independence, schoolteachers have obediently served the duties assigned to them. They form a literate, reliable labour force, the government can easily access. They have kept democracy functioning

Kumar is a former director of NCERT and the author of Thank You, Gandhi

TRIBUNE, (P-6), 17 DECEMBER 2025

Higher education Bill

Evolve viable roadmap through consultations

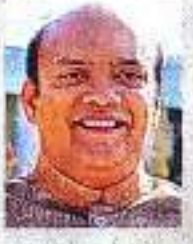
THE Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, which seeks to establish an overarching higher education commission, has been sent to a joint parliamentary committee. The panel will hold discussions on the legislation and submit its report in February. The Bill proposes separate councils for regulation, accreditation and academic standards in a bid to do away with the "multiplicity of regulators having non-harmonised regulatory approval protocols". As of now, the University Grants Commission (UGC) regulates non-technical higher education institutions, while the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) are overseeing their respective domains. The Acts under which these three agencies were set up are proposed to be repealed. The government aims to overhaul the regulatory system in order to "re-energise" the higher education sector. However, will the replacement of the UGC, AICTE and NCTE — which have functioned for decades — with new councils serve the purpose? These councils will come under an umbrella institution, the higher education commission; thus, it would be challenging for them to work as autonomous bodies.

Underfunding has plagued higher education institutions in India. However, the Bill gives no funding powers to the new commission. It makes the Ministry of Education responsible for disbursing grants. Some educationists fear that this provision will make the process of grant allocation more bureaucratic and politically motivated.

Global experience shows that world-class universities thrive on academic freedom, sustained public funding and institutional self-governance — not merely regulatory efficiency. Well-thought-out reforms are the way forward for India in higher education. Various stakeholders must be involved in detailed deliberations on the new Bill so that a viable roadmap can be evolved.

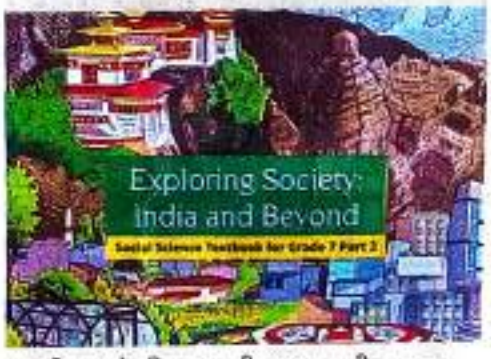
DAINIK JAGRAN (P-6), 17 DECEMBER 2025

इतिहासबोध की दिशा में सार्थक पहल



प्रणय कुमार

एनसीईआरटी का संशोधन वैचारिक अन्याय का उत्तर है। यह इतिहास को न कटुता से लिखता है, न प्रतिशोध भावना से



वास्तविकता से परिचय कराती पाठ्य सामग्री • फाइल

एनसीईआरटी द्वारा कक्षा सात की सामाजिक अध्ययन की नई पुस्तक 'एक्सप्लोरिंग सोसाइटीजः इंडिया एंड बियांड-पार्ट 2' में किया गया संशोधन केवल पाठ्यक्रम परिवर्तन नहीं है। यह उस वैचारिक जड़ता को तोड़ने की कोशिश है, जिसने दशकों तक भारतीय इतिहास को आधा-अधूरा, चयनात्मक और भ्रमित रूप में विद्यार्थियों के सामने रखा। यह पहल इतिहासबोध की पुनर्स्थापना की दिशा में एक साहसिक और आवश्यक कदम है। स्वतंत्रता के बाद भारतीय इतिहास-लेखन पर एक खास वैचारिक प्रभुत्व हावी रहा। इसके अंतर्गत मध्यकालीन भारत के आक्रमणों को या तो संक्षेप में प्रस्तुत किया गया या उन्हें केवल साम्राज्य-विस्तार और आर्थिक लूट के सीमित दायरे में देखा गया। मंदिर-विध्वंस, धार्मिक उत्पीड़न, गैर-मुसलमानों के व्यापक नरसंहार, दास-व्यापार और ज्ञान-केंद्रों के सुनियोजित विनाश जैसे तथ्य या तो दबा दिए गए या 'सुल्तानों-राजाओं के युद्ध' बताकर खारिज कर दिए गए। इससे भी आगे बढ़कर इन आक्रमणों के पीछे सक्रिय उस वैचारिक मानसिकता पर लगभग मौन साध लिया गया, जो 'कुफ्र-काफिर' की अवधारणा में विश्वास करती है। नतीजा यह हुआ कि इतिहास का एक निर्णायक और पीड़ादायक पक्ष पीढ़ियों तक छात्रों की समझ से बाहर ही रहा।

एनसीईआरटी की नई पुस्तक इतिहास को किसी वैचारिक सुविधा के अनुसार नहीं, बल्कि प्रमाणिक स्रोतों और ठोस ऐतिहासिक संदर्भों के आधार पर प्रस्तुत करती है। सच को सच कहना सांप्रदायिकता नहीं, बल्कि बौद्धिक ईमानदारी का परिचायक है। इस पुस्तक की एक महत्वपूर्ण उपलब्धि यह है कि यह भारतीय इतिहास को दिल्ली और उत्तर भारत-केंद्रित दृष्टिकोण की सीमाओं से मुक्त करती है। इसमें काकतीय, चालुक्य, पल्लव, होयसल, पूर्वी गंग, ब्रह्मपाल जैसे वंशों के साथ-साथ भंजा, गुहिल, कलचुरी, मैत्रक, मौखरी, शिलाहार, सोमवंशी, तोमर और चैहमान (चौहान) जैसे अनेक राजवंशों के योगदान को भी समुचित स्थान दिया गया है। इस पुस्तक में मंदिर स्थापत्य को केवल पूजा-स्थल या धार्मिक प्रतीक भर मानकर नहीं देखा गया है, बल्कि उसे मध्यकालीन भारतीय समाज की शिक्षा, कला, विज्ञान और सामुदायिक जीवन के जीवंत केंद्र के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया गया है।

बेलूर-हलेबिडु के होयसल मंदिरों की अद्वितीय सूक्ष्म नक्काशी हो या फिर एलोरा का कैलाशनाथ मंदिर, ये सभी उस तकनीकी दक्षता, स्थापत्य-ज्ञान और सौंदर्य-बोध के ठोस प्रमाण हैं, जिस पर भारत की सभ्यता सदियों तक खड़ी रही। यह प्रस्तुति उस लंबे समय से प्रचारित मिथक को स्वतः ध्वस्त करती है कि मध्यकालीन भारत बौद्धिक, वैज्ञानिक या रचनात्मक रूप से किसी प्रकार पिछड़ा हुआ था। पुस्तक में सम्मिलित 'वसुधैव कुटुंबकम्' और 'इंडिया, ए होम टू मेनी' जैसे अध्याय भारत के उस सभ्यतागत आत्मा को सामने लाते हैं, जिसकी जड़ें सहिष्णुता, सह-अस्तित्व और सम्मान में रची-बसी हैं। यहूदी और पारसी समुदायों को न केवल शरण देना, बल्कि उन्हें सम्मान, सुरक्षा और सामाजिक स्वीकार्यता प्रदान करना भारतीय समाज की ऐतिहासिक परंपरा रही है।

नई पुस्तक में जोड़ा गया 'इंडिया एंड हर नेबर्स' अध्याय में पाकिस्तान के संदर्भ में स्पष्ट रूप से कहा गया है कि उसका निर्माण धार्मिक आधार पर हुआ और विभाजन ने चुनौतियां कम नहीं कीं, अपितु भारतीय मानस को गहरे घाव दिए। यह प्रस्तुति उस वैचारिक भ्रम को तोड़ती है, जिसके अनुसार भारत-पाक विभाजन एक राजनीतिक दुर्घटना मात्र थी। पड़ोसी देशों के साथ भारत के संबंधों को साझा सभ्यतागत विरासत के संदर्भ में समझाने का प्रयास छात्रों को व्यापक दृष्टि प्रदान करता है।

वामपंथी खेमा सर्वाधिक असहज उन अध्यायों को लेकर है, जिनमें महमूद गजनवी, मोहम्मद गोरी और बख्तियार खिलजी के आक्रमणों का विस्तृत वर्णन किया गया है। कारण स्पष्ट है, क्योंकि पहली बार विद्यालयी पाठ्यक्रम में इन आक्रमणों को उनकी वास्तविक वैचारिक पृष्ठभूमि के साथ प्रस्तुत किया गया है। गजनवी के 17 आक्रमण-सोमनाथ मंदिर का विध्वंस, मथुरा और कन्नौज के देवालयों का नाश, बड़े पैमाने पर नरसंहार और स्त्री-बच्चों को दास बनाकर गजनी ले जाना, ये सब अब 'कथा' नहीं, बल्कि ऐतिहासिक तथ्य के रूप में सामने हैं। अल-उत्बी, अल-बिरूनी, फिरदौसी जैसे समकालीन फारसी स्रोत स्वयं स्वीकार करते हैं कि गजनवी अपने अभियानों को 'काफिरों के विरुद्ध जिहाद' मानता था। इसी क्रम में मुहम्मद बिन कासिम द्वारा सिंध पर किया गया आक्रमण हो, बख्तियार खिलजी द्वारा नालंदा और विक्रमशिला का विध्वंस हो या तैमूर द्वारा 1398 में दिल्ली में किया गया भीषण नरसंहार, इन सभी घटनाओं के पीछे केवल राजनीतिक कारण नहीं थे। स्वयं तैमूर ने 'तुजुक-ए-तैमूरी' में स्वीकार किया है कि उसका अभियान 'कुफ्र के उन्मूलन' की मजहबी प्रेरणा से संचालित था। एनसीईआरटी का संशोधन वैचारिक अन्याय का उत्तर है। यह इतिहास को न कटुता से लिखता है, न प्रतिशोध की भावना से। यह केवल यह कहता है कि इतिहास को जैसा था, वैसा स्वीकार किया जाए। बिना सत्य के न तो आत्मविश्वास संभव है, न सामाजिक समरसता। इतिहास का उद्देश्य समाज को बांटना नहीं, बल्कि उसे उसकी वास्तविक यात्रा से परिचित कराना है।

(लेखक शिक्षाविद हैं)

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The changing patterns of India's student migration

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India's latest wave of student migration marks a decisive shift that is no longer confined to elite universities or programmes that are fully funded. Today's migration is characterised by self-financed education where middle-class households invest heavily in the promise of a global degree and upward social mobility. In Ministry of External Affairs data, more than 13.2 lakh Indian students were enrolled in over 70 countries by 2023, which rose to 13.35 lakh in 2024, and projected to reach 13.8 lakh in 2025.

India is one of the top senders of international students, with the United States and Canada as the top destinations (40%), followed by the United Kingdom, Australia and Germany. This significant development is reflected in the report of the Parliamentary Committee on the Welfare of Indian Diaspora (2022) which engages with students as one of India's major diaspora categories.

The true picture

While all this is seen by some as a democratisation of foreign education, with doors opening to students from different socio-economic classes, the reality is more complex. Many of these students are channelled into lower-tier institutions and vocational colleges, into courses often unrelated to their expertise and without much job prospects, due to recruitment agencies that operate in a grey legal zone. The partnership between recruitment networks and less credible private colleges abroad is driven primarily by commissions and profit, reflecting the largely unregulated expansion of the foreign education industry.

The outcome is widespread deskilling and underemployment, with many graduates unable to transition into skilled work. In the U.K., what were once polytechnics have become universities post 1992 that cater primarily to international students, sometimes waiving entry requirements and triggering controversy due to declining academic standards. Reports suggest that approximately only one in four Indian postgraduates in the U.K. secures a sponsored skilled visa.

Student migration from India represents a middle-class aspiration with significant risks. Kerala, historically defined by Gulf labour migration, illustrates this transformation as the Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2023 reports that student migration doubled in five years, from 1.29 lakh in 2018 to 2.5 lakh in 2023, which is 11.3% of total emigrants. Outward student remittances from Kerala are estimated at ₹43,378 crore, equivalent to about 20% of total inward remittances from labour migrants.

Reverse remittance

Most students migrate through self-financing or education loans, often mortgaging family property, with the hope of better employment and higher wages that would repay debts and enable higher living standards. However, for many, this journey ends in debt, underemployment or forced return, a phenomenon that economists describe as reverse remittances, where Indian households subsidise foreign economies.

Foreign students contribute significantly to host economies. In Canada, international students contributed about $30.9 billion to GDP in 2022, supporting over 3,61,000 jobs. In 2023, Canada hosted over 4,27,000 Indian students, which is roughly 45% of international enrolments. In the U.S., roughly 4,00,000 Indian students, in 2024, spent an estimated $7 billion-$8 billion annually on tuition, housing and living costs, sustaining universities and local economies.

Across destinations, students shoulder substantial financial burdens, sometimes to the tune of ₹40 lakh-₹50 lakh, to finance studies abroad. Rising rents, restricted working hours, and visa caps exacerbate financial and mental strains. Unable to find skilled work, many take up low-wage unskilled jobs, often juggling multiple part-time jobs, sometimes undocumented, to work longer hours, and facing exploitation. Restrictive visa rules, limited post-study employment options and a lack of placement support from low-ranked colleges exacerbate this downward mobility. For instance, until 2024, the U.K. allowed students to convert student visas into care visas, offering a survival route in a tight job market, but this pathway has since become impossible due to new restrictions.

The local context

This outflow of students needs to be understood within the domestic context that is driving it. Is it the perceived lack of quality in domestic institutions or an inability to find well-paid domestic employment? With foreign universities establishing offshore campuses in Dubai, Singapore, and other destinations offering western degrees at lower costs, it is telling that Indian students rarely choose them. The reason is more structural. For many, studying in OECD countries is not only about education but about permanent residency, social mobility and an escape from a third world identity.

Ironically, this wave of student migration has also created a new form of cheap labour for OECD countries, akin to Gulf labour migration except that it is now accompanied by reverse remittances often financed through savings and debt.

This rapid expansion of Indian student migration exposes deep systemic contradictions between aspiration and outcome, and between opportunity and exploitation, resulting in a phenomenon that can be described as brain waste. It calls for stronger regulation of education agents, pre-departure counselling, and bilateral frameworks to ensure institutional accountability abroad.

The rapid expansion of Indian student migration points to contradictions between aspiration and outcome, and opportunity and exploitation

MILLENNIUM POST (P-15), 18 DECEMBER 2025

Power: The New Gold in Age of AI

DR SANKU BOSE

If we look at human history through the ages, the instruments of power have been different. Civilisations first measured power in land and grain, then in gold, the most trusted store of value for centuries, perhaps even now! Empires rose and fell on their ability to hoard it, mint it, and defend it. As trade expanded and industrialisation took hold, oil replaced gold as the world's most strategic currency. Whoever controlled oil fields, shipping lanes, and refineries controlled growth, warfare, and diplomacy. In the late twentieth century, another currency quietly emerged—data. Nations and corporations that mastered data flows, networks, and platforms gained unprecedented influence over markets, narratives, and behaviour.

Today, as artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes economies and societies, a new and far more elemental currency is asserting itself. Power, quite literally electricity, and the water required to sustain cooling systems at data centres are becoming the decisive arbiters of global advantage.

What most of us do not realize is that AI is not just software; it is infrastructure. Training large language models, running inference at scale, and supporting always-on digital intelligence requires enormous computational capacity. That capacity, in turn, consumes staggering amounts of electricity. A single hyperscale data centre can draw as much power as a medium-sized city. According to industry estimates, global data centre electricity consumption could double by the end of this decade, potentially accounting for over 7–10 percent of total electricity demand in some advanced economies. In this world, access to cheap, reliable, and scalable power is no longer the "utility", it is a strategic weapon.

The geopolitical implications are already visible. The United States has surged ahead in the AI race not only because of its research capabilities and technology dominance but because of its ability to rapidly build massive data centres backed by relatively stable power grids and abundant capital. States like Virginia and Texas have become global data centre hubs, offering tax incentives, land, and energy access. Meanwhile, China has taken a distinctly state-driven approach, aligning AI expansion with long-term power planning. It is experimenting with data centres located near hydroelectric dams and even submerged or river-adjacent facilities that use natural water flows for cooling, dramatically reducing energy costs. These innovations are strategic moves in a geopolitical long game that has only just begun!

Smaller nations, too, are finding their niche by recognising that power is the new leverage. The Nordic countries—Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland—have positioned themselves as attractive destinations for data centres by offering abundant renewable energy, cool climates that reduce cooling needs, and political stability. Iceland, in particular, runs much of its data infrastructure on geothermal and hydroelectric power, turning natural geography into geopolitical relevance. In the Middle East, oil-rich nations are attempting a remarkable pivot: converting fossil fuel wealth into AI infrastructure, with massive investments in solar power, nuclear energy, and next-generation grids to support data sovereignty and technological independence.

Yet electricity alone is not enough. Water is equally fundamental in the AI dominance game. Data centres require vast quantities of water for cooling, often competing with agriculture and human consumption. As climate change intensifies water stress across regions, this competition will become sharper. Countries that can secure sustainable water sources—through rivers, desalination, recycling, or advanced cooling technologies—will gain a decisive edge. This is why innovations such as liquid immersion cooling, underwater data centres, and closed-loop water systems are attracting intense interest. In the AI era, the ability to cool a server efficiently may matter just as much as the brilliance of the algorithm running on it!

An interesting consequence of this transition is the return of core engineering disciplines to prominence. For years, electrical, power electronics, mechanical, and thermal engineers were pushed to the margins as software took centre stage. Today, they are indispensable again. AI infrastructure systems survive on power stability, efficient conversion, and heat management—areas where foundational engineering expertise matters most.

INDIA HAS TALENT, DATA SCALE, AND A RAPIDLY GROWING DIGITAL ECONOMY, BUT POWER AVAILABILITY, GRID RELIABILITY, AND WATER STRESS COULD CONSTRAIN ITS AI AMBITIONS IF NOT ADDRESSED PROACTIVELY

For countries like India, this new dynamic presents both a challenge and an opportunity. India has talent, data scale, and a rapidly growing digital economy, but power availability, grid reliability, and water stress could constrain its AI ambitions if not addressed proactively. At the same time, India's expanding renewable energy capacity, improving transmission infrastructure, and strategic geography offer the potential to become a global AI infrastructure hub—if policy, planning, and execution align. The lesson from history is clear: nations that recognise a new currency early and build institutions around it tend to shape the rules of the game.

In that sense, the AI revolution is bringing us full circle—back to the fundamentals of energy, resources, and stewardship. Power is once again the ultimate currency. The future may not belong to those who write the smartest code, but to those who can keep the machines that write it alive!

The author is the Vice-Chancellor of Sister Nivedita University and Group CEO, Techno India Group. A visionary leader, he is shaping future-ready institutions and inspiring students to lead with purpose

Stressed teachers, anxious children: A school system under growing strain

HIMADRI SEKHAR DE

Walk into any school today and beneath the familiar buzz, you will sense something deeper — a collective emotional fatigue. It isn't only students who appear overwhelmed. Parents, teachers, and even school systems are carrying levels of stress that were unheard of a generation ago. What we are witnessing is not scattered anxiety; it is an ecosystem under strain, and children are absorbing the heaviest weight.

Teachers: Overworked and Emotionally Exhausted

Teaching has always been demanding, but today's teachers face pressures far beyond academic responsibilities. Compliance requirements, documentation loads, online updates, supervisory tasks, and activity coordination have expanded their roles dramatically. Most teachers were trained in pedagogy, not bureaucratic administration. This mismatch leaves them anxious, fatigued, and often disillusioned.

Yet behind their professional roles lie private burdens — financial worries, family issues, caregiving responsibilities, and personal emotional struggles. When a teacher walks into a classroom depleted, the environment inevitably absorbs that energy. As one teacher recently put it, "We are expected to stay calm for our students even when we don't have a moment to breathe ourselves."

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A stressed teacher cannot consistently model serenity or resilience for young minds. Their nervous system becomes the emotional climate of the classroom.

Parents: Pressured, Guilty, and Overwhelmed

If teachers are stretched at school, parents are stretched at home. Rising living costs, job instability, health concerns, the demands of nuclear families, and constant comparison through social media have placed parents under unrelenting pressure. Even well-intentioned parents often operate with guilt and anxiety they cannot fully name.

Children absorb this long before they understand it. A home tinged with emotional strain quietly becomes an extension of the stress a child experiences at school.

The question then becomes unavoidable: when both teachers and parents are struggling, who is holding the child?

Children: Navigating a High-Pressure World

Today's students live in an environment radically different from anything previous generations experienced. Academic expectations are higher. Social comparisons are constant. Online personas create pressure to appear perfect. Opportunities are vast, but so are the fears of failing, lagging behind, or being judged.

This emotional landscape is intensified by digital exposure. Several international reviews over the past decade show that higher smartphone and social media use among adolescents correlates with elevated risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thinking — especially when use becomes compulsive.

Yet digital factors are only one strand in a larger web of stress, emotional overload, and unmet developmental needs.

Increasingly frequent reports of student self-harm and suicide are tragic reflections of an environment that overwhelms children with pressures they are developmentally ill-equipped to manage. No counselling session can offset a home or school environment saturated with anxiety.

The Flawed Argument: "We Also Faced Stress"

Adults often respond to young people's struggles by saying, "We also had stress growing up." But the comparison is fundamentally flawed.

The 1980s and 1990s had no smartphones, no real-time comparison, no algorithmic pressure, no hyper-competition, no constant academic evaluation, and vastly less information overload. Children today face psychological inputs at an intensity and speed that older generations simply did not encounter.

The world has changed. Stress has multiplied. The ecosystem around a child is now immeasurably heavier.

Why Fixing the Child Alone Never Works

Children do not exist in isolation. Their mental health is shaped by the emotional stability of the adults around them. When teachers are overburdened and parents overwhelmed, children inhabit a world that mirrors this instability. This is why one-off workshops, short counselling sessions, or isolated interventions often fail.

Real, lasting change requires strengthening the ecosystem — the adults, the systems, the expectations — not just the child.

The Way Forward: Healing the Whole Ecosystem

A healthier educational environment demands balanced reform across three fronts:

In Schools:

Compliance must not overshadow pedagogy. Teachers need reasonable expectations, emotional support, and training in managing the psychological complexities of modern classrooms.

At Home:

Parents need guidance to reduce emotional spillover, manage stress, and communicate in developmentally healthy ways. A calm home becomes a psychological buffer for children.

For Children:

Well-being must be experienced, not only taught. Consistency between what adults teach and how they behave is crucial.

As one counsellor said, "You cannot plant seeds of well-being in soil that is constantly trembling."

A Possible Future

The crisis is real, but it is reversible. When we recognise that children's mental health reflects the emotional health of the adults around them, the path ahead becomes clearer. If we nurture teachers, support parents, and build balanced school systems, children will naturally experience greater security, confidence, and joy.

A mentally healthy child is not created in isolation — they are shaped by the ecosystem they grow in. Heal the ecosystem, and you heal the child.

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Higher education: A bold blueprint for Viksit Bharat

MANOJ TIWARI

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 marks a significant milestone in India's higher education reform journey. Rooted in the constitutional mandate under Entry 66 of the Union List and aligned with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, the Bill lays a strong foundation for coordinated, transparent, and globally benchmarked regulation of higher education. The proposed framework is both timely and progressive, with the potential to substantially strengthen academic excellence, institutional autonomy, and national capacity-building across the higher education ecosystem.

India's higher education landscape has witnessed unprecedented growth over the past decades, with more than a thousand universities and tens of thousands of higher educational institutions serving over four crore students. While this expansion has enhanced access, it has also resulted in regulatory fragmentation and overlapping compliance requirements due to the existence of multiple statutory bodies.

The proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA), as an apex umbrella institution, seeks to streamline this landscape by consolidating standard-setting, accreditation, and regulation under a unified, technology-driven framework. For institutions of higher learning, this rationalisation is a welcome step towards reducing procedural redundancies and enabling greater focus on teaching, research, and innovation.

The Bill's emphasis on a "light but tight" regulatory architecture, as envisioned by NEP 2020, resonates strongly with the broader higher education sector's commitment to academic integrity, transparency, and innovation. By shifting the regulatory focus from prescriptive control to outcomes-based oversight, supported by public self-disclosure, the proposed framework promotes trust-based governance while ensuring accountability. The move towards faceless, technology-enabled single-window systems is particularly significant, as it promises efficiency, objectivity, and reduced administrative burden for well-performing institutions.

Importantly, the Bill explicitly safeguards the existing autonomy of Institutions of National Importance, while simultaneously strengthening the overall regulatory environment for universities and other higher educational institutions. The proposed Standards Council, Regulatory Council, and Accreditation Council-operating independently within their respective domains-create a robust checks-and-balances mechanism that upholds academic standards while encouraging institutional differentiation and innovation.

From a strategic standpoint, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill also complements the vision of institutions of higher learning to foster interdisciplinary education, research-driven teaching, and industry-relevant skill development.

The Bill's focus on global best practices, flexible academic structures, and continuous reskilling directly supports efforts across the higher education sector to prepare future-ready graduates capable of addressing complex economic, technological, and societal challenges. Enhanced transparency, student feedback-driven evaluation, and a strong grievance redressal mechanism further contribute to building a learner-centric ecosystem.

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Equally significant is the Bill's emphasis on youth empowerment and Atmanirbharta in higher education. By enabling institutions to innovate responsibly and align academic offerings with national development priorities, the proposed framework strengthens the talent pipeline essential for India's economic and social transformation. The Bill provides an enabling environment for institutions of higher learning to deepen their contributions to nation-building and the broader vision of Viksit Bharat.

In conclusion, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 represents a forward-looking reform that balances autonomy with accountability, innovation with integrity, and growth with quality. The higher education community views this legislation as a constructive step towards creating a coherent, globally competitive, and future-ready higher education system. Institutions of higher learning remain committed to working within this evolving framework to uphold excellence, nurture talent, and contribute meaningfully to India's journey towards a developed and self-reliant nation.

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INDIAN EXPRESS (P-10), 19 DECEMBER 2025

The teacher's red pen should open minds, not shut doors

ROOPALI SINHA

AMONG THE many things that distinguish a teacher, one is the red pen. Teachers wield it as a form of authority; sometimes, as an expression of affection, too. We have all experienced it in our school life, living under its sway, where a single tick or cross could make or unmake our day. Teachers, on their part, become so accustomed to this red pen that they are prone to approving or rejecting things even in their dreams. Language teachers like us tend to correct spellings and grammar anywhere and everywhere — whether in notebooks, writings on walls, or on billboards. They know the invisible power this pen carries. Perhaps, at the beginning of their careers, there is a tinge of nervousness while using it, but with experience, it becomes second nature.

Typically, this red pen does not invite dialogue or dissent. It delivers a final verdict, drawing a sharp line between right and wrong. In this role, teachers almost turn into "soldiers of the pen" ("*qalam ke sipahi*", with apologies to the great Hindi writer Premchand). The authority of the red pen is deeply seductive, and many aspire to it. Gradually, the red pen in a teacher's hand expands into an invisible red pen in society's hand. Those with power or resources begin to use it, sometimes openly, sometimes silently, marking their approval or disapproval of people, ideas, and actions. Its ink never runs dry, and it gets handed down from one generation to the next.

Sir Francis Bacon's famous assertion that "knowledge is power", later examined more rigorously by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, continues to hold true. Knowledge has been treated as a source of power. Large sections of society were denied access to it, deliberately or otherwise, creating rigid hierarchies. This uneven distribution ensured that knowledge did not merely enlighten but also governed. But alongside this, there has also always existed a smaller but stronger tradition of teachers who sought to replace power with values such as equality, curiosity, scientific thinking, social awareness, freedom, dignity, and confidence. They consciously chose to see themselves as facilitators rather than teachers in the conventional sense.

Today, with academia on the cusp of change, it is this tradition that we must carry forward — one that creates an equal and respectful relationship between the learner and the teacher, that encourages questions and engagement

Today, with academia on the cusp of change, it is this tradition that we must carry forward — one that creates an equal and respectful relationship between the learner and the teacher, that encourages questions and engagement

Today, with academia on the cusp of change, it is this tradition that we must carry forward — one that creates an equal and respectful relationship between the learner and the teacher, that encourages questions and engagement. This approach does not diminish respect for teachers; in fact, it deepens it. After all, which teachers do we remember with love and gratitude?

Teachers' role has always been important and will remain so. In fact, today it is more critical than ever. When entire generations are being trained to walk with their eyes closed, to not disrupt, teachers must take the responsibility of helping them see the light. The teacher's red pen should not shut doors or gatekeep. Instead, it should guide students to open their minds — to new possibilities, new ways of discovering themselves and the world.

The writer is a Delhi-based teacher

INDIAN EXPRESS (P-11), 19 DECEMBER 2025

AI start-ups need copyright backing

MEGHNA BAL

ON DECEMBER 8, the Generative Artificial Intelligence and Copyright Committee, formed within the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, released a paper that addresses the debate surrounding AI training data and copyright. Some rights holders — news publishers, comedians and authors — argue that training AI on their works without compensation is unlawful. AI companies counter that training does not involve reproducing or memorising protected works, only learning unprotected patterns and statistical relationships. They argue that such use is transformative, a recognised defence in India and abroad. The clash between these camps has sparked lawsuits around the world, including in India.

To resolve this discord, the committee proposes that every AI model trained on copyrighted material would pay a flat rate decided by a government-appointed committee. The body responsible for collecting and disbursing these fees would be a consortium of collective management organisations (CMOs), the Copyright Royalties Collective for AI Training. This structure is marketed as a win for all: AI developers gain legal certainty and "automatic access to training data", and creators get guaranteed income. Yet these claims collapse under scrutiny.

First, the solution centralises power in CMOs. These institutions were designed to make licensing efficient and as a vehicle to strengthen creators' bargaining power. However, in the past, Indian CMOs have extorted users of works for large sums of money without being transparent about the rights they held, and fleeced artists of royalties. Though the Copyright Act was amended in 2012 to check such abuses, CMOs, while no longer statutorily empowered to file claims on behalf of creators, continued to do so.

Second, CMOs represent only a fraction of India's creative landscape. Numerous artists — emerging creators, independent authors, practitioners of traditional and folk arts, and entire categories of works for which CMOs do not exist — are not represented by them. For such artists, the Committee suggests the creation of a welfare fund. That sounds good in theory, but such ideas often falter in execution. For instance, a recent report indicated that a Labour Welfare Fund under the Delhi Welfare Board held Rs 5,200 crore in unspent funds. The paper suggests that royalty distribution would prioritise the most popular works, raising serious concerns about whether lesser-known creators would get any meaningful benefit.

Third, the report presents the dynamic between AI companies and creators as a zero-sum game, ignoring the fact that many in the creative community have embraced AI systems. A blanket licensing regime would raise the cost of accessing generative AI, as the fees would be passed on to users, which would negatively impact creators — indeed all users of generative AI.

Fourth, the report's emphasis on global revenue punishes scale and multinational presence for AI start-ups. It's unclear if they would be exempt from royalty requirements if their business were entirely in India.

The AI Copyright Committee's blanket licensing proposal casts a pall on the upcoming AI summit, where India is playing host while seeking to position itself as a leader in AI innovation. Our conversations with entrepreneurs make it clear they cannot afford licensing costs or the expenses of hiring legal teams to manage additional compliance burdens. Faced with these costs, they will either refrain from entering the space or move to jurisdictions with friendlier laws.

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PIONEER (P-8), 19 DECEMBER 2025

How Indian school education is quietly collapsing

SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

If irony ever needed a permanent address, it would find one not in a grand boulevard or a government bungalow, but in an Indian school staff room. It would sit between a fraying attendance register and a biometric machine that fails to recognise the fingerprints that keep the system alive. In a country that worships knowledge and calls teachers nation-builders, the Indian schoolteacher has been quietly reinvented as the world's most expensive clerk.

Why burden a trained educator with the inconvenience of teaching when they can be "productively" deployed filling forms, feeding portals, chasing signatures, uploading data, supervising mid-day meals, managing elections and conducting surveys? As the old proverb reminds us, when the axe forgets, the tree remembers-and Indian teachers remember everything.

There was a time when a teacher's professional toolkit consisted of chalk, books and an enquiring mind. Today, it resembles that of a junior bureaucrat: spreadsheets, dashboards, compliance formats, OTPs and passwords that expire with urgency. Teachers are expected to multitask with the efficiency of corporate executives and the docility of clerical staff, while being compensated and respected like replaceable accessories. This is not negligence; it is design. We entrust teachers with shaping future citizens, yet deny them the time, autonomy and dignity required to engage meaningfully with students.

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Unsurprisingly, the classroom has suffered a quiet demotion. Once a space of dialogue and discovery, it is now an interruption in a day of administrative survival. Teachers spend more time validating data than nurturing ideas, more time formatting reports than forming values. From census duty to election deployment, teachers have become the state's instrument. When you pay a professional salary for clerical obedience, you have not reformed education; you have built an overqualified filing cabinet.

What turns this farce into tragedy is the sermon that accompanies it. Teachers are repeatedly reminded that theirs is a "noble profession", a phrase deployed whenever salaries stagnate and workloads swell. Nobility here functions less as honour and more as anaesthesia. But nobility does not pay EMIs, cure burnout or conjure lesson plans after hours of drudgery.

Predictably, when students falter, accountability travels in one direction. Workshops proliferate and inspections intensify, while the structural reality remains untouched. You cannot expect pedagogical miracles from professionals fragmented across clerical obligations.

And still, teachers endure. They innovate in overcrowded classrooms, mentor beyond official hours and shoulder emotional labour no portal can upload. They persist not because the system is kind, but because conscience refuses surrender.

The solution is simple. Clerical work must be done by clerks. Technology must reduce workload, not multiply it. Policymakers must step into classrooms before drafting reforms. Most of all, teachers must be trusted to teach. For if education is truly the nation's backbone, its teachers cannot remain its exploited administrative resource. When the lamp is forced to count shadows instead of spreading light, darkness becomes policy.

The writer is an educator

PIONEER (P-8), 19 DECEMBER 2025

Editor's TAKE

Are Board reforms really reducing stress?

We must realise that the burden on children comes not just from the frequency of examinations, but from the way their worth is measured by their scores

Examinations have always been stressful. Most students undergo this annual exercise to prove their mettle. Over the years, this stress has only increased as peer pressure, parental expectations, and the cost of studies have increased manifold. Add to this the competitive job market, where everyone has to excel to carve a niche for himself or herself. Keeping this in mind, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has come out with a plan that is designed to take some pressure off students. As CBSE prepares to roll out its two-cycle Class X board examination system from 2026, it is being seen as a welcome step, yet some challenges and concerns have also emerged.

The new system of examination-written exams twice a year, scope for improvement, fewer life-defining moments compressed into a single test window-sounds progressive. On the ground, however, where mental health helplines are already overflowing during exam season, the big question being asked is whether it will mitigate pressure or just distribute it over a period of time.The new system mandates two written examination cycles, with the first exam compulsory. Students may opt to reappear in up to three subjects in the second cycle for improvement. Practical and internal assessments, crucially, will be conducted only once across the academic year. A poor performance in practicals can result in failure, regardless of high scores in theory. Subjects with a higher practical weightage will not even offer a second written exam. This is where the reform begins to look rather shaky. While CBSE's intent is to reduce the "one-shot" anxiety of board exams, the one-time practical assessment reinstates that very pressure through the back door.Instead of dispersing stress, it transfers it-into labs, viva voce, and internal evaluations that are often opaque and uneven across schools. For students in under-resourced institutions, or those battling anxiety, illness, a single bad practical day can undo an entire year's effort. Schools are already conducting pre-boards, revisions, and intensive practical drills. Add to this the fact that missing several subjects in the first cycle disqualifies a student from the second- flexibility exists, but in a limited way. Meanwhile, India's adolescent mental health crisis is growing. Counselling helplines report spikes during board months; cases of burnout, panic attacks, and clinical anxiety are now common at ever-younger ages.

In such a climate, exam reforms cannot operate in isolation from mental health infrastructure. Structural change without emotional support becomes cosmetic. So, what can mitigate the pressure? First, boards must match exam reforms with robust, visible mental health support-trained counsellors in schools, clear referral pathways, and de-stigmatised access to help. Secondly, practical assessments need greater standardisation and transparency to ensure fairness across regions and schools. Students must also understand that the two-cycle system is not for avoidance of exams. There is a need to change mindsets as well. Parents do more harm than good when they pressure their children to perform well. Reforms can change exam patterns, but they cannot, by themselves, unburden childhood.

STATESMAN (P-6), 19 DECEMBER 2025

Beyond Macaulay

Will reducing the hegemony of English-medium schooling marginalise India globally? Such a fear ignores the experience of many high-performing education systems. Schooling in their own languages has not stopped Japan, South Korea, Germany and France from building advanced economies. Even if some of their universities have English-medium programmes, they supplement, not replace, national-language instruction. Their and many other countries' experiences suggest that better engineers, scientists, or managers are not due to making English the classroom language

Recently, there has been a public debate around the "Macaulay mindset". English again has found a central place in India's education discourse. Some argue that criticising Macaulay's mindset is nothing but displaying an adversarial stance towards English itself. Others believe that Indians are increasingly using English to communicate with one another nowadays. They support India not shifting away from English-medium schooling to prevent India from isolating itself from modernity. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, however, presents a more coherent multilingual policy framework. Cognitive science and comparative policy findings recognise this multilingual approach as socio-culturally grounded, scientifically sound and economically prudent. Let us examine how.

UNESCO has often indicated that instruction through the mother tongue is "a key factor for inclusion and quality learning", especially in the early years. Research findings from RTI International also conclude that the attainment of comprehensive linguistic and cognitive development in a child is possible when the child becomes literate in their mother tongue first. Such research findings are in consistent with NEP 2020's recommendation that "wherever possible" the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue or local language.

Early education, therefore, should be in the language the child acquires in the home environment and thinks, dreams, and asks questions. It is natural that when a child learns foundational concepts in her own language, her brain does not have to incur additional cognitive load on decoding grammar and can focus more on conceptual understanding.

NEP 2020's model recommends that begin with the home language for foundational learning, gradually add another Indian language, and in later years teach English as a subject. This method aligns with current recommendations in cognitive science. There are empirically measurable cognitive benefits that the bilingual and multilingual brains exhibit. Viorica Marian, a professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Northwestern University in the USA, and her colleagues have found that, compared to monolinguals, bilingual individuals often exhibit better attention control and task-switching abilities. Additionally, recent studies suggest that multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, creativity, and social cognition.

Will reducing the hegemony of English-medium schooling marginalise India globally? Such a fear ignores the experience of many high-performing education systems. Schooling in their own languages has not stopped Japan, South Korea, Germany and France from building advanced economies. Even if some of their universities have English-medium programmes, they supplement, not replace, national-language instruction. Their and many other countries' experiences suggest that better engineers, scientists, or managers are not due to making English the classroom language. What matters more is conceptual clarity, which research suggests comes through learning in a familiar language. What is the rationale to assume that Indians can acquire global competitiveness only through English-medium schooling?

A language is not just a communication tool. Languages are a repository of memory, cultural creativity, and shared experiences. Multilingualism is "both a fundamental human characteristic and an essential educational approach", according to the most recent UNESCO guidance on multilingual education. For a civilisational nation like India, where people use multiple languages, this recognition is significant. When the Macaulay mindset pushes English as the primary marker of aspiration, are they not transmitting sociocultural signals to our young that success belongs to those who move away from their own languages? From their own heritage? This signalling will weaken their cultural confidence.

The Macaulay mindset's intended goal appears to be creating a linguistic hierarchy by making it seem as if knowledge expressed in Manipuri, Tamil, or Marathi is less modern than that described in English. NEP 2020's emphasis on the Indian language medium attempts to reverse this hierarchy without creating a new one. It asks us why universities and professional institutions cannot offer high-quality programmes in Indian languages while continuing to teach English as any other foreign language. In such a system, a student can read Shakespeare and Kalidasa, Plato and the Upanishads, as part of a wider civilizational dialogue available in multiple languages.

Are there equity implications of language choice? Data from OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that students underperform when they face a language barrier compared to peers with similar abilities. In India, the language barrier falls most disproportionately on rural students and first-generation learners. They usually learn English as a subject while their home and local environment language is different. The only instrument for achieving educational equity is therefore mother-tongue-based multilingual education. When we expand access to higher education in Indian languages, knowledge of English becomes a valuable skill, rather than a gatekeeping mechanism of exclusion.

M JAGADESH KUMAR

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Will multilingual education undermine India's global competitiveness? Fortunately, the empirical evidence suggests the contrary and is reassuring. The European Commission observed that learners' memory, attention, and problem-solving skills are positively impacted by multilingual education. Such an education also helps societies preserve their linguistic heritage. Yale researchers also emphasise that multilingualism enhances cognitive capacities and cultural awareness.

Aren't cognitive flexibility, socio-emotional competence, and intercultural communication the very skills the global knowledge economy requires? For India, the adoption of multilingual education will lead to deeper conceptual learning and stronger foundational literacy and numeracy skills. If that happens, we can then bring in more young people in STEM and vocational fields regardless of their first language. Why should a future software engineer who learns basic coding logic in Tamil and later reads documentation in English be at any inherent disadvantage? Research findings have repeatedly confirmed that a robust conceptual foundation in the mother tongue often makes learning another language easier. NEP 2020's stress on "conceptual understanding rather than rote learning" aligns well with this insight.

An inherent advantage India has is that its Gen Z is already multilingual. In their everyday life, millions of young Indians use their mother tongue at home and use a different language at work. On social media and podcasts, many Indian languages are widely used. For this generation, speaking more than one Indian language is a normative component of identity.

Surprisingly, and not commonly discussed in these debates, are the cognitive-health benefits of multilingual capability. Research shows that being multilingual slows cognitive ageing and builds greater resilience against decline. Multilingualism is, in fact, a form of intellectual and even neurocognitive capital.

A policy question, therefore, arises. Should India structure its education system around a single language equating it to modernity, or should it design an ecosystem in which each child's full linguistic repertoire becomes an asset? NEP 2020 takes the second route. It treats every Indian language as a carrier of knowledge and imagination, while positioning English as one of the foreign language skills rather than the only road to success.

Even if the benefits of multilingual education are well understood, we need to adopt a strategic implementation framework for its successful implementation. The first task is to have a well-designed learning material development, teacher training, and digital content in Indian languages that match the quality available in English. Therefore, we must ensure significant, coordinated investments in textbook writing in Indian languages, translation, terminology standardisation, open educational resources and teacher capacity-building.

The second task is to mitigate any possible disparities between states or boards that rapidly adopt high-quality multilingual education and those that lag. To avoid this, national and state-level bodies will need to establish harmonised standards, interoperable platforms, and continuous monitoring of learning outcomes across languages. The third task is to continuously promote awareness about the benefits of mother tongue and multilingual education among students, parents and institutions. Finally, we must deconstruct the colonial framework that equates English with intelligence and modernity.

The ongoing discussion about English in India should evolve into an informed policy dialogue about how languages serve learners, rather than devolving into a language-based contestation. As India is determined to move away from Macaulay's legacy, a more meaningful question we should ask is: how can we ensure our children emerge as competent multilingual learners anchored in their cultural contexts yet globally prepared? Answering that question with evidence and imagination will honour not only the spirit of NEP 2020 but also the aspirations of young Indians.

ECONOMICS TIMES (P-4), 20 DECEMBER 2025

AI Copyright, Dead on Arrival?

Prashant Reddy T

In the West, AI developers and content owners are engaged in litigation and negotiations over the use of copyrighted works for training AI programs. In India, a GoI-constituted expert committee has proposed a regulation model that appears to be inspired by ghosts of the licence raj regime.

The proposed approach departs from that adopted in most jurisdictions, where copyright laws have been tweaked through narrow statutory exceptions that permit the use of copyrighted content for AI training, provided developers have 'lawful access' to it. None of these international frameworks resemble the heavy-handed model being contemplated by India. There are three components to the Indian committee's proposal:

❶ **Pay and use** Blanket permission for AI developers to use copyrighted content for no upfront fee to train their AI programs, provided they have 'lawful access' to the content. Singapore and Japan allow for similar access to copyrighted content, but don't require any payment to the copyright owner. India will be the first jurisdiction to require AI developers to pay copyright owners for using content for AI training, although this obligation kicks in only upon commercialisation.

In theory, the 'lawful access' requirement makes it possible for copyright owners to sidestep Indian law. For example, Western academic databases, which contain the most valuable copyrighted content required by most AI developers, typically require users to agree that the licensing agreement governing access to the database will be subject to foreign laws.

Breach of those licensing requirements will result in arbitration in foreign jurisdictions. In such a scenario, Indian law makes no difference to foreign copyright owners, and Indian AI developers will have to comply with foreign law. Indian copyright owners, who can't escape Indian law, can still control who gets 'lawful access' to their content. It's safe to presume most will now require AI developers to pay hefty advance payments before they can get 'lawful access'.

❷ **Revenue sharing** The proposed model requires AI developers to share a percentage of their global revenues once they successfully commercialise AI products trained on copyrighted content. The rate would be set by a GoI-controlled committee.

Caught in a web

The report justifies this intervention to fix rates on the grounds that GoI fixes prices of essential items. That analogy misses the fact that copyright has been considered by Indian courts to be akin to private property. Compensation payable for forceful acquisition of property has traditionally been handled by independent judges.

Even under Copyright Act, Madras High Court in 2016 struck down provisions giving the government control over appointments to the copyright board — responsible for setting royalties in compulsory licensing — citing a violation of the separation of powers. Determining royalties for accessing copyrighted content without the owner's permission is a judicial function, and any GoI attempt to intervene would likely be unconstitutional.

❸ **Statutory body** The committee proposes creating a statutory body, Copyright Royalties Collective for AI Training (CRCAT), to be composed solely of collective management organisations (CMOs) representing copyright owners.

CRCAT is to collect royalties from AI developers at rates fixed by the committee and then distribute them to copyright owners through CMOs, as per disclosures made by the AI industry about the content they used in the training process. Most likely, the most well-organised CMOs will control operations of CRCAT, and probably win disputes on royalty sharing. Authors of books and journals who lack well-organised CMOs could end up being shortchanged.

The proposed model is far too complex for a state that struggles to regulate traffic on its roads. Simply put, India lacks the administrative capacity to enforce it effectively.

The committee's only accomplishment has been to block industry demands, like those from Nasscom, to adopt exceptions similar to the EU, Japan, Britain and Singapore. This is unsurprising, given DPIIT's long-standing bias toward copyright owners since taking over India's copyright policy from the education ministry, which had to balance copyright rules with the realities of education and research budgets.

So where does this 'dead on arrival' proposal leave India's AI developers? Like their Western counterparts, many are likely training AI on pirated content from databases such as SciHub and LibGen, which host vast collections of academic papers, books and journals. Detecting and suing developers for using this content is difficult, especially in India, where copyright cases — even against platforms like SciHub — can drag on for years. India's sclerotic courts are the best bet for Indian AI developers in their negotiations with copyright owners.

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HINDUSTAN TIMES (P-14), 20 DECEMBER 2025

AI and copyright: Need a nuanced approach

The department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT)'s working paper on generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and copyright is framed as a careful balancing act — between innovation and creator rights, access and compensation. But its starting premise merits a closer look. The paper assumes that the rapid and ubiquitous deployment of AI systems is not only inevitable, but inherently desirable. Such an approach could end up determining whose interests are treated as foundational and whose are treated as negotiable.

Much of today's responsible AI discourse begins with a more basic question: Is AI actually necessary to transform every sector and ecosystem? While AI can certainly deliver efficiencies, the DPIIT paper does not engage with this threshold inquiry. Instead, it treats large-scale AI deployment as a given, and defines regulation's role to primarily smoothen that path. This is a policy choice, not an objective reality. When regulation is premised on the inherent desirability of a technology, safeguards tend to emerge as afterthoughts rather than first principles.

Ameen Jauhar

This orientation is especially visible in the paper's treatment of copyright. The analysis relies heavily on economic logic: Authors resist sharing their works because they are insufficiently compensated, and remuneration is therefore the solution. Compensation matters, but copyright law has never been only about money. Authors also enjoy moral rights, including the right to control how their works are used. Creators frequently withhold content not because of inadequate payment, but because they object to particular forms of reuse — especially in political, cultural, or deeply personal contexts. Reducing copyright to a royalty pipeline sidelines authorial autonomy altogether.

Then there is another questionable technical assumption that more data automatically leads to better AI systems. Its emphasis on maximising access to "all data" suggests that problems such as bias and hallucination are merely matters of scale. They are not. Data divorced from context or purpose — no matter how voluminous — can amplify error and reinforce bias. The experience with LLMs like ChatGPT, trained on vast swathes of the internet, illustrates this clearly. By contrast, narrower, curated datasets can often deliver more reliable and contextual outputs. Copyright policy should, therefore, focus not just on data quantity, but on data quality and relevance.

The proposed Copyright Rights Collective for AI Training (CRCAT) also raises concern. It leaves individual authors with little bargaining power, binding them to collectively negotiated rates without meaningful opt-out options. Unlike traditional collective licensing systems, creators here cannot withdraw and pursue independent negotiations. Rate-setting under a government-controlled process risks entrenching a single institutional perspective, while judicial review offers limited practical comfort given the cost and delay involved.

None of this is an argument against AI innovation. The real question is how India balances efficiency with legitimacy, and scale with consent, at a time when the downstream consequences of generative AI remain uncertain. Legitimacy in emerging technology ecosystems is built not only through centralisation, but through trust. A framework that accommodates consent, differentiation, and dialogue may move more slowly, but it is better equipped to adapt as AI capabilities and social expectations evolve.

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TRIBUNE, (P-14), 20 DECEMBER 2025

What after UGC, AICTE are repealed

AKSHEEV THAKUR

THE Modi Government says the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, aims to overhaul India's higher education regulatory framework. Introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 15, it was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) after the Opposition raised several objections. The 31-member joint panel will submit its report by the last day of the first part of the Budget Session 2026.

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the Bill would make higher education more robust, research-oriented and flexible. Chapter 18 of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, he added, calls for a fundamental transformation of the regulatory system.

REGULATORY APPROVALS

At present, higher educational institutions (HEIs) are required to take multiple approvals by different regulatory bodies. A simplified regulatory system would end this, the government said.

The proposed Bill seeks a unified and streamlined regulatory architecture. "The entire framework will operate through technology-driven, faceless, single-window interactive systems, based on principles of public self-disclosure and trust-based regulation," the government said.

> Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan is proposed as an over-arching regulator

The Bill proposes to establish the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan as an apex body with three independent councils — the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyaman Parishad (Regulatory Council), the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad (Accreditation Council), and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad (Standards Council).

The Standards Council will be responsible for synchronisation and specifying the minimum academic standards. The Regulatory Council will ensure coordination and maintenance of these standards. The Accreditation Council will function as an independent authority.

The Regulatory Council's public portal, which mandates the disclosure of governance, financial, academic, and institutional performance data, will also serve as the foundational basis for accreditation.

ALTERED FRAMEWORK

The Adhishthan and various councils would primarily comprise eminent academicians, domain experts, and representatives from states/UTs, state HEIs, and Institutions of National Importance.

The Bill also provides for repealing the University Grants Commission (UGC) Act, 1956; the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) Act, 1987; and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Act, 1993. All HEIs under the purview of the Education Ministry, UGC, AICTE and NCTE will come under the purview of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan.

The UGC regulates non-technical institutions, the AICTE technical education and the NCTE regulates teacher education.

FUNDING SYSTEM

At present, the Centre disburses grants to Central universities through UGC (grants are released by the Education Ministry to the UGC on a quarterly basis, which further disburses to Central universities on a monthly basis). The government also disburses grants directly to Institutes of National Importance (on a monthly basis).

"Considering that the NEP 2020, envisions that funding be segregated from the Councils, the function of disbursal of grants to the Centrally-funded HEIs shall be ensured through mechanisms devised by the Education Ministry, which will be similar to or better than the existing mechanisms," officials said.

The feedback of the Regulatory Council on the institutional performance shall be a major factor for the quantum of funds to be distributed through the Education Ministry.

OPPOSITION'S OBJECTIONS

Congress MP Manish Tewari said the Bill "results in excessive centralisation of higher education and violates the constitutional distribution of legislative competence. The Bill suffers from excessive delegation of legislative power, which violates settled constitutional principles".

MPs from Tamil Nadu said the Bill goes against the federal principles. Congress MP S Jothimani objected to the nomenclature and alleged that the government was "imposing Hindi". Pradhan said the concerns will be addressed in the JPC.

DAINIK JAGRAN (P-10), 20 DECEMBER 2025

उच्च शिक्षा में सुधार की सार्थक पहल

प्रो. रसाल सिंह

उच्च शिक्षा के लिए नया एकीकृत आयोग उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों के दोहरे-तिहरे नियमन की वर्तमान व्यवस्था को सुगम बनाएगा

पिछले दिनों केंद्र सरकार ने भारतीय उच्च शिक्षा आयोग (विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग की समाप्ति) विधेयक, 2018 में आंशिक परिवर्तन करते हुए उसके कार्यान्वयन का मार्ग प्रशस्त कर दिया। 'विकसित भारत शिक्षा अधिष्ठान विधेयक, 2025' नाम से पारित नया विधेयक संयुक्त संसदीय समिति को विचारार्थ प्रेषित किया गया है। यह समूचे उच्च शिक्षा क्षेत्र का एकमात्र नियामक तंत्र होगा। हालांकि, चिकित्सा शिक्षा, फार्मेसी और विधि की शिक्षा इसके दायरे में नहीं होगी। अभी उच्च शिक्षा क्षेत्र में अनेक नियामक संस्थाएं कार्यरत हैं। उनके अपने-अपने मानदंड हैं। यूजीसी, एआइसीटीई, एनसीटीई, वास्तु परिषद, कृषि विज्ञान अनुसंधान परिषद, दूरस्थ और मुक्त शिक्षा, आनलाइन और डिजिटल शिक्षा तंत्र, आइसीएसएसआर, आइसीएआर, नैक, एनआइआरएफ जैसी एक दर्जन से अधिक नियामक संस्थाएं देश के कला, विज्ञान, व्यवसाय, अभियांत्रिकी, शिक्षा, प्रबंधन, कृषि शिक्षा आदि अनुशासनों से संबंधित उच्च शिक्षण संस्थाओं एवं शोध-संस्थानों की संबद्धता, मूल्यांकन, प्रत्यायन, रैंकिंग, वित्तपोषण और नियंत्रण आदि काम करती हैं। इन अलग-अलग नियामक संस्थाओं के अधीन उच्च शिक्षा पृथक्करण और बहुपरतीय नियंत्रण का शिकार थी।

देश भर में ऐसे अनेक उच्च शिक्षण एवं शोध-संस्थान हैं, जहां एक साथ कई प्रकार के पाठ्यक्रम पढ़ाए जाते हैं और उनसे संबंधित शोध-कार्य किया जाता है। उल्लेखनीय है कि राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति में सभी संस्थानों को क्रमशः बहु-अनुशासनिक बनाने पर जोर दिया गया है। विभिन्न पेशेवर और परंपरागत संस्थानों की आपसी दूरी और अलगाव के 'स्टील फ्रेम' की क्रमिक समाप्ति की जा रही है। नया आयोग भारत में उच्च शिक्षा को गुणवत्तापूर्ण और सर्वसुलभ बनाने के लिए उत्तरदायी होगा। इन बहु-अनुशासनिक उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों एवं शोध-संस्थानों को अलग-अलग नियामक संस्थाओं का दरवाजा खटखटाना पड़ता था। इस प्रक्रिया में ये संस्थान अनेक प्रकार की समस्याओं का सामना करते रहे हैं। कई बार इन नियामक संस्थाओं में अनियमितता एवं पक्षपातपूर्ण रवैया अपनाने का दोषारोपण भी होता रहा है। पाठ्यक्रमों के निर्माण एवं उनके कार्यान्वयन में भी ये नियामक संस्थाएं दोषमुक्त नहीं रही हैं। ये स्वायत्त नियामक संस्थाएं आपसी टकराव और अंतर्विरोध का भी शिकार रही हैं। इससे संबंधित संस्थानों को अनावश्यक अड़चन और अवरोध का सामना करना पड़ता है। इसीलिए केंद्र सरकार ने इन सभी नियामक संस्थाओं की कार्यशैली का मूल्यांकन करते हुए इन्हें एक सर्वसक्षम निकाय के अधीन लाने का निर्णय लिया है।

अवधेश राजपूत

नई व्यवस्था में विकसित भारत शिक्षा अधिष्ठान सीधे शिक्षा मंत्रालय की निगरानी में काम करेगा। यह यूजीसी एक्ट-1956, एआइसीटीई एक्ट-1987 और एनसीसीटी एक्ट-1993 का स्थान लेगा। ऐसे एकल और केंद्रीकृत निकाय की संस्तुति राष्ट्रीय ज्ञान आयोग (2009) और यशपाल समिति (2010) ने भी की थी। यह आयोग विभिन्न संस्थाओं के आपसी सामंजस्य, समन्वय और सक्रियता के अभाव और लालफीताशाही के प्रभाव की समाप्ति और जवाबदेही और पारदर्शिता और समयबद्ध कार्रवाई सुनिश्चित करेगा। चेयरमैन के अलावा इसके 12 सदस्य और होंगे। इस आयोग के विकसित भारत शिक्षा विनियमन परिषद, विकसित भारत मानक परिषद और विकसित भारत शिक्षा गुणवत्ता परिषद जैसे तीन आयाम (वर्टिकल) होंगे। ये आयाम नियमन, मान्यता और व्यावसायिक मानक निर्धारण का कार्य करेंगे। निर्धारित मानकों, प्रक्रियाओं और गुणवत्ता का अनुपालन न करने वाले संस्थानों पर 10 लाख से लेकर 2 करोड़ रुपये तक जुर्माने का भी नई व्यवस्था में प्रविधान हुआ है। यह आयोग उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों के दोहरे-तिहरे नियमन की मौजूद व्यवस्था का सरलीकरण और स्तरीकरण करेगा, ताकि शिक्षण संस्थानों के प्रबंधन में दोहरा/तिहरा हस्तक्षेप न हो। इस आयोग द्वारा उच्च शिक्षा में मानकों और गुणवत्ता के संबंध में पारदर्शी तरीके से सार्वजनिक प्रस्तुतीकरण और योग्यता आधारित निर्णय के माध्यम से विनियमन किया जाएगा।

इस आयोग को अधिगम परिणामों (लर्निंग आउटकम) पर विशेष ध्यान देने के अलावा शैक्षणिक मानकों में सुधार, संस्थानों के शैक्षणिक प्रदर्शन का मूल्यांकन, संस्थानों का परामर्श, शिक्षकों का प्रशिक्षण, अधुनातन शैक्षिक पद्धतियों और प्रौद्योगिकी के उपयोग को बढ़ावा देने आदि का काम भी करना होगा। यह आयोग संस्थानों के नियमन और संचालन के लिए अनुकूलित वातावरण बनाते हुए अधिक लचीलेपन के साथ स्वायत्तता प्रदान करेगा। इस आयोग के पास उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों में शैक्षणिक गुणवत्ता मानकों का अनुपालन सुनिश्चित करवाने तथा स्तरहीन और कागजी संस्थानों को बंद कराने की शक्ति भी होगी। इस एकीकृत और सर्वसक्षम आयोग के गठन से समय, श्रम-ऊर्जा, संसाधन और धन की भी बचत होगी। यह नई पहल बहुत सार्थक है, लेकिन यह भी समझना होगा कि शिक्षा तंत्र को सिर्फ सरकार का दायित्व न मानकर सभी हितधारकों को उसमें भागीदारी और जवाबदेही सुनिश्चित करनी होगी। नियुक्ति प्रक्रिया में गुणवत्ता और पारदर्शिता, संचालन में दूरदर्शिता और सक्षमता, आधारभूत ढांचे के निर्माण में आंशिक और आनुपातिक भागीदारी और उत्पादकता में वृद्धि करने के लिए सभी हितधारकों को अपना सर्वोत्तम योगदान देने के बारे में गंभीरतापूर्वक विचार करने की आवश्यकता है। दायित्व-विमुख और अधिकार-सचेत बौद्धिक समाज उच्च शिक्षा तंत्र न तो सरकार से प्रश्न पूछने का नैतिक साहस रखता है और न ही देश और समाज का कल्याण करने की सामर्थ्य रखता है। यह हास्यास्पद ही है कि कुछ विपक्षी और दक्षिण भारत के सांसदों ने इस अधिष्ठान के नाम पर तंज कसते हुए इसे हिंदी थोपने की कोशिश बताया है। ध्यान रहे कि यह सकारात्मक सुधारों को स्वीकारते हुए उनके बेहतर कार्यान्वयन की दिशा में संगठित प्रयास करने का समय है। अन्यथा उच्च शिक्षा तंत्र भी स्कूली शिक्षा तंत्र की गति को प्राप्त हो जाएगा।

(लेखक दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के रामानुजन कालेज में प्राचार्य हैं)
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25/10

आर्टिफिशल इंटेलिजेंस से लैस खिलौने जीत रहे बच्चों का दिल

बचपन को किधर ले जा रहा AI

उमेश चतुर्वेदी

सांस्कृतिक तौर पर भारतीयता की वापसी के दौर के बावजूद क्रिसमस की धूम कम नहीं होने जा रही। इस बार क्रिसमस पर जब बच्चे हैरतभरी उत्सुकता से गिफ्ट पैक खोलेंगे तो उन्हें ऐसे उपहार मिल सकते हैं, जो उनसे बातचीत करें, उनकी पढ़ाई में काम आएं या फिर सीखने के मोर्चे पर नए सिरे से जुटने की सीख दें। इस बार आखिर ऐसे सरप्राइज की उम्मीद क्यों है? इसका जवाब है, चीन के खिलौना निर्माताओं की सोच।

चीनी खिलौना उद्योग की धमक। चीनी खिलौना उद्योग ने साल 2025 को कृत्रिम बुद्धिमता यानी AI वर्ष घोषित कर रखा है। इसके तहत वहां ऐसे रोबॉट और टेडी बियर बन रहे हैं, जो बच्चों को सिखा सकते हैं, उनके साथ खेल सकते हैं और उन्हें कहानियां सुना सकते हैं। ध्यान रहे, वैश्विक खिलौना बाजार में चीन की भारी हिस्सेदारी है। दुनिया के 70- 80 फीसदी खिलौने चीन में ही बनते हैं और उनका दुनियाभर को निर्यात होता है। भारत के खिलौना बाजार में भी चीन की हिस्सेदारी 65 से 75 प्रतिशत तक है।

स्कूलों में चैट जीपीटी। देश के ग्रामीण इलाकों में AI का शिक्षा में सीधा उपयोग भले ही कम हो, लेकिन शहरों के तमाम स्कूलों में बच्चों को चैट जीपीटी से बनाई सामग्री से पढ़ाया जा रहा है। कई जगह चैटबॉट-ट्यूटर्स के साथ बच्चे सीख रहे हैं। AI जिस तरह बढ़ रहा है, उसे देखते हुए आश्चर्य नहीं कि आने वाले दिनों में बच्चे खुद के बारे में बने गाने सुनें और ऐसी कहानियां पढ़ें जिनमें वे स्टार हों।

बच्चों के लिए खास अवसर। AI ने बच्चों के लिए ऐसी दुनिया के दरवाजे खोल दिए हैं, जिसमें उनके लिए अवसरों की भरमार है। अभी तक बेहतर और ज्यादा अवसर संपन्न परिवारों के बच्चों को मिलते रहे हैं, लेकिन AI आम बचपन को भी राजसी सुविधाएं उपलब्ध रहा रहा है। तकनीकी कंपनियां बता रही हैं कि जिन स्कूलों में अध्यापकों और पढ़ाई के लिए जरूरी उपकरणों की कमी है, वहां उनकी तकनीक मददगार हो सकती है। इस दिशा में हुए प्रयोगों ने साबित किया है कि AI से पढ़ाई-लिखाई और भाषा सीखने की प्रक्रिया को बनाया जा सकता है। खिलौना कंपनियां ऐसे AI केंद्रित पाठ तैयार कर चुकी हैं, जो छोटे बच्चों के काफी काम आ सकते हैं। इनमें पाठों को कार्टून स्ट्रिप या गाने के रूप में भी पेश करने की सुविधा है।

AI Image

जोखिम भी कम नहीं। हालांकि इन तकनीकों पर बच्चों को छोड़ना जोखिम भी हो सकता है। मसलन, AI ट्यूटर गलत जवाब दे सकते हैं। खिलौने पटरी से उतर सकते हैं, कामुक बातें कर सकते हैं, जिनसे बच्चों पर बुरा असर पड़ सकता है। तकनीक बच्चों के होमवर्क में चीटिंग को बढ़ावा दे सकती है या फिर 'डीपफेक' तकनीक के जरिए साथियों को परेशान करने की राह सुझा सकती है। चैटबॉट किशोरों को फुसलाकर उन्हें खुद को नुकसान पहुंचाने के लिए उकसा सकता है। AI का खतरा यह भी है कि वह अपने मालिक की पसंद समझ कर सिर्फ वैसी ही चीजें उसे दिखा-सुझा सकती है। मसलन, फुटबॉल पसंद करने वाले बच्चे को उसका टेडी सिर्फ फुटबॉल की कहानियां ही बताएगा। इससे बच्चा एकांगी हो सकता है।

कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता का खेल

- AI खिलौने बनाने में चीन है सबसे आगे
- बनाए जा रहे बच्चों को सिखाने वाले रोबॉट
- खेलते-गाते सीखने का मौका है तो खतरा भी

मनोवैज्ञानिकों के सुझाव। चैटबॉट में रिश्तों को लेकर भी जोखिम है। इन पर सक्रिय उन बच्चों के लिए मनोभावों को समझना कठिन हो सकता है, जिनके दोस्त न कभी आलोचना करते हैं, न ही अपनी भावनाएं जाहिर करते हैं। लिहाजा मनोवैज्ञानिकों का सुझाव है कि बच्चों को वैसी ही तकनीक सौंपी जाए, जो उन्हें फिर से शब्द रचना सिखाए। चैटबॉट के इस्तेमाल के लिए उम्र सीमा भी तय करने का सुझाव आ रहा है। स्कूली पढ़ाई पर भी जोर देने की बात कही जा रही है।

स्कूलों की भूमिका बढ़े। यही नहीं, AI का ज्यादा इस्तेमाल बच्चों का सामाजिकरण खत्म कर सकता है। चूंकि बचपन का ज्यादातर हिस्सा स्कूलों में बीतता है, लिहाजा माना जा रहा है कि बच्चे के सामाजिक विकास में स्कूल ही बड़ा भागीदार हो सकता है। इसलिए बच्चों के सीखने की प्रक्रिया में स्कूलों की भूमिका बढ़ाने की भी बात हो रही है।

(लेखक वरिष्ठ पत्रकार हैं।)

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WHERE DOCUMENTS SAVE HISTORY

In Haryana, Ashoka University's Archives of Contemporary India now boasts a 100-plus private-paper collection and shows why external funding is crucial for archival work

Aditya Mani Jha

For students of history, making pilgrimages to physical libraries only to find documents, manuscripts, etc. in poor condition on dust-laden shelves is par for the course. Often, these primary source materials have to be digitised and restored before they can be of any use.

This is where the crucially important work of archiving and restoration comes in. Several Indian universities have been making significant strides in archival work. One such is Ashoka University, a private research university in Sonipat, Haryana. Its Archives of Contemporary India (ACI) initiative, started in 2017, has recently crossed 100 private-paper collections.

Collect, filter, disseminate

Over the years, ACI has gathered documents pertaining to the economic reforms of the 1990s, scientific and technological developments, the history of women's rights, the growth of India's media sector, and so on. The collections now include political figures such as S. Radhakrishnan and Manmohan Singh, writers Kiran Nagarkar, Adil Jussawalla and Girish Karnad, journalists Anil Dharker and Nayan Chanda, among others. This initiative is backed on an ongoing basis by HDFC Ltd., with a one-time grant of ₹60 crore for setting up a library and archive on campus, according to a Deloitte report.

Founder-director Deepa Bhatnagar brought to ACI her three-decade experience from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, where she served as head of research and publications. The self-taught archivist has worked on the papers of Motilal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari, et al. She says her "approach remains the same, whether acquiring the papers of a writer, an artist, or a political personality".

(Clockwise from left) Ashoka University, Sonipat; S. Radhakrishnan's papers at the Archives of Contemporary India; and ACI founder-director Deepa Bhatnagar (left) with filmmaker Sai Paranjpye. (COURTESY ASHOKA UNIVERSITY)

Bhatnagar adds, "We begin by studying the life, work, and contributions of the individual to understand the context and significance of their papers and then proceed accordingly with the acquisition process. When the donor is alive, the process involves direct dialogue, through email, phone or in-person meetings to explain the importance of archiving their papers. In cases where the subject is deceased, the discussion happens with the family or legal heirs. In both cases, our goal is to preserve and make accessible material of lasting historical value."

Conservation protocols

"Digitising and preserving old documents is undoubtedly a very challenging task," Bhatnagar says. "Papers often come to us in a fragile condition: torn, brittle, or affected by humidity. At the Archives of Contemporary India, we follow strict conservation protocols: use acid-free folders and boxes, temperature-controlled storage, and high-resolution, non-invasive digitisation. Photographs are encapsulated in archival polyester covers and stored in specially designed boxes."

The prepared catalogue of a collection is uploaded to the ACI website, where it is freely available for download; "for access to specific files, a nominal fee is charged," she adds.

Ashoka's efforts are in line with similar initiatives at government-funded colleges. IIT Kharagpur has an enviable free-of-cost digital archive of material pertaining to computer science, mechanical engineering, all the way to literary, religious and philosophical texts.

Archiving matters

For someone writing a thesis on Indian cinema history over the last 50 years, the personal correspondence of, say, Sai Paranjpye, the only woman directing Bollywood films in the 1980s (*Sparsh*, *Chashme Buddoor*, *Katha*), will be of import. Or a compilation of a record of presidential tenures in independent India will need the official correspondence of S. Radhakrishnan.

Given the range of texts available in a professionally managed archive – newspaper interviews, audio recordings of long-forgotten speeches, photographs of international conclaves and informal get-togethers of high-profile people – it is clear why entities like ACI are valuable to students, researchers, independent scholars, both domestic and foreign. "Earlier there was a point of view that archival work only matters for students or specialists," says Prof. Abhijit Gupta of Jadavpur University (JU), a State-funded technical university in Kolkata. "But I feel that we have to move away from this view now and think in terms of public interest. After COVID, we (JU) have made a significant portion of our archives freely accessible, and we have organised 'open days'. We have held events and workshops where we teach people simple archival practices they can use to preserve family memories, old photographs that have sentimental value, and so on."

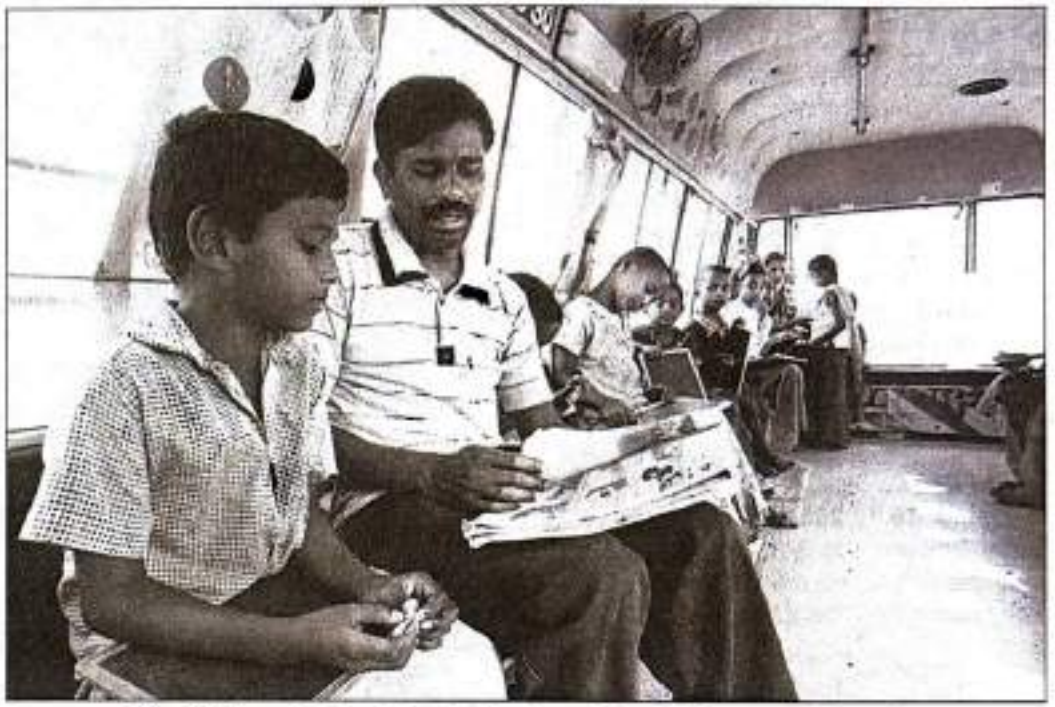
JU's School of Cultural Texts and Records (SCTR) 'Bichitra' archive is a comprehensive collection of Rabindranath Tagore's works available freely in Bangla, English and Hindi. It was created in collaboration with Visva-Bharati University and sponsored by the Ministry of Culture. Prof. Gupta says they have "archived and digitised several out-of-print Bengali children's magazines and comics" over the last decade.

While ACI's work is impressive and looks set for aggressive expansion in the years ahead, it is crucial to democratise knowledge and aid the development of first-generation scholars. For that, society must back similar projects at public universities too – politically, financially, morally – lest all research and knowledge-gathering endeavours be restricted to a privileged few.

The writer and journalist is working on his first book of non-fiction.

HINDUSTAN TIMES (P-10), 21 DECEMBER 2025

The anxieties of the soft-parenting club



Rousseau's *Émile* is invoked as a foundational text for child-centred education. REUTERS

'*Abhi mummy ki chappal Atlantic ke upar se udti hui aayegi!*" (Mummy's flying slipper will reach me across the Atlantic.)

The chat history of my cousins' group on WhatsApp, rather appropriately named "We Are All a Little Mad Here", is dotted with such messages. Whatever be the context, the mother's flying *chappal* is an ubiquitous and strong metaphor there. Or a memory, even a false one. Whether they used the *chappal* on us or not is debatable, especially in front of the softly-parented grandchildren. Tiger moms have transformed into soft bunnies.

Nishtha Gautam

Most of us have an extra dose of our parents' faults. We have tried our best to raise our children in a manner diametrically opposed to how we grew up. We have learnt to cultivate high emotional responsiveness, non-punitive discipline, and an emphasis on children's autonomy. We express our frustrations only in therapy rooms and nowhere else. We seem to be following the soft-parenting rulebook like an annoying front-bencher, yet we are scared and struggling. What are we doing wrong?

The only answer one can come up with is flawed selectivity. But we aren't alone here. For example, Rousseau's 1762 text *Émile, Or Treatise On Education* is often invoked as a foundational text for child-centred education. He famously argued that children are naturally good and corrupted by society, and that education should follow the child's natural development rather than impose premature moral constraints. However, Rousseau did not advocate *laissez-faire* parenting. On the contrary, he emphasised the idea of guided freedom. A careful structuring of the child's environment so that natural consequences, rather than arbitrary authority, teach limits. Neglecting this and equating freedom with the absence of boundaries, we turn away from Rousseau's core insight. The result is not the preservation of natural goodness, but the cultivation of dependency and impulsivity. These traits are what Rousseau explicitly warned against in adults who never learned self-restraint.

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates describes the degeneration of democracy into tyranny because, without habituation to reason and order, the soul becomes disordered. Applied to parenting, Socratic thought suggests that children require *paideia* or reasoned guidance. Shielding children from discomfort prevents the development of *sophrosyne* (moderation), leaving them ill-equipped for ethical deliberation and civic life.

Research after research, it has been established that the most effective (whatever that means) parenting style is authoritative (high warmth, high structure), as opposed to permissive (high warmth, low structure) and authoritarian (low warmth, high structure). Parenting styles, support, and parental beliefs *bricolage* children's internal working models that they use later in life as adults. We, the children fleeing the flying slipper, don't seem to get it right somehow. The recent total social media ban for children in Australia is making us happy because someone else is the bad guy. We can't bear to be the reason why our children need therapy. We are ever present, ever loving, ever listening. We grew up hearing "No" and feel like a failure when we have to repeat it.

As the global festive season, overthinking parents' nightmare, closes in on us, family dynamics become inescapably real. Rights and duties versus rights and wrongs. Economic determinism seeps into emotional uncertainty. Probably many of us have read our Diana Baumrind or Laurence Steinberg and know that parenting involves discipline, but the latter cannot be effected through coercion. We are torn between empathy and impulse, not just the childrens' but our own, too. How do we survive this pandemic of parenting crisis? Maybe it's not a collective crisis, and this author is overthinking it. Maybe our friends in good houses are doing great.

But a recent unpleasant experience with a teenager, fortunately another person's child, where they nonchalantly told off an adult in public because the latter tried to question their "authority" on the matter of nuclear physics, has suggested otherwise. Our children depend on us. Their moral development cannot be outsourced or avoided. We may have ditched the *chappal*, but let's pull up our socks and shine our shoes.

Nishtha Gautam is an academician and author. The views expressed are personal

HT/10

Memory, Discipline and Growing Up

***Charlie's Boys* is a deeply nostalgic memoir that traces boyhood, discipline and growing up at St Columba's as India itself moved through profound social and political change**

AUTHOR

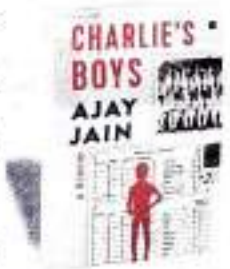
SANJEEV CHOPRA

Much before Modern, DPS, Sanskriti, Sriram, Vasant Valley and IB schools marked their presence in the national capital, there was the one and only St Columba's, which opened its portals on January 7, 1941, when the Empire was in decline but still a dominating presence. Located in the heart of Lutyens' Delhi, it catered to the sons of the political, defence, civil services and professional elite of the city.

It was to this institution that our protagonist, Ajay Jain, was admitted 34 years later, on January 6, 1975, in KG-D, under the tutelage of Mrs Ruby Almond, who continued to remain the teacher for this section for all the 13 years he was in school, and long thereafter. He recalls his class teachers: Mrs M Robinson in Class 1-D, Mrs Monica Singh in Class 2-D, Mrs Nazareth in Class 3-D and Mrs J Wintle in 4-A. This was a fifteen-month academic year, as the school shifted from the January–December academic year to April–March. Mrs U Das taught him in V-D. This also marked his entry to middle school, with the privilege of using a fountain pen instead of a pencil!

The headmaster of the middle school was Br Eric D'Souza—a brilliant academician and a man of many parts. He was a thespian, gymnaster and a sportsman who could dribble a football, swing a cricket ball and wield a hockey stick with equal felicity. Endowed with a photographic memory, he was "an alchemist whose students turned 24K gold". For some inexplicable reason, Br D'Souza gave him the moniker "Jumbo". Mr C Ennis was his scout teacher and Br Fernandes taught him in Classes IX and X; they were then the big boys of the middle school.

More than a page is devoted to the very popular Manju Kak, "the most beautiful history" teacher, who made the subject so real and alive that Ajay wanted to be a modern-day Otto von Bismarck, the architect of modern Germany. He was delighted to be asked to deliver an appreciation of her strengths on Teachers' Day, even as he fumbled with the pronunciation of "idiosyncrasy". Siddharth Mukherjee, who went on to write *The Emperor of All Maladies*, produced a magazine called Eureka, but Ajay admits he was too lazy then to contribute to it.



The memoir is a record of his 13 years at school, which marked his transition from boyhood to adolescence. It has been recorded as diary entries, and the reader gets a glimpse of what it was like for a middle-class boy in an era when power supply was erratic, Ambassador cars marked status, most families could not afford a black-and-white TV set, and the popular brands were Canon, Weston, Bigston, Belltek, Televista, Crown, Tesla and Uptron. He writes about the ban on Coca-Cola, the orange bar at 50 paise, airline luggage tags, the brutal murder of Sanjay and Geeta Chopra, the day of the class photo, learning photography from Rahul Gandhi and sharing his cheese sandwiches. Other entries relate to Jubi Chawla winning the beauty pageant, the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, and the closure of school in Delhi ended under the riots that followed.

INDIA IN TRANSITION: 1985

Let me quote him from his entry dated January 1, 1985: "Our generation was at the forefront of the great transition... the year gone by was one of the most tragic in India's history. But the new year was one of hope, one of anticipation. There was optimism in the air. The country had a new Prime Minister, the youngest ever, Rajiv Gandhi—an alumnus of St Columba's... winds of change had been blowing across the world, and it was a matter of time before India too would be swept in a gale..."

He continues, "Unfortunately, there was a recklessness to the growth story. We would be the first generation in India to bring unimaginable prosperity and also to wreak unmeasurable havoc. Our formative years were of material deficits, yet our heads always felt light and free. Our children have only known surfeit, yet they suffer from a mental health epidemic."

SHAH RUKH KHAN'S SWORD OF HONOUR

This was the year Shah Rukh Khan won the Sword of Honour, but then joined Hansraj College as he was miffed with St Stephen's for not giving due regard to the honour extended to him by the school. Ajay brims with pride when he talks of his academic accomplishments in Classes IX and X. But he also tells us that "bird watching" was not about ornithological feathers, but about ogling at girls from CJM, Mater Dei and Loreto. The girls from St Thomas', who occupied the first row in inter-school competitions in their short skirts with "legs suggestively apart", had all the boys gaping at them.

DEFECTION TO DPS, AND BACK!

Senior school—or Class XI—saw a change from Section D to C, for it offered the PC2M combo (Physics, Chemistry, Computers and Maths). But then three of them—our protagonist, Rohit Vaka and Anish—defected to DPS R.K. Puram, as it was regarded as a sure-shot pathway to IIT. They came back after five days, as if nothing had happened, but after some reluctance, Principal Br Pinto reinstated them

> LONG BEFORE DELHI'S ALPHABET SOUP OF ELITE SCHOOLS CAME INTO BEING, *St Columba's* SHAPED GENERATIONS OF BOYS AT THE HEART OF LUTYENS' DELHI

following a solid firing. The entire section was once suspended for the paper and orange missiles they threw at each other and the teacher in class. An attempt at sex education and anonymous correspondence with the CJM girls of Class XI did not quite succeed.

By 1986, the honeymoon with Rajiv Gandhi was over—especially on account of the position he took on the Shah Bano case, the mishandling in Ayodhya, and the scandal surrounding Bofors. On April 1, Brother Pinto left, and then the countdown began, as Class XII was the terminal year in the school. The last entry is from May 1988, when he scored a 99 in Maths, but as the ISCE board believed that no one can be perfect, one mark was deducted.

WHO WAS CHARLIE?

Finally, who the hell was Charlie? In this day and age of "political correctness", it is difficult to recall a time when "spare the rod, spoil the child" was the accepted norm—certainly for an all-boys school. Charlie was the baton, which came in two established forms (the thin and the thick cane) and seven supplementary formats—the ruler, the leg of a chair, thorn-laden branches, the hand, the foot, the feather duster stripped bare, and the blackboard duster. This was raw corporal punishment meted out to enforce discipline, but these were times when one dared not complain at home, for fear of yet another whacking. All of Charlie's Boys bore it well, convinced it was all for a good cause. No wonder, then, that this is the title of this wonderful "boyhood memoir".

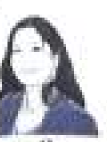
I close with these lines taken from the introductory chapter:

WHAT IS MEMORY?

"What happens when you stir a memory? It is like placing a spool of film in a projector and flicking it on. Evoking nostalgia like nothing else can. I watched scenes play out in front of my eyes. Endlessly. And tangibly. Not in three dimensions, but in four—add emotion to it. But the past is not something you can leave behind..."

Certainly not, if you are a Columban alumnus.

Not English, neglect of rich bhashas is the problem



Oopalee Operajita

"Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination." — Ludwig Wittgenstein

ONE HUNDRED and ninety years after English was introduced in India as its official language — and 78 years after the British were made to leave India — we, in India, are debating our use of English, and whether it engenders "a colonial mindset". About 140 million Indians know the English language with varying levels of expertise; some sources peg that figure at 238 million. We could easily demonstrate the colonial mindset without discarding the English language, as many Indians have done and will continue to do. The Indian use of the English language has afforded India global prominence. It is, after all, also an Indian language.

However, this must not happen at the expense of Indian languages and bhasha literature. As an Indian from Odisha who grew up across cities in India and Nepal, I acquired both Odia and English as my first languages. I have a degree of proficiency in Sanskrit and Hindi, and in spoken Tamil and Bengali. I grew up studying in English-medium schools, colleges, and universities; Hindi was a compulsory second language and subject in my school.

My parents and I translated the genius Gopinath Mohanty's magnum opus, *Amrutara Santana*, into English (at Mohanty's request). It was an enlightening experience. This sense of exultation holds for any readers when they come upon magnificent literature in new languages.

If you speak to scholars and university professors in the UK and the USA, they will often praise the Indian ability to both write and speak in English. I have to respectfully remind them that English is also an Indian language.

If Prime Minister Narendra Modi castigates Macaulay, as he recently did at an *Indian Express* event, a cacophony of voices immediately arises to defend Macaulay. PM Modi is not telling us to jettison English. He is asking India to valorise its infinite ocean of extraordinary bhasha literature and languages, and accord them the respect and primacy they deserve. Macaulay's not-so-ulterior motive was to shatter Indian confidence by dismissing its civilisational heritage, and imposing an English identity upon Indians. Macaulay had the temerity to state that a single shelf of English literature was worth more than all of India's literature — of which he had scant knowledge — put together.

The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Tolkappiyam, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, the Charyapada — there is a cornucopia of writings in Indian languages that has tragically been relegated to the backburner owing to the obsession with English. The neglect of India's rich bhashas and literature is serious, and so is the valorising of English literature and language above them. Czeslaw Milosz said that language is your only homeland. I recall being moved by that momentous insight decades ago when I was a graduate student and Rotary Foundation ambassadorial scholar at Canada's Dalhousie University — and away from home for a rather lengthy period for the first time in my life.

If India is to be a genuine global force, it needs to empower its youth through use of languages they feel comfortable with, as well as develop necessary scientific and technical vocabularies in Indian languages. Educated Indians have the advantage of being at least bilingual, if not multilingual. I cannot overemphasise the advantage of learning multiple languages — each new language activates a separate region of your brain, and opens your mind and heart to a new culture. And it is language that grants you "the rare virtue of interior spaciousness".

If we consider colonisation qua spoken English, Giorgia Meloni and Emmanuel Macron, for example, speak it with heavy accents — and this is readily accepted — but Indian leaders speaking English with local accents elicit an unjust ridicule, from Indians too. Here is another example of the pernicious colonial mindset we need to address.

We adore our Indian languages, and we treasure English. I will say we need both, wherever possible, for, in the final analysis, [illegible] A new language is a new life.

The writer was appointed distinguished fellow at Carnegie Mellon University in [illegible]. She is also a global advisor on public policy, communications, and international relations, and an award-winning Odia novelist, translator, artist and choreographer. Views are personal

22/12

PIONEER (P-5), 22 DECEMBER 2025

VBSA Bill: Not Centralisation, Not Repair – A New Blueprint for a Viksit Bharat Education System

MANISH JOSHI

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha by the Ministry of Education, represents one of the most consequential attempts in recent decades to redesign India's higher-education governance framework. Presented to Parliament as part of a broader reform agenda aligned with national development goals (Viksit Bharat), the Bill aims to replace an overstretched and multi-regulatory heterogeneous, overlapping structure with a unified, coherent institutional framework. Its stated objective is not merely administrative consolidation, but the creation of a regulatory environment that is transparent, outcome-oriented, and capable of supporting a rapidly expanding and diversifying higher-education system. The Bill's movement through the Lok Sabha marks a recognition at the highest policy level that the existing regulatory model has reached the limits of its effectiveness.

India's higher-education system is among the largest in the world, comprising thousands of universities and colleges that serve millions of students. This scale is both a strength and a challenge. While access has expanded significantly over the years, governance mechanisms have struggled to keep pace with growth. The regulatory framework that evolved over time was shaped by layered responses to specific needs — new councils, new approvals, and new oversight mechanisms — each introduced with legitimate intent. Yet, taken together, these layers produced a system characterised more by overlap than coordination.

The VBSA Bill assumes that higher education today is no longer a collection of isolated streams. A university is not merely a "UGC institution" or an "AICTE institution." It is a single academic ecosystem producing graduates, research, innovation, and public value. Regulating such an ecosystem through multiple authorities is not decentralisation; it is misalignment.

In the present arrangement, institutions often engage with multiple regulators for similar academic and administrative matters. This has resulted in duplication of processes, inconsistent interpretations of standards, and delays in decision-making. University leadership teams devote substantial time to regulatory compliance, often at the cost of academic planning and institutional development. Faculty members experience regulatory intrusion into areas that are fundamentally academic in nature, while students face uneven quality across institutions without adequate transparency to guide their choices.

The need for transformation arises from the accumulated mismatch between the system's scale and its regulatory design. In a global environment where higher education is increasingly mobile, competitive, and benchmarked across borders, credibility depends on clarity and consistency. Degrees must carry a clear meaning. Quality assurance must be reliable. Governance structures must be predictable. A regulatory system burdened by fragmentation cannot meet these expectations, regardless of the commitment of those who operate within it.

The reform proposed through the VBSA framework responds to this challenge by reorganising governance around clearly defined functions, instead of multiple regulators performing overlapping roles, regulation, accreditation, and academic standard-setting are placed within a single national framework while remaining institutionally distinct. Each council is assigned a specific purpose and responsibility. This separation reduces ambiguity and allows each body to focus on its core task without interference or duplication.

This reorganisation represents more than a structural adjustment; it signals a shift in regulatory philosophy. The emphasis moves away from prior approvals and procedural permissions toward outcomes and performance. Institutions are expected to meet defined standards of academic quality, governance integrity, and transparency. The methods by which they achieve these outcomes are largely left to institutional discretion. This approach reflects an understanding that academic excellence cannot be engineered through constant supervision but must be cultivated through responsibility and internal accountability.

One of the most significant consequences of this shift is the redefinition of autonomy. Under the earlier regime, autonomy was often conditional and fragile. Institutions sought regulatory clearances rather than exercising academic freedom with confidence. Under the new framework, autonomy becomes performance-linked. Institutions that demonstrate consistent quality and sound governance are subject to fewer constraints. Those who fall short are required to improve. Autonomy is no longer an abstract promise, but a responsibility earned through credibility.

Accreditation, too, is repositioned within this framework. Instead of being treated as a periodic formality, it becomes an ongoing quality assurance process. Institutions are encouraged to maintain standards continuously rather than focusing on compliance at specific intervals. For students and the public, this offers clearer signals about institutional quality. For institutions, it provides structured feedback that supports improvement rather than merely recording compliance.

The reform also addresses a long-standing weakness of the system: the gap between regulation and accountability. Earlier mechanisms often struggled to enforce standards effectively. Non-compliance frequently resulted in prolonged correspondence rather than meaningful correction. The new framework seeks to restore seriousness to oversight while retaining fairness. Institutions are given opportunities to address deficiencies, but persistent failure carries consequences. This balance between support and enforcement is essential if regulation is to protect students and public trust.

From the student's perspective, the potential benefits are substantial. Clearer standards and stronger quality assurance improve the reliability of degrees. Transparency enables informed choices. A more predictable regulatory environment also supports smoother academic mobility, credit recognition, and progression for students entering an increasingly competitive global workforce, these factors are of great importance.

Faculty members stand to benefit from reduced procedural interference and clearer institutional priorities. When institutions are not preoccupied with navigating overlapping regulations, academic staff can focus more fully on teaching, research, and mentoring. Academic freedom is strengthened not by the absence of regulation, but by regulation that respects professional judgment and discretion.

Internationally, the direction of this reform aligns with broader trends. Many countries have moved away from fragmented oversight toward unified regulatory frameworks that emphasise quality assurance and outcomes. India's approach reflects the same understanding: that scale demands simplicity, and autonomy demands accountability.

Ultimately, the VBSA Bill represents a transition from a culture of compliance to a culture of responsibility. It seeks to replace regulatory congestion with coherence, procedural obsession with performance, and negotiated autonomy with earned trust. This transformation shall help Indian higher education move toward greater reliability, confidence, and global credibility.

There is a common misunderstanding surrounding the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill. It is often described as an attempt to centralise power, to keep a tighter watch on universities, or to repair defects in an otherwise workable system. This reading misses the essence of the reform. The VBSA Bill is none of these. It is not about tightening screws or replacing worn-out parts. It is about drawing a new blueprint altogether one that responds to present realities, future aspirations, and the demands of a developing India that seeks to become a truly Viksit Bharat.

The author is Secretary, University Grants Commission

STATESMAN (P-6), 22 DECEMBER 2025

Employment for Youth

Labour demand in the formal sector is too sluggish to absorb large numbers of young labour market entrants. Manufacturing accounts for a small share of total output and employment, compared to other developing regions, and this mostly affects low- and medium-skilled workers, who are still predominantly confined to working in agriculture and informal services. Given the inelasticity of employment in the public sector, the focus should be on the private sector as far as the prospects for growth and job creation are concerned

Much before acquiring skill and experience many individuals participate in the job market at a young age. A large majority of the youth end up in low productivity activities in the informal sector and/or formal sector activities in an informal capacity given the compulsions of earning their livelihood. The income outcomes are naturally poor and the prospects for acquiring further skill in the current job are dim. The kind of activities they are engaged in do not offer any opportunity for accessing on-the-job training. Hence, the scope of regularisation or any upward mobility is meagre.

Besides, capital-intensive economic growth has given rise to a wide spectrum of problems for young job market aspirants. In the post-Covid scenario, the youth has been facing severe challenges. The deceleration in demand and the lack of its revival aggravated labour market outcomes. New types of jobs have emerged (i.e., platform workers) but with new challenges. Whether the new jobs compensate for the jobs lost is an important question to be investigated. What job market securities and safety-nets are available, and in what ways the vulnerability of the youth can be reduced need detailed analysis. The labour market deregulations, the weakening of the bargaining power of the young labour market participants and the absence of adequate employment programmes are some of the major lacunae.

Further, mechanisation, technological advancements and innovation have brought in new employment challenges. New innovations relating to technological upgradation are highly capital and skill intensive, which in turn pose threats to the youth, especially those who do not have adequate skill and experience. Some of them may have joined the informal sector at a young age to acquire work experience but that may not be adequate to cope with the new challenges posed by technological progress. Besides, improvements in technical efficiency are a function of human capital which many young participants may lack.

The young elderly, at times are compelled to participate in the labour market due to paucity of consumption expenditure. Given their experience, employers prefer them over youth. In this process competition surges between the elderly and the youth as a result of which the latter keeps reducing the reservation price in order to get a hold in the labour market. This aggravates vulnerability of the youth. Machines and old people act as substitutes for young people in many fulltime jobs.

As agriculture still accounts for a large percentage of the work force and the sector is already characterised by low levels of productivity, it is unlikely that new entrants into the labour market would have a high probability of getting absorbed into this sector. With higher levels of educational attainments, the expected earnings of the youth would not match the wages prevailing in the agriculture sector. The next best option is the rural non-farm sector. However, if the activities in this sector are of a residual type, the rural to urban migration can become prevalent and migration of youth is likely to raise the supply of labour in urban areas significantly.

Though employment configurations are generally envisaged in terms of three important dimensions – self-employed, casual wage and regular wage employment – there can be many grey areas, not falling directly in these categories. If the own account enterprises are running profitably, they can be considered as the major absorber of new entrants as they protect youth from the vagaries of job search.

However, given the fact that many of these enterprises operate at the margin, it is most likely that wage employment will be the category most sought after. However, high shares of vulnerable employment, informality and working poverty are dominant in south Asia.

Labour demand in the formal sector is too sluggish to absorb large numbers of young labour market entrants. Manufacturing accounts for a small share of total output and employment, compared to other developing regions, and this mostly affects low- and medium-skilled workers, who are still predominantly confined to working in agriculture and informal services. Given the inelasticity of employment in the public sector, the focus should be on the private sector as far as the prospects for growth and job creation are concerned.

From the supply point of view, although primary school enrolment has increased, the transition rate from primary to secondary schooling is declining. Poor quality of basic formal education and persistent gender gaps in educational attainment do not allow the most vulnerable youth to get a chance to obtain decent work. The world's highest youth-to-adult unemployment rate ratio is evidenced in south Asia and more than 60 per cent of the region's employed are estimated to be in vulnerable employment.

ARUP MITRA

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The new entrants, particularly potential migrants, access a great deal of information pertaining to the job market at the destination through various informal networks. While the networks and familial ties are instrumental in job searches, the adverse outcomes are inevitable. Fragmented information acquired and passed on by the contact person to the potential migrant results in labour market segmentation, which in turn leads to mismatches between labour supplies and demand in various pockets within a given city, often with the former exceeding the latter.

The higher the duration of unemployment, higher is the probability that the job seeker would reduce the reservation wage, eventually employment taking place with meagre earnings. Further, neighbourhoods with higher spells of unemployment are likely to witness persistent unemployment, informality, vulnerability and unrest in terms of crimes and social disorder. Networks in such situations are often redundant and they reduce the probability of securing jobs as job seekers may not be trustworthy. Informal networks with network concentration (or the lack of network diversification) lead to the absence of mobility and youth either hover around petty and marginal activities or remain engaged residually in activities with meagre earnings.

The practice of similar jobs with different remunerations gets reinforced in the face of excess supplies of labour. Those who are engaged informally either in the formal or in the informal sector encounter such consequences due to inadequate experience, partial information about the jobs and differences in networks. Even within the same organisation similar activities are performed at different wage rates due to the information asymmetry and the lack of regulations. Third-party involvement in hiring facilitates such discriminatory activities.

The desperation of the youth to join the labour market without quality education triggers the compulsions to endorse such practices. The vulnerability of dropouts from education is highly prevalent in urban areas as the rural youth of such background migrate on a large scale. Part time and casual engagement do not generate any skills; even some of the fulltime occupations do not offer opportunities to improve employability. With such occupational background as they initiate a search for fulltime jobs, they hold only weak bargaining power. On the other hand, volatility is extremely high as far as part time jobs are concerned which in turn adds to the vulnerability of the youth.

Fulltime jobs in many activities, in the retail sector especially, have been split into several part-time jobs with a view to reducing costs. On the other hand, part-time jobs are the major hindrances to occupational and income mobility. The mismatches between education acquired at schools and the requirements in the job market are also said to be the major barriers to productive absorption of youth. Besides, those from poor socio-economic background are believed to have the pressure of joining the job market early for which they leave school, thus getting stuck in low productivity jobs.

Hence, from an empirical point of view it would be important to examine if youth from certain social background and poorer economic households are as vulnerable as those with lower educational attainments. Inadequate housing and poor health and social stress are said to raise the participation of youth in the job market.

The inadequacy of skills and the compulsion to participate in the labour market, concentration in activities with excess supplies of labour, unrecognised work experience, lack of upward mobility and working with information asymmetry are some of the issues that the volume reflects on. Caste and gender disadvantages play an instrumental part in this context. Whether certain caste categories and young women are at a greater disadvantage than others, is an important line of enquiry.

A wide range of issues relating to occupational flexibility are pertinent. The role of skill imparting institutions and major lacuna associated with their functioning have been widely noted. Social unrest and threats to the prospects of future growth in the absence of adequate youth employment are some contentious issues.

The problems of the educated and uneducated youth are quite different and they need to be tackled separately. The youth tribulations due to the lack of economic growth and in the face of rising inequality and inadequate labour market opportunities are inescapable. Which policies hold better prospects for success and how the on-going policies need to be revised are indeed the important considerations.

Reforming education without reforming teachers

SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION
THE PIONEER

When Finland revises its curriculum, it begins by retraining teachers. When Singapore introduces new competencies, educators are upskilled well before students encounter the change. Across high-performing OECD nations, education reform starts with strengthening teaching capacity, not demanding student adjustment. India, however, follows a different sequence. Reforms are announced with fanfare, policy documents multiply, acronyms proliferate, and students are expected to adapt immediately. Teachers, meanwhile, are left to translate ambitious vision into classroom reality-often with little preparation, minimal consultation and growing administrative pressure.

If education reform is genuinely the objective, one uncomfortable truth must be acknowledged: real change lies not in constantly fixing students, but in re-teaching teachers.

When learning outcomes disappoint, the diagnosis is predictable. Students are distracted. They do not read. Smartphones have ruined attention spans. Every explanation is accepted except the possibility that pedagogy itself has failed to evolve. This narrative is administratively convenient. It shifts accountability away from institutions, boards and training bodies and places it squarely on children. Questioning students is easy; questioning systems is not.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

Teacher professional development has increasingly become an exercise in compliance rather than competence. Orientation programmes, NCERT-led sessions and mandatory Continuous Professional Development hours look impressive on paper. In practice, they are often overcrowded, rushed and overwhelmingly PowerPoint-driven. Teachers log in, listen passively, mark attendance and log out-officially "trained", yet pedagogically unchanged.

The irony is stark. Teachers are urged to foster experiential learning through training that offers no experience. They are told to encourage inquiry while being placed in environments that discourage questioning. Reflection is sacrificed to coverage, dialogue to deadlines. Completing hours matters more than deepening understanding. Concepts such as classroom psychology, differentiated instruction, assessment literacy and socio-emotional learning are frequently invoked but rarely internalised. Creativity is praised in policy language but quietly discouraged in practice, especially when it challenges hierarchy or routine.

A teacher unfamiliar with inquiry-based learning may view questions as disruption and disagreement as disrespect. This is not individual failure; it is systemic contradiction. Re-teaching teachers is not an indictment of the profession. It is recognition of its growing complexity. Teaching today is not mere content delivery; it is cognitive mentoring, emotional scaffolding and ethical guidance.

India's education policies are often visionary, yet classroom experiences remain average. The gap between intent and implementation is bridged not by students, but by teachers — who are rarely treated as intellectual partners in reform. Until teachers are prepared for the classrooms we imagine, reform will remain cosmetic. Real change does not begin in the child's notebook. It begins in the teacher's mind. Pi(8

The writer is an educator and counsellor

PIONEER (P-9), 23 DECEMBER 2025

Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill, 2025: A backbone for higher educational institutions

T SENTHIL SIVA SUBRAMANIAN

India is marching and making bold moves towards *Amrit Kaal*, especially by discovering innovative, objective, flexible, simplified and light educational reforms through the introduction of Bharat's educational revolutionary Bill called Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill, 2025, in short called VBSA, is a 21st-century educational reformist system that enforces positive and more competent unified standards, regulations and accreditation through an autonomous entity and thereby makes Bharat's educational system unique and sets transformational benchmarks, leading to meeting global educational standards.

VBSA meets the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi: "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance".

A Gateway to Academic Excellence

The Hon'ble Union Minister of Education, Shri Dharmendra Pradhan, stated that VBSA will act as a coordinating, advisory and philanthropic body, and it would create a flexible platform for different stakeholders of educational institutions that is expected to enhance research, innovation and entrepreneurship, which will lead to the introduction of higher quality education and will set universal benchmarks among higher educational institutions. Most importantly, VBSA will open critical and innovative thinking qualities among students and Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). VBSA is expected to reskill and upskill students' knowledge, thereby making education more outcome-based. The primary focus of VBSA is innovation-based education that paves the way for youth empowerment. VBSA makes a paradigm shift from conventional subjective education to emerging objective-based education. VBSA will enhance research and innovation in educational institutions and adds paramount importance to the ease of access to mega research funding schemes like the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).

A Flexible and Simplified, Objective Approach

VBSA foresees a 'light but tight' based approach. VBSA will enhance Indian educational systems to meet global and universal educational standards, thereby making education more multi-

disciplinary and interdisciplinary in Higher Educational Institutions. VBSA will constitute members from expert committees and representatives from industry, thereby bringing educational quality among institutions. It also includes and makes a uniform way for public access to educational data.

VBSA will bring Indian educational systems to global standards and thereby will create a unique and frugal platform for outreach enhancement, gross enrolment ratio improvement, and a robust holistic approach, thereby meeting the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Credit Framework (NCrF).

VBSA will form a fulcrum and has the following educational architecture under one umbrella of autonomy:

- Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad (Standards Council)
- Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyaman Parishad (Regulatory Council)
- Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad (Accreditation Council)

Case Study in Educational Systems

VBSA has successful case studies and best practices in MedTech education in India, which are successfully implemented at the Indian Institute of Technology, Jammu; All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Jammu; and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Jammu. These make students capable of learning technology, medical and management disciplines, leading to nurturing innovation and start-ups, thereby contributing to the growth of the medical start-up ecosystem in India.

Additionally, the "AMZ Science and Technology Cluster", known as the Vizag Science and Technology (S&T) Cluster, and AMTZ-India's premier medical technology park based at the Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) in Visakhapatnam-showcase the growth of Indian MSMEs and medical start-ups in the medical sector. Another successful case study is the undergraduate medical technology course offered by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, which introduces medical technology to undergraduate engineering students.

Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, space and critical minerals have emerged as the fastest-growing disruptive technologies in India in the current decade of the 21st century. Today, there is a need for science, technology and economic collaboration within educational systems, which will be met through the best practices of VBSA.

In today's era of digitalisation, the launch of Digital India has created a revolution in the educational system, facilitating teachers across every corner of the nation to reach students in remote locations. MOOC platforms such as NPTEL and SWAYAM create unique opportunities for students and faculty members to reskill and upskill knowledge in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics-management (STEAMM). Another successful case of digitalisation is the best practices of Jigyasa by CSIR and Virtual Labs under the Ministry of Education, which enable students to perform remote-based experiments and provide ease of access to software tools and techniques. Additionally, the I-STEM-Indian Science, Technology and Engineering Facilities Map-an initiative of the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India, brings enormous value for students and researchers to access equipment and hardware, tools such as MATLAB, available at nearby educational institutions, thereby enabling research and development activities.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

A Vision for Viksit Bharat@2047

VBSA will set benchmarks among institutions, leading to enhancement of the quality of education among different stakeholders-students, faculty, staff and overall Higher Educational Institutions. VBSA will have a vital component of discrete student feedback that forms the primary constituent to meet standards, regulations and accreditation in Indian educational systems. VBSA will bring a paradigm shift in educational systems, thereby making them more flexible, simplified and objective.

VBSA will make Indian educational systems self-reliant, thereby enabling them to achieve Aatmanirbhar Bharat, leading to the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047.

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STATESMAN (P-6), 23 DECEMBER 2025

Macaulay today

The prudent course is neither to erase Macaulay from history nor to canonise him, but to use the debate he provokes to strengthen universities: invest in textbooks and teacher training in Indian languages, build rigorous translation programmes, protect spaces for English where it serves global engagement, and ensure that raising vernacular prestige does not lower methodological rigour. That synthesis – difficult, technical, and institutionally demanding – is the only historically honest and politically responsible way forward

Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" is a short text that has cast a long shadow over debates about language, knowledge, and power in India. Read literally, it is an unapologetic statement of cultural preference: Macaulay argued that "a single shelf of a good European library" was worth more than the whole native literature of India and recommended that government patronage concentrate on creating an English-reading class to serve the needs of administration. That text, available in full in contemporary archives, is the origin point for the critique that English colonial education displaced vernacular learning and produced a cultural inferiority that still haunts public life.

But the story is more complicated than the caricature of Macaulay as a simple cultural vandal. Recent historiography and sober commentary stress that pre-colonial educational institutions were neither uniformly democratic nor uniformly comprehensive: centres such as Takshashila and Nalanda were once cosmopolitan hubs of learning, yet most local schooling before the Raj remained tightly bound by caste, religion and patronage and did not systematically provide the secular technical knowledge that was spreading across Europe.

Some scholars and contemporary analysts therefore treat Macaulay's reforms not as a beneficent gift but as an administrative reordering that incidentally opened avenues, unevenly and imperfectly, to modern texts, scientific curricula, and bureaucratic employment for a wider swath of the population than had been reached before.

That nuance must inform our politics because the current "Undoing Macaulay" rhetoric is doing political work beyond pure historical correction. The recent thrust: evident in media coverage of renamings, curricular reframings and rhetorical assaults on "Macaulay's children" – is part of a broader decolonisation agenda that combines cultural reclamation with state policy changes and political narratives. Journalistic accounts of the shift toward a "Bharat-centred" identity show how symbolic moves, new museum narratives and educational directives are being marshalled together to reconfigure what counts as legitimate knowledge in the public sphere. This is not mere nostalgia: it is a reallocation of prestige and institutional priority that has tangible administrative consequences.

At the policy level, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the clearest institutional expression of a more multilingual, mother-tongue-friendly approach. The NEP explicitly recommends that early schooling use the child's home language as the medium of instruction and encourages multilingualism through a three-language formula; it also opens the door to higher-education instruction in Indian languages where feasible. These changes are presented as pedagogically sound: many cognitive-development studies support early-mother-tongue instruction, but translating theory into equitable practice is the real challenge, because infrastructure, teacher training and textbooks in regional languages remain patchy across states and disciplines. The NEP itself sets the aspiration; its implementation will determine whether multilingualism becomes genuine pluralism or merely another set of uneven offerings.

Implementation is already producing contentious, concrete interventions. The Central Board of Secondary Education and some state machineries have begun operationalising "mother-tongue first" norms and language learning initiatives; at the same time, critics warn that poorly resourced rollouts risk deepening disparities between urban, elite schools that can sustain bilingual instruction and rural or private institutions that cannot.

The fear that a policy framed as anti-colonial might, in practice, privilege one regional language or produce new gatekeepers is widely voiced, particularly in non-Hindi states where linguistic federalism remains a live political issue. These are not abstract anxieties: they reflect predictable asymmetries in fiscal capacity, textbook production, and the market value of different languages.

Another critical dimension is social mobility. English in India and the broader world, despite its colonial pedigree, has functioned as a credential that opened doors to administration, law, higher education and global labour markets.

For many historically marginalised groups, access to English education became a route into professions and public life; erasing that pathway without providing equivalent substitutes would be a policy error. Thus, one important truth in the debate is that the colonial language regime had both exclusionary effects and emancipatory side-effects: it consolidated new elites but also, over time, created openings for others. Any reform that romanticises pre-colonial forms or that demonises English wholesale risks sacrificing those real, if partial, gains.

AMAL CHANDRA

The writer is an author, political analyst, and columnist

The agendas behind the rhetoric matter. On one hand, linguistic and cultural revivalism can democratise knowledge, legitimise the study of indigenous epistemologies, enable students to learn in their mother tongues, and correct the oddity that a democracy's elite debates sometimes happen in a language foreign to most citizens.

On the other hand, when revivalism is instrumentalised for majoritarian cultural consolidation, it ceases to be pedagogic reform and becomes a project of identity politics. The line between pluralist enrichment and centralising cultural politics is thin and often crossed not in manifestos but in administrative details: which languages receive funding for technical translation, which departments prioritise Sanskrit or classical studies over contemporary pedagogy, and how academic hiring and evaluation adapt to multilingual scholarship. These are bureaucratic fault lines where rhetoric becomes reality. Evidence for such shifts can be seen in the mix of symbolic and structural changes reported across states.

A third problem is the scholarly method. Reclaiming indigenous knowledge must not lapse into a politics of assertion that treats classical texts as self-validating sources for modern science or public policy.

Genuine decolonisation of curricula demands careful philology, translation, critical editions and the difficult work of placing traditional insights in conversation with contemporary disciplines, not the uncritical elevation of antiquity as proof of national greatness. Academic standards and peer review cannot be optional in a decolonised academy; otherwise, the result will be the replacement of one orthodoxy with another, and Indian universities will suffer the twin maladies of parochialism and credential weakening.

Finally, the politics of Macaulay in 2025 is a mirror: it reflects anxieties about class, caste, and cultural authority rather than simply an encapsulated judgment about a nineteenth-century bureaucrat. Answering whether Macaulay was a villain, a benefactor, or something in between is less important than the contemporary choices we make about institutional design.

If language policy becomes a lever for widening access, funding regional research, and professionalising multilingual scholarship, then the corrective impulse will have been well spent. If it becomes a slogan that substitutes symbolism for capacity building, Indian academia will lose years it cannot afford.

The prudent course is neither to erase Macaulay from history nor to canonise him, but to use the debate he provokes to strengthen universities: invest in textbooks and teacher training in Indian languages, build rigorous translation programmes, protect spaces for English where it serves global engagement, and ensure that raising vernacular prestige does not lower methodological rigour. That synthesis – difficult, technical, and institutionally demanding – is the only historically honest and politically responsible way forward.

STATESMAN (P-11), 23 DECEMBER 2025

When education meets aspiration:
Mapping the evolving mindset of Gen Z learners

ASHISH MUNJAL

In the past, gaining entry to a well-regarded college or university was the holy grail, a badge of honour, and stability in the future. Every admission cycle came with a challenge of course versus college, and more times than not, the college name prevailed. We viewed college access as a pathway to success; it offered knowledge, experience, networking, and definitive placement status.

Yet recent data reveals a seismic shift: a 2024 Pearson Global Learner Survey found that 62 per cent of Indian Gen Z students prioritize skill acquisition over institutional prestige when choosing higher education, up from 41 per cent in 2020. Now, Generation Z is changing that paradigm. As the most connected, diverse, and socially conscious generation yet, they expect their educational investment to simply offer more than prestige or normalcy. They demand measurable returns on time and tuition, with 78 per cent viewing employability within six months of graduation as a non-negotiable benchmark, according to a 2025 LinkedIn Emerging Jobs Report focused on India.

Attention spans ignite the shift to interactive learning

Thus, to cater to Gen Z, we will need to rethink traditional teaching models. They are already technologically fluent and can easily move between devices and platforms. As a result, they have really short attention spans. Neurocognitive studies from the Journal of Educational Psychology indicate an average focus window of just 8-12 minutes for digital-native learners during passive content delivery.

Educators have realised that lectures and static textbooks will no longer be able to amuse this generation. For them, learning models will need to be interactive and immediate, and virtual as well, and include adaptive platforms responsive to Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies that are capable of adjusting levels of difficulty in the moment, such as has occurred in pods with completion rates over 85 per cent completing interactive activities compared to 55 per cent completing traditional lecture formats.

Tailored paths boost engagement

Gen Z is also deeply collaborative and pragmatic. They use the power of digital tools to become self-reliant as well as collaborate with peers and even mentors. For them education that equips them to apply theory lessons to real world scenarios is what makes it a great learning experience. Since they have grown up with rapid technological changes, their mindset has reached a point where they prize personalisation. For them, education too must be tailored to their individual goals, with their interests and strengths as the core. The 2023 Deloitte Education Survey further supports this, as personalised learning paths increase Gen Z engagement by 47 per cent, resulting in higher retention in tech and management pathways, including MCA, BTech, BCA, MBA, and BBA.

College regret grows as skills gap widens

With growing aspirations, Gen Z can clearly see how traditional higher education is failing, which has resulted in waning faith in traditional modes of education. As per a recent study report, one in four Gen Z individuals regrets their decision to go to college; corroborated by a 2025 NASSCOM report indicating that 68 per cent of Indian graduates lack job-ready skills due to outdated syllabi.

Obtaining degrees is no longer perceived as a pathway to stability or success for this group. This is largely due to the fact that the job market is changing quicker than university programs can keep pace with; new jobs in AI, cybersecurity, and sustainable management rely on proficiency in tools like Python, cloud computing, and ESG frameworks. Only 22 per cent of traditional programs are integrating these areas of learning, according to a 2024 FICCI Higher Education Report. With redundant curricula, graduates end up with theoretical knowledge and negligible practical readiness.

CEOs in classrooms: Guest lectures boost confidence

Thus, there is a need for a new learning model where academic foundations blend with industry relevance. Imagine recruiters, CEOs, CTOs and COOs delivering classroom lectures to students - observations from partnered institutions in over 15 cities show that such guest sessions increase student-reported confidence in market demands by 72 per cent. With an understanding of what the market truly demands, they will be able to share their experience, and students will learn from real-life solutions. Industrial internships of more than six months will also enable students to practise their skills in real-world settings: data from programs embedding these reveal a 3.5x higher full-time conversion rate from internships to jobs.

Add projects and industry visits, and we will have students who are connected with academic as well as practical aspects of their subjects. Moreover, the industry exposure will give them the confidence to stand taller among the peers who have not had such an experience; further enhanced through faculty training initiatives that align pedagogy with current industry standards, resulting in curricula refreshed annually based on recruiter feedback.

Blended models drive career wins

This approach works for Gen Z as it focuses on outcomes over credentials. As a result, the students will graduate with a verified portfolio that is meaningful proof of their skills, experience, and employment readiness instead of merely reflecting their mark sheet. Educational institutions treading this path are already seeing good results: tracking across 35+ campuses indicates that graduates from blended models secure an average of 2.8 job offers pre-graduation, with 90 per cent placement rates in tech and management sectors. They enter the workforce confidently and ready to face further challenges. Their readiness is bolstered by enriched campus ecosystems featuring extracurriculars, alumni mentorship networks, and a student-first ethos that prioritises holistic development.

Accountability defines tomorrow

As educational institutions cater to Gen Z, understanding their mindset and aspirations is not a challenge but a direction. It is a call for education to evolve. With the integration of real-world practice, hands-on learning, and industry mentorship, the newly evolved graduate is self-aware, adaptable and ready to thrive in a dynamic world, where accountability in education delivery, from curriculum relevance to career acceleration, defines the future of learning.

THE WRITER IS CO-FOUNDER & CEO, SUNSTONE

TIMES OF INDIA (P-12), 23 DECEMBER 2025

Did Macaulay Alienate Indians From Their Roots? No, No, No

He succeeded in his narrow goal of building a clerical class for colonisers. But education in Indian languages continued to thrive, as did criticism of Brits for betraying Enlightenment values

Bidyut Chakrabarty

English colonisers' introduction of English education in India, following the promulgation of Macaulay's 1835 Minutes, is once again in the eye of a storm. The Minutes have often been blamed for dissociating Indians from their cultural roots. PM Modi has also made this claim in a widely circulated public speech.

To the extent that his Minutes are considered responsible for creating circumstances in which "the natives" gradually became blind imitators of the British socio-cultural ethos, TB Macaulay is now regarded as a villain in history. But this is an oversimplification of India's colonial history, which was rooted in a programme of systematic exploitation, meant to consolidate British rule.

The 1909 Morley-Minto Reforms, for instance, were a response to the increasingly hostile nature of the nationalist campaign led by Congress's Lal-Bal-Pal triumvirate and Aurobindo Ghose.

Likewise, Macaulay Minutes were basically a design to prepare Indians to help the British rule India per the colonisers' priorities. These opened the door for the ruled to become part of the administration, and many Indians celebrated. One of the first Indian Civil Service officers was Satyendranath Tagore, elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore. In this sense, it is misleading to argue that Minutes took Indians away from their roots.

Furthermore, the continuity of alternative education left enormous opportunities for Indians to be educated in the language of their choice. For example, Debendranath Tagore founded Tattvabodhini Patshala in 1840, to provide an indigenous alternative to English education. Under Akshay Kumar Dutta's (1820-1886) tutelage, Patshala emphasised a Bengali-language curriculum, promoting a rational and scientific outlook while remaining rooted in Indian culture. Here, English was taught as a language, with the belief that it would empower learners to become acquainted with the values of Enlightenment, and champion humanism.

It's no exaggeration that many Indian intellectuals hailed the arrival of the British, because they were convinced that, by demolishing feudal rule, it heralded a new era in India. Rammohun Roy (1773-1833) was a pioneer. His determination to abolish the most inhuman Sati custom wouldn't have gone far had he not been supported by the rulers. Similarly, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) would have failed to successfully address the agony of the young widows, without the legal endorsement of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856.

Image: AI

Yes, long before Macaulay Minutes were promulgated, Indian intellectuals were drawn to Enlightenment visions that had evolved in England since the seventeenth century. But the claim that Macaulay succeeded in dismantling India's civilisational base is quite incorrect.

Consider the Tagore family's history. Patriarchs Dwarkanath (1794-1846), Debendranath (1817-1905), and Rabindranath (1861-1941) were neither xenophobic, nor anglicised to the extent of being identified as pucca Englishmen. As a companion of Rammohun Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Rabindranath's grandfather, wrote many pieces in the weekly *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, which he funded, on the Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Upanishads to show that India's intellectual resources were equally illuminating.

That Indian opinion makers showed admiration of the British, should also be qualified by how much they questioned the colonisers for deviating from Enlightenment visions. In the political arena, Dadabhai Naoroji's *Poverty And Un-British Rule In India* (1903) castigated the rulers for draining India's wealth, without care for the adverse impact on Indians. Lal-Bal-Pal and Aurobindo Ghose criticised colonial rule in their mouthpiece, *Bande Mataram*.

India's nationalist history thus witnessed a constant ideational battle between visions emanating from Western discourses and those from indigenous sources of wisdom. India benefitted from colonisation insofar as it created conditions for the flourishing of Enlightenment discourses. However, in his essay 'Crisis in Civilisation' (1941), Rabindranath Tagore candidly admitted that although he had welcomed British rule because it was an antidote to an archaic code of conduct, which safeguarded the exclusive interests of a few, he was soon disillusioned.

Because he discovered how easily those who accepted the highest truths of civilisation, disowned them with impunity whenever the questions of their self-interest were involved. British rule was condemned for its contemptuous indifference to Indians' well-being. Hence, the claim that Macaulay was responsible for making Indians forgetful of their civilisational worth does not seem tenable.

This was a battle fought at a structural level, where it has now been well-established that British rule was viewed differently by different Indians, in accordance with their different socio-economic and political priorities. And Macaulay's intervention wasn't nearly as impactful as is often assumed. Its purpose itself was limited: transforming a section of Indians into capable assistants to the *defacto* rulers, in governing India as a colony.

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TOI/12

INDIAN EXPRESS (P-13), 24 DECEMBER 2025

Macaulay is only a punching bag. His ghost is resurrected to bury inconvenient ideas

SUHAS PALSHIKAR

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

MACAULAY IS a shorthand for at least three things — the English language, modern education and an un-Indian mentality. The beauty of invoking Macaulay's ghost is that its mention puts defenders of English or modern education on the defensive and any self-criticism is discredited as un-Indian. It is therefore useful to exorcise the ghost by being a devil's, or the ghost's, advocate. Let us not get blinkered by Macaulay's colonial intentions — because, after all, if we want to decolonise our thinking, then should we not see the effects of the Minute through our decolonised wisdom?

Take the case of the English language. For the vast majority, it is never their first language. India's many languages have happily — sometimes grudgingly — accommodated many English words precisely because users of those languages can't speak "proper English". From the early 19th century, the influence of English only alerted speakers of other Indian languages to the need to reorganise, modernise or sharpen their respective traditions. If we look at the vocabulary, idioms and ideas that writers in India's many languages are producing, we shall realise the diversity and richness of these languages.

These developments are not hindered by the pragmatic and superficial use of the English language. Early social revolutionaries like Jyotirao Phule or EV Ramasamy Naicker resorted to languages such as Marathi or Tamil for their political projects ,and even as the conservative Bal Gangadhar Tilak started an English periodical, his politics as also his original thinking took place in a powerful and artful Marathi. Therefore, if one looks at the issue beyond polemics and beyond the blinkered objective of making Hindi the national language, one would realise the meaning of considerably rich two-way interaction: English-language writings getting translated into Indian languages and Indian-language resources getting translated, by Indians themselves, into English.

Easy politics happens around the modern system of formal education that emerged during the colonial period — something that was effectively utilised for and on behalf of the masses by, again, visionaries like Phule. The idea of modern education introduced in the 19th century represents the issue of access.

The controversies over modern education in those initial years were about whether all persons were entitled to learn whatever they chose to learn or whether differential curricula would fit different social sections. If Rajaji's scheme of education was vehemently opposed in the then Madras province, it was because backward sections resisted the possibility of imprisonment in so-called traditional occupations. If Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule were attacked with stones, mud and cow dung, it was because they insisted on education for women and "lower" castes.

Modern education is accused of making us less invested in "our" traditions. Leaving aside larger debates about whose traditions one is talking about, as someone who studied in the local language in a Congress-dominated state, this writer can vouch that schools never instilled a sense of inferiority about India's past, India's culture or its own heroes.

> Nearly two centuries since his Minute, if Macaulay were to revisit India, he would be mostly disappointed to find that major sections of elites and masses from India have responded to his plea for colonising the mind in more complex ways than those who resurrect him imagine

The caste matrix did make a difference in that the traditions and histories were unselfconsciously and deeply tuned to the tastes and preferences — and fantasies — of upper castes. Let us not blame Macaulay for this caste bias unless we are saying that the upper castes colluded with Macaulay to make *their* ideologies secure under the new circumstances.

Perhaps the most attractive criticism of the Macaulay *manasikata* (mentality) is that it produced an Indian elite with un-Indian characteristics and outlooks. Fiction and fascination with the lives of army and civilian elites have always been fodder for this accusation. The caricaturing of the idea of the sahib resonated with the images of powerful Indian elites both during and after British rule. Curiously, however, fiction and filmdom often implicitly critiqued (remember the song, *saala mein toh sahab ban gaya*) or rejected this slave mentality. More interestingly, there is scanty evidence to show that the Indian elites, and much less the Indian masses, really gave up Indianness in mundane, good or bad things; whether it be the deep affinity to the Ramayana or Mahabharata, the engagement with the Bhagavad Gita, the search for the eternal in Indian philosophy or the crass belonging to caste and casteism. Brown sahibs did emerge just as every system produces power asymmetries and symbols of inequality. But did that result in India selling its soul?

Nearly two centuries since his Minute, if Macaulay were to revisit India, he would be mostly disappointed to find that major sections of elites and masses from India have responded to his plea for colonising the mind in more complex ways than those who resurrect him imagine. Indeed, there was introspection to begin with. This did not, however, lead to imitation. Instead, it led to a quiet determination to rediscover — leading to critique and reform, an assertion of human agency and human goodness and a craving for making our own destiny without the pomp of claiming false superiority of our past.

This India was not shy of critiquing or reinterpreting the Gita or burning the *Manusmriti*; it was proud to educate, agitate and organise; it was not worried about appearances of similarity with Western constitutions when dreaming its collective destiny because, transcending spatial and temporal ideas of tradition and modernity, India could confidently turn to Buddha for ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity.

As a result, over the past two centuries, India witnessed a search for its modern soul without giving up its anchor in the past. The fight against colonialism, the difficult war on caste, the tougher challenge over women's dignity, and the even more detested conversations over material exploitation, are all dimensions of a modern sensibility. The easy equation between tradition and culture on the one hand, and tradition and religion on the other, has often come in handy for those who see the real modern as a threat while adopting everything that is problematic in it.

Macaulay is only a useful punching bag. As the battle over the meaning of Indianness continues, ghosts are resurrected to bury inconvenient ideas and aspirations.

The writer, based in Pune, taught political science

Vision that resonates

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan identified Tagore as a modern interpreter of India's spiritual inheritance rather than its guardian. He understood Tagore's global vision not as a closed metaphysical system, but as a living moral orientation – grounded in sympathy, truth, and love. Radhakrishnan emphasized Tagore's faith in the unity of humanity and his refusal to lose confidence in human possibility even amid civilizational crisis. For him, Tagore's internationalism expressed a spiritual conviction that ethical renewal remained possible through service, sacrifice, and responsibility toward all existence

At a time when nationalism is once again hardening into moral certainty, and violence is routinely justified in the name of history, identity, or destiny, Rabindranath Tagore's global vision speaks with unsettling clarity. More than a century after he articulated it, scholars across disciplines and generations continue to return to Tagore not as a nostalgic figure of the past, but as a thinker whose ethical warnings, educational experiments, and civilizational imagination remain urgently relevant.

What is striking in serious Tagore scholarship today is not disagreement about his global vision, but a remarkable convergence around its core principles. Thinkers such as Amartya Sen, Bashabi Fraser, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Uma Das Gupta, William Radice, and Sarani ndranath Tagore – alongside biographers who situate Tagore in lived historical context – arrive at a shared understanding of Tagore as a moral universalist who placed responsibility to humanity above loyalty to nation, religion, or power.

The scholars are discussed here not alphabetically, but in a conceptual sequence – moving from ethical and philosophical foundations, through educational and institutional practice, to modern reinterpretations and lived cosmopolitanism – in order to reflect how Tagore's global vision unfolds from moral principle to everyday life.

Across these interpretations, Tagore's critique of aggressive nationalism stands as a central point of agreement. Scholars consistently emphasize that Tagore did not reject cultural rootedness or love of one's homeland; rather, he feared the transformation of national identity into a moral absolute. Nationalism, when fused with collective egoism and political power, threatened to eclipse ethical responsibility and normalize cruelty. This concern, articulated during the age of empire and world wars, now appears tragically prescient.

Amartya Sen, one of the most influential modern interpreters of Tagore, has repeatedly highlighted the centrality of intellectual freedom, open reasoning, and ethical reflection in Tagore's worldview.

Sen reads Tagore as a thinker who understood that political freedom without moral reasoning easily collapses into dogma, and that independence without openness risks reproducing new forms of domination. For Sen, Tagore's global vision was inseparable from the cultivation of fearless minds – capable of questioning authority, resisting prejudice, and engaging the world without fear or resentment.

A complementary perspective is offered by Bashabi Fraser, a highly respected contemporary scholar of Tagore. Fraser firmly establishes Tagore as a transnational thinker whose universalism was ethical rather than geopolitical or imperial. She stresses that Tagore rejected both aggressive nationalism and Western-dominated cosmopolitanism, insisting instead on moral responsibility, reciprocity, and dialogue across cultural difference. In Fraser's reading, Tagore's global vision rests on humility and ethical accountability, not on abstract internationalism or cultural hierarchy. Dialogue, rather than domination or assimilation, forms the moral core of his global humanism.

Where many scholars converge most clearly is in recognizing education as the practical heart of Tagore's global vision. Tagore did not treat universalism as a philosophical abstraction; he sought to institutionalize it. Uma Das Gupta has shown how Tagore's founding of Visva-Bharati was conceived as a living experiment rather than a symbolic gesture – a space where international cooperation, cultural exchange, and spiritual unity could be cultivated without nationalist pride or civilizational rivalry. Her work also highlights Sriniketan, where Tagore linked rural reconstruction with global ethics, insisting that world-mindedness must remain grounded in social responsibility and everyday life. William Radice significantly reshaped modern understanding of Tagore by challenging the persistent caricature of him as a mystical "Eastern sage." Radice restored Tagore as a rigorous, modern intellectual deeply engaged with questions of culture, inequality, education, and global responsibility. He emphasized that Tagore's vision was not about bridging a simplistic East-West divide, but about transcending such binaries altogether. In Radice's interpretation, Tagore's educational and cultural experiments were forward-looking responses to global injustice and ecological imbalance, not retreats into spiritual idealism.

Long before these contemporary readings, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan identified Tagore as a modern interpreter of India's spiritual inheritance rather than its guardian. He understood Tagore's global vision not as a closed metaphysical system, but as a living moral orientation – grounded in sympathy, truth, and love. Radhakrishnan emphasized Tagore's faith in the unity of humanity and his refusal to lose confidence in human possibility even amid civilizational crisis.

ABHIK ROY

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For him, Tagore's internationalism expressed a spiritual conviction that ethical renewal remained possible through service, sacrifice, and responsibility toward all existence. A particularly illuminating contemporary contribution comes from Sarani ndranath Tagore, who reconstructs Rabindranath Tagore's cosmopolitanism as a form of rooted universalism. He rejects the idea that Tagore advocated a vague or placeless global citizenship, arguing instead that his vision was deeply embedded in local culture and everyday life while remaining genuinely open to the world.

Sarani ndranath understands Tagore's cosmopolitanism as an existential orientation – a way of being marked by humility, attentiveness, and awareness of human limits in the face of cultural diversity. In this view, rootedness is not an obstacle to global openness but its necessary foundation.

Biographers such as Andrew J. Robinson and Krishna Dutta reinforce this scholarly consensus by situating Tagore's global vision within the lived realities of his time. Their work shows that Tagore's critique of nationalism and insistence on dialogue were forged through concrete encounters with war, empire, cultural misunderstanding, and personal experience. By tracing how Tagore consistently resisted narrow political loyalties while remaining deeply rooted in his own cultural world, they confirm what philosophical interpreters have argued: that Tagore's universalism was neither naïve nor detached, but ethically earned.

While these scholars differ in emphasis – some foregrounding spirituality, others ethics, education, modernity, or everyday practice – they do not differ on the substance of Tagore's global vision. Together, they present a remarkably coherent thinker: spiritually grounded yet rational, culturally rooted yet globally open, critical of power yet committed to institution-building. Global education emerges as the point where these strands converge most clearly, revealing Tagore's conviction that ethical citizenship must be cultivated, not imposed.

This convergence becomes especially significant when Tagore's thought is brought into dialogue with the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. As I have argued in my essay on Tagore and Buber published in The Statesman a decade ago, Tagore expressed grave concerns about the rise of political Zionism – not out of hostility toward Jewish culture, which he admired, but from a principled fear of any nationalist project that transformed historical suffering into moral entitlement.

He warned that when sacred history, collective trauma, and political power converge, ethical restraint is often the first casualty. Seen through this lens, the continuing brutality and violence inflicted upon innocent Palestinians – especially women and children – stands as a devastating confirmation of Tagore's warning. What we are witnessing is not merely a geopolitical conflict, but a profound moral failure: the normalization of suffering through nationalist justification. Tagore feared precisely this outcome – when responsibility to the Other is eclipsed by claims of destiny or security, human life becomes expendable.

Tagore did not offer policy blueprints or geopolitical solutions. What he offered was something more enduring: a moral compass. His global vision reminds us that education without humanity breeds domination, that freedom without ethics collapses into violence, and that identity without responsibility corrodes the soul of civilization.

That so many of Tagore's interpreters – across continents, disciplines, and generations – converge on this understanding is no coincidence. It suggests that Tagore was not merely responding to the crises of his time, but articulating a vision for ours. In a fractured world searching for ethical anchors, Rabindranath Tagore's global vision remains not only relevant, but indispensable.

TIMES OF INDIA (P-20), 24 DECEMBER 2025

Vinod Kumar Shukla, first Jnanpith awardee from C'garh, dies at 88

Rashmi Drolia & Avijit Ghosh | TNN

Raipur/New Delhi: Vinod Kumar Shukla, who created a universe of quiet grace from the small histories and inner worlds of ordinary people in his novels and poems, and who became the first Jnanpith awardee from Chhattisgarh last year — passed away Tuesday. He was 88.

The renowned Hindi writer was undergoing treatment for a lung ailment in the Chhattisgarh capital since Dec 2 and was on ventilator support since Dec 19. His body had weakened but his resolve to write remained unswerving.

"He carried a writing pad, even inside the ICU. In the hospital, he wrote his last poem. Probably inspired by what he had observed around him," his son Shashwat told **TOI**.

His last poem, penned in an infirm hand from his hospital bed on Dec 6, went: "Batti maine pehle bujhayee / Phir tumne bujhayee / Phir dono ne mil kar bujhayee (I turned out the light first / then you did / then we turned it off together)."

In a conversation with PM Modi some weeks back, he had said, "Writing is like breathing for me. I want to return home as soon as possible—I want to keep writing."

PM condoled the writer's passing in a post on X, "He will always be remembered for his invaluable contribution to the world of literature."

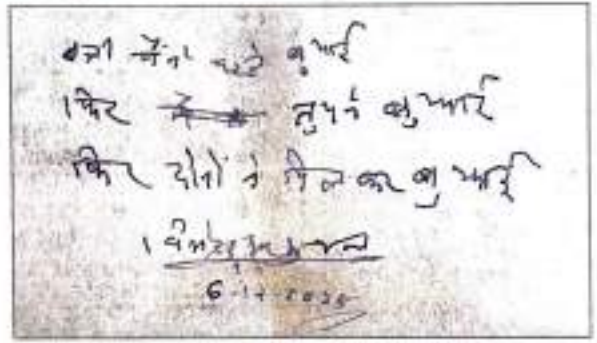
Shukla wrote sparingly, but deeply. He wrote in a tone that never needed to raise itself. His prose moved gently like the wind, his poetry like breath. His writing did not insist; it illuminated. And it traversed the vacant space between remembering and forgetting.

"Forgetting is my nature. I forget, again and again. Since forgetting is my nature, so is remembering. If I forget, I also remember. Forgetting is a form of leaving behind. Remembering is trying to bring it back," he told actor Manav Kaul in director Achal Mishra's documentary on his life, 'Chaar Phool Hain Aur Duniya Hai' (2024).

Vinod Kumar Shukla
(1937-2025)

Notable work
Naukar Ki Kameez which was made into a feature film by Mani Kaul

Major Awards
Jnanpith Award (2024), PEN/Nabokov Award (2023)



The last poem Vinod Kumar Shukla wrote from his hospital bed in Raipur

Naukar Ki Kameez (The servant's shirt, 1979) was his most celebrated work. The novel was adapted by renowned filmmaker Mani Kaul into a feature film in 1999. "Initial sales were slow. But after 2020, it became a best-seller," says Satyanand Nirupam, editor, Rajkamal Prakashan. A Facebook Live presentation by him was watched by a high 18,000 viewers during the 2020 Covid lockdown.

"In 2025, it sold 10,000 copies, a huge number for a book released five decades ago," says Nirupam. Some months back, there was even an unpleasant online controversy over the royalty he had earned.

Shukla was born in Rajnandgaon, now part of west Chhattisgarh. A post-graduate in krishi vigyan (agriculture science) from Jabalpur, his first poetry collection, Laghhag Jai Hind (Almost Jai Hind) was published in 1971.

As a writer, Shukla never carried the baggage of literary politics. Perhaps a reason why fame trickled to him, like water dripping from a tap in a desert town. He received the Sahitya Akademi award in 1999 for his novel, Deewar Mein Ek Khidki Rehti Thi (A window lived in the wall). Khilega To Dekhenge (Will see when it blooms) was another feted work.

In 2023, he became the first Indian to receive the PEN/Nabokov Award. "Writing for decades without the recognition he deserves, Shukla has created literature that changes how we understand the modern," the PEN/Nabokov judges panel said.

Sahitya Akademi recipient writer Mridula Garg says that Shukla was truly one of a kind. "Articulate but not verbose, simple but not simplistic, real but not realistic, individualistic but not self-centered. Equally empathetic to individual and social desires and ills," she says.

Another Sahitya Akademi awardee Anamika poetically puts it that in Shukla's poems and novels "we meet a lonely man full of empathy and grace, a man of the community, a man like the Christ on cross in Rembrandt's painting, a man who belongs — his bones hanging, skin sagging, the pain of inner struggle writ large on his face."

Senior journalist Sunil Kumar, who was associated with Shukla for decades, said, "He was the most prominent Hindi writer of significance in the last half a century, but his feet remained solidly on the ground. Shukla ji was a man of unique simplicity in language, life, and values, all. He had a strange ability to remain aloof from praise or criticism, success or failures."

When asked for his reaction on receiving the Jnanpith, India's most prestigious literary award, Shukla had said, "Mujhe likhna bahut tha, lehin bahut kam likh paya," (I had a lot to write, but could write very little." Following his demise, every reader too enchanted by his world of writing has been left wanting for more.

MILLENNIUM POST (P-15), 25 DECEMBER 2025

2025: The Year Indian Education Crossed the Inflection Point

DR SANKU BOSE

As we close 2025, let's admit it. This year will be remembered as a defining turning point for Indian Education and the job ecosystem. Degrees alone no longer prove capability. Skills do. In an age shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI), what you know today can become outdated tomorrow. The demand for high-skill, adaptable professionals is only rising and education has finally begun responding to this reality.

Just as importantly, the long-discussed transformation of higher education has moved from intent to action. Clear policy direction, institutional courage and a sharp focus on employability have pushed the system out of inertia. Change is no longer theoretical. Here are five shifts from 2025 that clearly mark this transformation.

HIGHER EDUCATION MOVED FROM CONTROL TO TRUST

For decades, Indian universities struggled under layers of approvals and overlapping regulators. Innovation was slowed, sometimes completely blocked. In 2025, this began to change.

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill signalled a move away from micromanagement towards principle-based governance. Instead of dictating processes, the focus shifted to outcomes.

With fewer bureaucratic hurdles, universities gained the freedom to design programmes aligned with global standards and industry needs. Accountability remained, but without suffocating control.

EMPLOYABILITY BECAME THE REAL REPORT CARD

One of the most visible shifts of 2025 was the move from syllabus-centric education to outcome-centric education. Employability was no longer treated as an afterthought.

Universities expanded industry-linked curricula, credit-based internships, apprenticeships, and integrated micro-credentials. Employers were clear about what they wanted: graduates who are job-ready and capable of continuous learning. Students, in turn, demanded clarity on career outcomes.

Success was no longer measured only by enrollment numbers or campus size. Placement quality, career mobility, and real-world readiness began to matter more. The message was simple and powerful. Education must lead to dignity of work and economic independence.

INTERNATIONALISATION IS REAL

Internationalisation had long been discussed, often limited to ceremonial MoUs. In 2025, it finally became practical. Indian institutions focused on joint programmes, dual degrees, credit transfers, faculty exchange, and collaborative research. The policy environment matured to support foreign universities operating in India and Indian institutions attracting international students.

This shift matters because internationalisation is not about sending students abroad. It is about bringing global quality, pedagogy, and exposure into Indian classrooms. Indian higher education has started becoming globally competitive while staying locally relevant.

LIFELONG LEARNING IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY

2025 also ended the idea that education finishes at degrees. In the age of AI, lifelong learning is no longer optional. It is an absolute necessity. Machines can now write code, analyse data, design visuals, and create music. What they cannot do is think critically, empathise deeply, or act with ethical judgement. To remain relevant, humans must strengthen these uniquely human abilities. That requires constant learning and reinvention.

Micro-credentials, stackable courses, and flexible learning pathways gained mainstream acceptance. Universities began evolving from one-time degree providers into long-term learning partners. Education started aligning with real life, including career shifts, breaks, and reinvention.

> MICRO-CREDENTIALS, STACKABLE COURSES, AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS GAINED MAINSTREAM ACCEPTANCE. UNIVERSITIES BEGAN EVOLVING FROM ONE-TIME DEGREE PROVIDERS INTO LONG-TERM LEARNING PARTNERS

INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA ON THE SAME PAGE

The lack of AI skills is leading to labour shortage and bridging the AI skills gap is impossible without strong industry-academia collaboration and 2025 showed real progress. Co-op education models expanded, allowing students to alternate between classrooms and workplaces. Industry participation in curriculum design, guest lectures, boot camps, and applied research increased.

When academia and industry work together, students graduate with both knowledge and experience. However, a larger responsibility remains. If leading AI players focus only on market dominance and closed research, society risks missing a chance to build future-ready human capital. Open collaboration benefits everyone. For students, this means clearer ways from education to employment. For institutions, it means greater autonomy with responsibility. For employers, it means access to talent that is capable, not just qualified.

As educators, policymakers, and citizens, our collective responsibility is to sustain this momentum so that education becomes not merely a system we inherit, but a future we consciously and carefully build.

The author is the Vice Chancellor of Sister Nivedita University and Group CEO, Techno India Group. A visionary leader, he is shaping future-ready institutions and inspiring students to lead with purpose

MICRO-CREDENTIALS, ACADEMIC TIE-UPS & MORE

TOP 6 EDUCATION CHANGES IN 2025

2025 has been a transitional as well as an inflection year for education globally

ANINDITA ACHARYA

The year 2025 was defined by the simultaneous drive of global policies, labour-market pressures, and advances in technologies. From visa restrictions affecting students and professionals, to the rise of skill-based education and the importance of micro credentials and increase in industry-academia collaborations, 2025 has been a transitional as well as an inflection year for education globally. Millennium Post lists the top educational shifts in 2025.

IMPACT OF VISA RESTRICTIONS

As several countries tighten their visa policies, led by the Donald Trump administration in the US, student and professional mobility has been significantly affected. In the US, the Trump administration has replaced the H-1B work visa lottery with a new weighted system, making it more difficult for entry-level professionals to secure work visas. Shantanu Rooj, Founder and CEO, TeamLease Edtech, believes tighter visa pathways on student and professional mobility has been one of the biggest shifts of 2025. "Instead of slowing aspirations, this has pushed learners to make more intentional choices i.e. selecting programmes with stronger career linkages, clearer post-study pathways and measurable outcomes," he said. According to Dr Girish Jain, Professor of Finance and Chairperson (BIMTECH), Greater Noida, stricter visa policies in traditional destinations like the US have significantly reduced international student mobility. "At the same time, several international educational institutions had inaugurated their campuses in India. This presents India with a timely opportunity to emerge as a preferred destination for international students, particularly by offering well-structured joint and dual degree programmes," he said.

RISE OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

It wouldn't be incorrect if we say that 2025 has been a hallmark year where micro-credentials emerged as a vital tool to bridge skill gap, and boost employability. However, these courses also raised questions on authenticity and quality. Dr Ashwini Kumar Sharma, Pro- Vice Chancellor, Medhavi Skills University, mentioned nearly 96 per cent of employers around the world think that micro-credentials enhance job applications, and close to 90 per cent of students view them as essential to better job prospects, as per an AACRAO survey. Prof Braj Bhushan, Deputy Director, IIT Kanpur, believes the rapid proliferation of short-term certificates and stackable micro-credentials expanded opportunities for lifelong learning but also raised concerns regarding quality assurance and recognition. "AI enabled teaching tools transformed pedagogy and assessment, offering personalised learning while prompting debates about over reliance, academic integrity, and equitable access. These shifts collectively intensified existing disparities in funding, resources, and digital infrastructure, threatening global commitments to inclusive education," he said.

OUTCOMES OVER DEGREES

Gone are the days when a traditional degree from a reputable university could help you in your job throughout your career. Dr Jain of BIMTECH said the integration of AI and advanced edtech has led to the elimination of the "one-size-fits-all" structure of examinations to broader methods of assessment, though ethical use and faculty upskilling remain a concern. "As technology cycles shorten and AI adoption accelerates, shorter, modular learning (tightly aligned to job roles) has become a powerful complement to traditional degrees. It reflects the reality that talent needs continuous renewal, not one-time qualification," said Rooj. Prateek Shukla, Co-Founder & CEO, Masai, said for decades, educationists have debated what's broken in Indian education system. "In 2026, the debate ends because the market won't tolerate it anymore. Parents are done asking "what's your placement rate?" They're asking "show me the data or I'm taking my money elsewhere." Colleges that can't produce verifiable outcomes won't survive the year. We'll see warranty models everywhere, "place our graduates or refund tuition." That's not innovation. That's desperation masquerading as accountability," he said.

UPSKILLING IS THE NEED OF THE HOUR

Rapid technological advancements have made continuous upskilling and reskilling unavoidable. Today, specialising in just one subject is no longer enough to sustain a long-term career. In this evolving ecosystem, those who actively reskill are the ones leading market trends. Prof V Kamakoti, Director IIT Madras, highlighted the growing appetite for upskilling among working professionals and students alike. "This is evident from the rising enrolments in programmes such as BS Data Science and BS Electronic Systems, which are seeing sustained and significant demand. Also, with policy support from the Ministry of Education and State governments,

THE TREND OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING AND APPRENTICESHIPS ALSO SAW INCREASING ACCEPTANCE IN 2025, AS COMPANIES PLACED MORE EMPHASIS ON HIRING FRESH GRADUATES WITH PRIOR INDUSTRY EXPOSURE

allowing up to 20 percent of academic credits to be allocated to skill-oriented courses, institutions are responding actively," he said. Niru Agarwal, Managing Trustee, Greenwood High International School, believe schools are also adopting international best practices and experiential programmes to prepare students for diverse academic and career pathways. "Together, these shifts reflect an education ecosystem that prioritises adaptability, inclusivity, and experiential learning, equipping students with the skills, confidence, and agility needed to thrive in an evolving professional world," she said. "Research by OECD shows that work-related learning, or work- integrated learning, is increasingly accepted within the education system as a way for skills-targeting industries. This transition towards skill-based learning is a testimony to HEIs & industries aligning with educational reforms under National Education Policy (NEP) 2020," said Dr Sharma.

ACADEMIC TIE-UPS

Collaborative education models have gained significant momentum in 2025. B-schools are increasingly joining hands with global academic institutions and industry leaders to design dual-degree and co-branded programmes that combine academic rigor with real-world relevance. Prof Mahadeo Jaiswal, Director, IIM Sambalpur, mentioned how the institute is offering several dual degrees to boost employability. "The international collaborations underscore the growing importance of micro-credentials, interdisciplinary learning, global standards, and professional applicability, enabling learners to acquire skills that are both relevant and globally recognized," he said. Prof Jaisal further informed that education today is defined by flexibility, relevance, and industry integration. "Institutions that embrace micro-credentials, digital recognition, collaborative degrees, and future-oriented curricula are shaping a more resilient and inclusive education ecosystem," he said.

INTEREST IN CORE ENGINEERING

2025 has been the increasing interest in core engineering and scientific domains. "Students are now looking beyond purely high-paying roles in areas such as software, AI, or machine learning, and are recognising the long-term stability and impact offered by core sectors. This change in mindset is a very positive development for the education ecosystem," said Prof Kamakoti of IIT Madras. The educationist also mentioned that 2025 also saw a surge in startup activity and innovation. There is heightened interest from investors and venture capital firms, alongside a noticeable increase in entrepreneurship and patent filings, he added.

Higher education bill frees our universities

YOGESH SINGH

THE VIKSIT Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in the Winter Session of Parliament and referred to a joint parliamentary committee. With the Bill now publicly available, the intervening period provides a good opportunity for informed conversation on it.

One of the major concerns is that it will lead to excessive centralisation. This appears ironic as the Bill's primary objective is to accelerate autonomy in higher education institutions (HEIs) — it aims to create greater freedom in teaching, pedagogy, curriculum development, and the research and the innovation ecosystem.

The Union Education Minister has also said that the Bill will neither impede institutional autonomy nor affect funding. He also emphasised that states will retain the rights under their respective acts, including the authority to establish new universities and develop curricula.

The very name of the Bill communicates its purpose — propelling India towards its goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047. The name also situates the Bill in the decolonisation process of our education system. These two themes align with the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, which advocates a "light but tight" regulatory framework.

The Bill proposes minimal structural encumbrance and maximum governance by subsuming into one commission the UGC, which regulates the HEIs, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE, which regulates technical institutions), the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE, which regulates Teachers' Education) and other such regulatory institutions in education, except those governing law and medical education. Various regulators have been established over time — starting with the UGC Act in 1956, followed by AICTE in 1987 and NCTE in 1993 — in a piecemeal manner as and when the need arose. The proposed unification through the paring down of HEI regulators was long overdue. That this Bill is being tabled nearly five years after the introduction of the NEP shows the maturity of the entire process.

The three councils of the proposed commission, the Viniyaman Parishad (Regulatory Council), the Gunvatta Parishad (Accreditation Council), and the Manak Parishad (Standards Council), will have a clear mandate. This will remove ambiguities.

Through minimal regulation, the Bill aims to provide greater autonomy in a graded and time-bound manner to the HEIs, making them independent and self-governing. It envisages a facilitating role for the education regulator. The single technology-driven window operations will remove procedural ambiguities.

Departing from the traditional UGC evaluation framework, which is largely focused on input-based criteria such as infrastructure, faculty qualifications, and compliance with fixed standards, the Bill proposes an outcome-based evaluation. It shifts the focus to measurable learning outcomes, student skills, employability, and real-world impact. This approach emphasises what students actually achieve and apply, rather than what institutions provide, promoting greater excellence in higher education. The new commission will support high-performing Indian universities in setting up campuses in other countries.

The Bill prioritises transparency by mandating online and offline public self-disclosure of all academic, operational, and financial matters. It ensures students have free access to a fair, transparent, and robust grievance redressal mechanism. Together, these measures build genuine trust and confidence in India's higher education system. It envisions a higher education landscape where transparency and fairness are no longer just best practices, but the norm.

The writer is vice chancellor, University of Delhi

TRIBUNE, (P-7), 26 DECEMBER 2025

Universities are hollowing out

DP SINGH

PROFESSOR, PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

LARGE campuses, grand buildings and imposing libraries often create the impression of a rich and flourishing intellectual life from the outside. But over time, the inner academic world in most universities has become fragile and diminished.

Recently, while serving on a selection committee, I was part of an informal discussion on faculty appointments with the Vice-Chancellor of a university in Haryana. He shared that filling all posts with regular faculty would make it impossible for the university to meet its financial obligations, including salaries and pensions. Part-time and contractual teachers were a matter of survival. If government universities failed to strengthen themselves both financially and academically, the private universities would push them towards irrelevance.

His concerns highlighted broader regulatory and financial challenges confronting these institutions, which are now under greater scrutiny and expected to manage their own resources. Haryana recently established the Haryana Education Regulatory Authority, signalling a more rigorous regulatory environment. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, aims to bring several bodies together under a single authority.

When public funding is uncertain and institutions are encouraged to generate their own resources — especially where raising fees can trigger strikes or protests — permanent faculty appointments no longer appear viable for teaching and research.

The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22 reports about 15.98 lakh faculty serving over 4.5 crore students across India. Faculty distribution across the country is far from uniform. Parliamentary committee discussions in 2025 suggest that more than a quarter of teaching positions in some centrally funded universities were vacant.

In Haryana and Punjab, the situation is grimmer. Most public universities operate under chronic fiscal stress. State grants are neither regular nor adequate, barely sufficient to meet salary and pension obligations. In many cases, 75-80% of university budgets are absorbed by salaries and pensions, leaving limited and uncertain funds for libraries, laboratories, research support and faculty development. Some departments do not have even a single regular teacher, while in many there is only one.

> Lack of adequate funds is steadily eroding the academic foundations of our universities.

Departments increasingly rely on temporary staff and, in some cases, research scholars. These appointments are often made without duly constituted selection committees or wide public circulation. As a result, some qualified candidates choose to not even apply for these positions. Those who are eventually appointed are unable to plan sustained research, redesign curricula or mentor students beyond a semester. Research output is limited, student mentoring inconsistent and departments struggle to sustain a meaningful academic environment. Financial pressures have come to dominate institutional priorities.

Financial vulnerability has also increased susceptibility to external pressures. Universities operate deeply within political ecosystems. Administrative decisions attract interest from local power structures. Academic disagreements, rather than fostering debate, most often, slow down governance. Time and effort are sometimes absorbed in navigating internal alignments and protecting positions. Parochial recruitment deepens the problem. Departments draw repeatedly from narrow pools, where familiarity replaces intellectual diversity.

At a time when higher education policy speaks of excellence, innovation and global competitiveness, public universities are being asked to function under conditions that steadily erode their academic foundations. Buildings expand, regulations multiply, but the intellectual core weakens.

The question is whether we are willing to fund them in a way that allows them to remain universities in any serious sense.

ECONOMICS TIMES (P-4), 27 DECEMBER 2025

Fold Them When They're Young

Habits formed when young are liable to last a lifetime. So, UP state-run schools having 10-min newspaper-reading sessions in classrooms is an excellent idea — and we think so not just because we're, well, a newspaper. The idea is to inculcate a reading habit, curb online screen time and pick up the ability of separating wheat from chaff. The newspaper is unique in that it is an object-service, its very physicality acting as a frame to both contain news 'fit to print' and keep out the tsunami of dross and rubbish.

The relationship of youngsters with the world is developed according to the content that lies beyond their regularly lived experiences. This informs and shapes their beliefs and biases arguably more than what is taught to them. Today, an overwhelming part of this content is an unfiltered blizzard. A newspaper's greatest strength lies in its ability to curate content, fact-check, and act as quality control while reflecting and commenting on the world. This allows young people to develop an innate ability, over time, to distinguish between facts and information, the latter holding no fealty to fact or fiction. This curation — unlike the dopamine-driven chaos of social media — invites reflection, comparison and interpretation.

By implementing this initiative, schools in UP — like those in Kerala earlier — will be doing more than promoting literacy. They will be shaping a generation capable of critical judgement, informed debate and responsible engagement. In a country where a robust reading culture is still missing because of a lack of public libraries and access to affordable quality material, reading a newspaper can spark a quiet but transformative revolution. Page-turning can, even if we say this ourselves, be a game changer.

HINDUSTAN TIMES (P-16), 27 DECEMBER 2025

[MINOR HINTS]

Rahul Sagar

Why making our universities great again won't be easy

The great universities of modern Asia have been produced either by strong States with vision or by philanthropists. India once had both kinds, but now it has little of either

The 2026 Times Higher Education rankings make for grim reading. Not one Indian university features in the world's top 200 universities. By contrast, Japan has five, South Korea has six, and China has 13. And the gap is widening. China now has five universities in the top 40 worldwide (this rises to seven if we include Hong Kong) and its national champions, Tsinghua and Peking, are on the verge of breaking into the world's top 10.

We are not without hope. The National Education Policy signals that the government wants to do better. The continued development of IITs and IIMs, which have begun setting up international campuses, bodes well. More promising is the rise of well-run private universities, symbolised above all by Ashoka University. Even so, to know if Indian universities can "catch up" with the rest of Asia, we need to understand why they fell behind in the first place.

We need to start with the fact that modern education arrived in India sooner than elsewhere in Asia. When the Japanese launched Keio University in 1858, Hindu College, Elphinstone College, and Presidency College were already thriving. By the time the Chinese set up Peking University in 1898, British India had five public universities, and the Native States had established their Maharaja's Colleges. These institutions housed great minds, from JC Bose, PC Ray, and Ashutosh Mukherjee in Bengal and KT Telang, MG Ranade, and RG Bhandarkar in Bombay, to Sundaram Pillai and BN Seal in Mysore, Aurobindo Ghosh and TK Gajjar in Baroda, and Aghorenath Chattopadhyay in Hyderabad (and this is only to skim the surface). Clearly, we do not have to hark back to Takshashila and Nalanda to think of a time when Indian universities led the pack in Asia.

How was this lead squandered? The hard truth is that once the British and the Maharajas departed, universities began to be treated not as ends in themselves but as means to address grievances. To advance socialism, "reactionary" ideals had to be chased out; to satisfy regional pride, locals had to be advantaged; to redress inequality, fees had to be kept low; to overcome caste, reservations were introduced; and to regulate "quality", bureaucratic interference was normalised. The question was never what politicians and bureaucrats could do for the university but what the university could do for them. In short order, the university became an extension of party and State, as seen in the keenness with which middle-aged candidates partake in "student elections" and the ease with which bureaucrats maintain "*ex officio*" roles.

It is not all gloom. There remain talents scattered across our public universities. A few institutions, particularly the IITs and IIMs, have remained autonomous and grown in stature. But, in the international race, it is not enough to walk briskly when one's competitors are running full tilt. To wit, when the Times Higher Education rankings launched in 2004, the IITs were 20 places above Tsinghua. Two decades later, they are more than a hundred places behind it.

The realisation that public universities are not likely to regain their former glory any time soon has prompted some admirable private initiatives. Unfortunately, these endeavours face an uphill battle for three reasons. First, because they are latecomers, these universities are invariably located outside metropolitan centres. This creates an immense geographic disadvantage. When travelling to a university involves long, back-breaking commutes, opportunities for international collaboration and fortuitous connections dim rapidly. Recruitment becomes harder too, because modern families want dual careers, access to high-quality schooling and health care, and leisure opportunities. This is why more than 90% of the top 200 universities in the world are located in urban hubs and within an hour of a major international airport. Second, because these universities are frequently reliant on single founder-donors, they tend to be under-institutionalised (or, to put it another way, the donor's family and retainers tend to be over-involved). The curse of the "family business", which has stifled corporate India, may undo much in the higher education sector too. Third, there is the "cost of doing business" in India. To rise in world rankings, these universities will need to attract global talent. To do so, they not only have to persuade "stars" to quit esteemed universities abroad, but they also have to convince them to put up with the inconveniences of daily life in India, where "contacts" cannot save you from constant pollution, endless gridlock, sexual harassment, and language chauvinism.

These challenges are not insurmountable. But there is worse in the offing, because private institutions are not immune from the *sarkari* mentality that has humbled our public universities. The essential problem is that our political class cares not one whit for the autonomy of the private or civil sphere. We see this dynamic at play in the growing calls for reservations in private corporations. Against such populists, what defence do entrepreneurs have? The prospect of organised mobs, FIRs, and endless court appearances — our cynical politicians know that these will bring their opponents to heel. Thus, the more successful this new crop of private universities becomes, the more likely it is that the very same influences that corroded public universities will work their way in. They will be pressured to give way when it comes to admissions, quotas, grades, and unions — or else.

This vulnerability is only deepened by the duplicity of our intellectual class, which smugly critiques these fledgling universities as "elitist" and "neoliberal" (even though they would move heaven and earth to send their own children to a Yale or an Amherst). Worse still, they send these universities to an early demise by urging them to become more "radical", as if the purpose of a university is to advance politics) revolution rather than human knowledge. Ask Peking and Tsinghua where the former path leads. They learnt the hard way in 1968 and 1989, which is why they now focus on generating patents rather than protests.

Here then is the dilemma India faces as it tries to rebuild its university sector. The great universities of modern Asia have been produced in one of two ways: Either by strong States with vision and taste or by selfless philanthropists backed by the good sense of their fellow citizens. India once had both, now it has little of either.

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A few institutions, particularly the IITs and IIMs, have remained autonomous and grown in stature. But, in the international race, it is not enough to walk briskly. HT ARCHIVE

TIMES OF INDIA (P-24), 27 DECEMBER 2025

Morning Bulletin

Getting schoolkids to read newspapers is a smart idea

You can read this, thanks to a unique brain circuit your ancestors evolved about 6,000 years ago. But now that circuit is weakening species-wide because we don't use it enough. In US, daily reading for pleasure has declined 40% in 20 years. In UK, reading among 8-18-year-olds has halved. School librarians will tell you the situation is dire in India too. So, it's heartening that UP govt has made newspaper reading mandatory in its schools. Every day, students will take turns to read aloud the main points of news and editorials from a selection of English and Hindi papers. Govt hopes this will improve their GK, vocabulary, writing skills, and critical thinking.

It should, because reading not only pours information into the mind but also catalyses its organisation into conceptual models. Videos and podcasts aren't as effective because you can't linger over their words, nor turn pages for reference. And the printed page doesn't vibrate with notifications and other distractions. When we give up slow, deliberate reading for reading's sake, and stick the hose of "fast" digital content in our ears, our abilities to analyse critically and draw inferences weaken.

So, well begun, UP, and now all states should do more. Going beyond the daily 10-minute mandate, encourage children to become bookworms. Help them find focus, which is key to future success. In the 1800s and early 1900s, reading helped many disadvantaged workers improve their lot. Welsh miners were avid readers in the 1930s, helped along by over 100 libraries. So, invest in libraries as a public good. If retired Italian teacher Antonio La Cava can drive his three-wheeler library more than 3L km over 25 years, to bring books to children in far-flung villages, our states can do better.

NAV BHARAT TIMES (P-12), 27 DECEMBER 2025

यह पढ़ाई भी ज़रूरी

यूपी के स्कूलों में बच्चे पढ़ेंगे अख़बार

यूपी के सरकारी स्कूलों में बच्चे अब अखबार भी पढ़ेंगे। उनमें पढ़ने की आदत विकसित करने और स्क्रीन टाइम घटाने के लिए यह आदेश दिया गया है। अखबार केवल सूचनाएं नहीं पहुंचाते, समझ; संवेदनशीलता और सामाजिकता भी पैदा करते हैं। इस तरह के आदेश की नौबत आना ही बताता है कि बच्चों में स्क्रीन की लत किस कदर गंभीर हो चुकी है।

AI Image

स्क्रीन से समस्या

बस 10 मिनट | आदेश के मुताबिक, मॉर्निंग असेंबली के दौरान हर दिन 10 मिनट न्यूज रीडिंग होगी। इंग्लिश और हिंदी के अखबार बच्चों को दिए जाएंगे। सभी सरकारी सेकेंडरी और बेसिक स्कूलों पर आदेश लागू होगा, लेकिन प्राइवेट और दूसरे स्कूल भी चाहें तो इसका पालन कर सकते हैं।

भरोसेमंद सूचना माध्यम | पढ़ने का मतलब केवल कोर्स की किताबें नहीं होतीं। डिजिटल दौर में सूचनाएं हर तरफ से आ रही हैं, लेकिन उसमें कौन-सी सही हैं और कौन गलत - यह समझना चुनौती है। अखबार आज भी सबसे भरोसेमंद माध्यम हैं। इनको पढ़ने से बच्चों को विश्वसनीय जानकारी मिलेगी, विभिन्न घटनाओं को लेकर उनका अपना नजरिया बनेगा और भाषा में सुधार होगा।

चिंता बढ़ाते सर्वे | यह आदेश सबसे बड़ी समस्या की ओर भी ध्यान खींचता है - बच्चों का टीवी, मोबाइल से चिपके रहना। इस साल जुलाई के एक सर्वे के मुताबिक, भारत में 5 साल की उम्र तक के बच्चे हर दिन औसतन 2.2 घंटे स्क्रीन पर बिताते हैं। यहां तक कि दो साल से कम उम्र के बच्चे भी हर दिन औसतन 1.2 घंटे स्क्रीन देखते हैं, जबकि उन्हें बिल्कुल ही दूर रहना चाहिए। एक चौथाई से ज्यादा की पहुंच इंटरनेट तक है और 10 से कम उम्र वालों के भी सोशल मीडिया अकाउंट हैं।

ऑस्ट्रेलिया का उदाहरण | स्क्रीन मासूमियत ही नहीं छीन रही - बेचैनी, ध्यान की कमी, नींद से जुड़ी समस्याएं, चिड़चिड़ापन भी दे रही है। स्क्रॉल से फोकस घट रहा है। यही वजह है कि हाल में ऑस्ट्रेलिया ने 16 साल से कम उम्र के किशोर-बच्चों के लिए सोशल मीडिया बैन कर दिया। मद्रास हाईकोर्ट ने भी एक जनहित याचिका पर सुनवाई करते हुए केंद्र को ऑस्ट्रेलिया जैसा कानून बनाने का सुझाव दिया है।

टेक्नॉलजी संग संतुलन | यूपी सरकार का आदेश टेक्नॉलजी से दूर नहीं करता, बल्कि संतुलन बनाने की कोशिश है। पढ़ने की आदत धीरे-धीरे विकसित होती है। आदेश से ज्यादा प्रभाव तब पड़ेगा, जब घर-परिवार में भी बच्चों को अखबार पढ़ने के लिए प्रेरित किया जाएगा।

HINDUSTAN TIMES (P-12), 28 DECEMBER 2025

The present needs the spirit of ancient Nalanda

Pavan K Varma

Last week, I attended the first Nalanda Literature Festival at Rajgir, which is close to Nalanda, in Bihar. It is a commendable initiative, and Ganga Kumar, its prime mover, deserves our felicitations. The event was well attended, with danseuse Sonal Mansingh, parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor, historian Vikram Sampath, author Abhay K (who has written a well-received book on Nalanda), among many others, participating.

A festival of ideas in Nalanda's name is a befitting tribute to the world's first world-class university. Founded in the early 5th century CE during the reign of the Gupta dynasty — traditionally dated to 427 CE — it blossomed into a residential academic campus long before the medieval universities of Europe took shape. When the University of Bologna — often cited as the oldest in Europe — was established in 1088 CE, Nalanda was already over 650 years old. In its prime, it remained the jewel of India's intellectual life for more than seven centuries.

I first visited the brooding ruins of Nalanda — a World Heritage Site — in August 2012. My wife and I were the guests of chief minister Nitish Kumar, and he sent us on a tour to see Bihar Sharif (next in importance only to Ajmer Sharif), Pawapuri (where Jain founder Mahavir took *samadhi*), Bodh Gaya, and Gaya. It is amazing that within a radius of around 100 km are key sites of four of India's major religions. That was Nitish's way of emphasising to us the eclectic and inclusive ethos of Bihar.

At Nalanda, I stood transfixed pondering over the fact that there was once a flourishing university here, with 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers, in which Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics, Vedic literature, logic and linguistics, medicine (including Ayurveda), mathematics, astronomy, astrology, economics, politics, poetry, ethics, and even arts and architecture, were taught and debated. Foreign students, from China, Tibet, Central Asia, and, indeed, all of South East Asia, who studied at Nalanda, took their learning back home, becoming emissaries of Indian thought systems, translating texts, and initiating dialogues across cultures.

The description of Xuanzang, the Chinese scholar who visited India (630-643 CE), and lived in Nalanda for five years, was carried by the gentle breeze to me: "An azure pool winds around the monasteries, adorned with the full-blown cups of the blue lotus; the dazzling red flowers of the lovely *kanaka* hang here and there, and outside groves of mango trees offer the inhabitants their dense and protective shade." My mind conjured students debating with *acharyas*, and profound Buddhist scholars like Nagarjuna, or mathematical geniuses like Aryabhata (who discovered the zero) and Brahmagupta, among hundreds of others, making path-breaking discoveries.

The thought also struck me: Why, in a civilisation that produced the first Harvard of the world, and other great universities like Takshashila and Vikramshila, there is, today, no Indian university in the top 100 educational institutions globally? Why have we so easily accepted our educational downgrading, relinquishing our pursuit of *moulik soch*, the power of original thought?

Nalanda University Ruins, the first Buddhism University with blue clear sky in Bihar state in India. SHUTTERSTOCK

Perhaps the ecosystem of support that sustained such an extraordinary institution has died. Nalanda did not flourish in a vacuum; it flourished because the Indian polity and society recognised knowledge as worthy of sustained patronage. The Gupta kings, and later the Pala dynasty of Bengal, were among its most committed patrons. They provided endowments, land, monasteries and stipends — conceiving a centre of learning not as a private academy but as an essential public good.

And then, with a shudder, I visualised the army of Bakhtiyar Khilji destroying Nalanda in the 12th century. Centuries of priceless accumulated knowledge were reduced to ashes. Contemporary accounts describe its libraries — Ratnasagara, Ratnodadhi and Ratnaranjaka — as repositories of thousands upon thousands of manuscripts, millions of scrolls arranged in scientific order, reflecting an encyclopaedic grasp of human knowledge. The libraries are said to have burned for months owing to the sheer volume of texts. This wanton destruction shows how vulnerable human knowledge is when political and ideological intolerance displaces curiosity and open inquiry.

In a global age that frequently privileges technocracy over wisdom, Nalanda's heritage — its expansive, inclusive, innovative and deeply reflective pursuit of knowledge — must be reclaimed not as nostalgia but as inspiration. In doing so, we honour not only the scholars and seekers of ancient India, but reaffirm that the pursuit of knowledge, when unfettered, remains humanity's noblest pilgrimage.

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The views expressed are personal

STATESMAN (P-9), 28 DECEMBER 2025

Ramanujan's troubled nationalism

ANAMITRO BISWAS

The same year as Asia's first Nobel, an FA dropout clerk of the Madras Port Trust gathered courage to write to Prof. G. H. Hardy, who led the mathematical establishment of Britain in his era, with a small sample of his mathematical results backed by no institutional credibility or proof. What followed in the next few years was a collaborative hurricane of unbelievable findings, scribbling of ideas that would take more than a century to realize, and international scientific limelight straight on the face of an 'enigma like the Hindu Ramanujanwho arrives unexpectedly out of nowhere'. Shockingly, apart from academic circles locally, contemporary nationalists remained oblivious to the existence and the untimely death of perhaps the most brilliant Indian brain of the 20th century.

The year Ramanujan died was that of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements. No prominent leader in British India bothered to pay homage to the man of international acclaim as the second Indian F.R.S., the first Indian Fellow of Trinity, and arguably

he most productive Indian mathematician ever, all in 32 years of life. Witnesses saw in Ramanujan 'the immemorial wisdom of the East'. No mortal could comprehend the mind magic to his striking insights. Almost always right, he could do more math in his head than most of his peers could on paper - and by math here, I do not mean just numerical manipulations, but analysis of structures abstract and vast. For Bruce Berndt 'still covered by a curtain that has barely been drawn', to E. T. Bell his artistry was 'all but supernatural'. Bell particularly identified him with his affiliation to the exotic land of Hindus. His

advent in England was mythically majestic, and veni, vidi, vici!

Ramanujan led a life of strict religious observance, up to his personal space. He continued with his vegetarian diet into the sanatorium of Matlock. For him, his deity Namagiri uncovered secrets of mathematics. He pictured equations as thoughts of God. He went deepenough into spirituality to attribute human action, like in anelectric streetcar, to 'the current that flows in the overhead wires. 'That is the way maya works in this world.'

Hardy, his colleague, insisted that his religion was simply 'a matter of observance and not of intellectual conviction'.Baron Snow chose not to trust Hardy's insight in this. Hardy's self-proclaimed 'distaste for all forms of mysticism' might have affected his view, but on the contrary, 'Hardy's deep reverence formathematics... was precisely of the same kind as impels other peopleto the worship of God.' To Dr. George Andrews, a special case ofmathematicians' reacting to subconscious flashes of insight was Ramanujan's attachment of that to his Hindu outlook.

'The earliest extant mathematics of India is embedded intexts of architecture and rhythm, the Śulbasūtras and the Chandaḥśāstras, where principles of geometry and combinatorics are stated and utilized to make the perfect yajña altar and the exquisitely resonating hymn. Scholars like Baudhāyana and Pingala have stated the synopses of their deductions as Vedic truths. Following Alexandria's fall, more original work had been produced here, of which the use of zero as a number apart from place value has taken up all prominence, but which also encompasses Brahmagupta's extension of Euclid's magnum opus and Bhāskara's work on Diophantine number theory. Dr. Cajori's book, published by AMS Chelsea, calls it the phase of "the Hindus".

The UGC's new undergrad syllabus emphasizes math 'made in India'. Algebra, often misattributed to Arab compiler Khowarizmi's Al Jebr, and Varāha Mihira's development of trigonometry as a tool for astronomy flourished here before the medieval Dark Ages after the eclipse of Nalanda and Taxila. By the time Ramanujan was born, India was a subcontinent engulfed in ignorance and shadowed by colonialists. Ramanujan hailed from a corner distant in infrastructure and culture from the anglicized capitals of Bombay and Calcutta. Ramanujan, with all his familiarity of Sanskrit, could not have read the works of the Indian stalwarts, which had been pushed to obscurity.

As India had to re-learn math from a British framework, so did Ramanujan. With no formal training, he studied Carr's textbook that listed just formulae, so never cared for rigorous deduction. His style of writing in notebooks that hide to date a mine of surprises, erasing any deduction on slate, is similar to the assertions of Vedanga math, but in a manner adapted from perhaps the worst example of an English formula manual, not from sages to whom formulae were as important as their mystic interpretation. His inheritance of Hindu spirituality tuned into perfect harmony the non-academic faith and the secular math he had picked up from distinct sources. Truths, whether in mathematics or in the Upanishads, mattered equally to him. In an age when the flood of wartime technological advances would motivate the acceleration of theoretical sciences, Ramanujan, like his advisor Hardy, remained faithful to pure mathematics not 'useful' in war or amenity, that

Hardy was convinced did not make, 'for good or ill, the least difference to' the material world'. They both defied gracefully the peril of civilization during the world war and dedicated their efforts to the unadulterated pursuit of Truth, which to Hardy was, as to Keats, synonymous with beauty, and to Ramanujan stood for his religious integrity.

Besides sourcing his math from Carr, Ramanujan willingly learnt the literary conventions of modern mathematics at Trinity. He kept his mysticism to himself; his cultural affiliation packed in his suitcase. Hardly in a position to flaunt his nationalism, not being born in affluence that allows one to toss aside a job under the British, he never spoke against the British Raj nor indulged in politics. If he had made friends with Indian students like Mahalanobis in Cambridge, that was only because of shared roots and emotions. Yet, the Tamil man in European attire, with his hair tuft cut off and his tilak wiped off, to his Western peers seemed to personify the treasures of clouded India that Max Müller, Vivekananda and Tagore were revealing to them - perhaps more vividly than Gandhi in dhoti and chaddar.

(The author is a research scholar in the Department of Mathematics, IIT Delhi.)

New ways of learning

An educationist considers some crucial differences between higher education institutes in India and the U.S.

A. Joseph Dorairaj

As an educationist who has visited dozens of higher education institutes in India and the U.S. and interacted with faculty and students, I have found major differences between Indian HEIs and their American counterparts.

Most American HEIs are international in character. No matter which department or discipline, there are faculty from different parts of the world and students of different races, complexions, world views, and sexual and ideological orientations. This leads to cultural plurality and promotes diverse viewpoints and debates, making teaching-learning dialogical and meaningful. In contrast, even top-ranking Indian institutions have hardly any international faculty. At the most, there are a couple of visiting professors who may spend a maximum of one semester teaching one or two courses. This extends to the student body as well, leading to an acute absence of cross-cultural discussions and debates.

Variety of activities

American campuses are buzzing with various activities: intellectual, cultural, political, sports and more. The Ivy League institutions are members of the Ivy League Athletic Conference, making them not only intellectually vibrant but also strong in terms of sporting activities. In contrast, Indian HEIs are committed primarily to academic pursuits.

While cultural and sporting facilities are available in some, Indian institutions have a long way to go before they reach American standards. Many campuses are deserted after regular class hours. As a result, students lack a holistic dimension.

The third aspect is the contrasting teaching styles. Indian classrooms are largely teacher-centred and rote-memorisation is the norm. But American institutions encourage debates and discussions, even dissent. Teachers are guides and catalysts. Critical thinking is the bedrock of teaching-learning with problem-solving being a key strategy. Technology has been seamlessly integrated in all institutions.

Indian institutions have made some successful attempts in integrating technology with teaching-learning but much more needs to be done. Universities and colleges in India have introduced the Choice-Based Credit System but this is plagued with issues. There is hardly any interdisciplinarity. Credit transfer too is a thorny issue though there have been attempts to iron these out. Indian HEIs have a lot to learn from their American counterparts regarding the credit system, which facilitates an individual pace of learning.

American institutions, including medical and technology institutes and community colleges, focus on liberal education, which claims that knowledge is an end in itself. But, in the Indian educational system, liberal education is being discounted and the future of the Humanities is uncertain. HEIs are being turned into skill development institutes.

Assessments

There is a crucial difference with regard to assessment though both systems talk of formative and summative assessments. The American system encourages self-study and personalised learning, and emphasises formative assessment. Evaluation is individualised to a reasonable extent. There is a conscious attempt to go beyond marks and grades. In India, given the large number of classes, evaluation is standardised.

American universities are centres of excellence, especially in terms of cutting-edge research. Many top journals in diverse disciplines are published in the U.S. and the American universities boast of publishing the highest number of papers in indexed journals. Indian universities are trying to catch up in terms of the number of publications but lack of research funding, plagiarism and retraction are key challenges.

Finally, a striking difference is the stark absence of political activism on campus. In recent times, some university presidents had the courage to speak truth to power. A sizeable percentage of students in American institutions are politically active, voicing their concern for the disempowered.

On the contrary, the faculty and the students in most Indian institutions are politically non-committal though student wings of major political parties are active on campuses. But the political activism in the American HEIs is issue-based while it is drawn on party lines in Indian HEIs.

In the realm of higher education, India has a lot to learn from the U.S., especially in terms of promoting liberal education, critical thinking, interdisciplinarity, individualised learning, and holistic and transformative education. In particular, Indian HEIs should realise that political activism is not an enemy of the academia, but a tool of empowerment. If India emulates some of the best American educational practices, it can improve its ranking and stature in the international area and empower its students.

Views are personal

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A grand vision and the great Indian research deficit

Shashi Tharoor

is the fourth-term Member of Parliament (Congress) for Thiruvananthapuram (Lok Sabha), an award-winning author and a former Minister of State for Human Resources Development

India stands at a pivotal moment in its economic and technological trajectory. With its vast human capital and a rapidly expanding economy, it harbours ambitions of becoming a global power. Yet, this grand vision is significantly hampered by a deep-seated and chronic insufficiency in research and development (R&D).

The scale in numbers

The scale of India's R&D deficit is best illustrated by a few stark numbers. Despite having 17.5% of the world's brains (since it is home to 17.5% of the world's population), India produces only a meagre 3% of the world's research output. This disparity highlights a fundamental failure in leveraging its massive demographic dividend to generate high-value research.

The situation is not much better on intellectual property creation. Recent reports from the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) suggest a mixed picture: dramatic growth from a very low base, but overall an unimpressive performance. In 2023, India was ranked sixth globally for total patent filings, recording 64,480 applications. This represents the fastest growth (+15.7%) among the top 20 countries and is a significant figure. However, in the context of the total 3.55 million patent applications filed globally in 2023, India's share is still low, at approximately 1.8% of the global total. Critically, when measuring resident applications per million inhabitants, a truer reflection of domestic innovation intensity, India ranks significantly lower (47th), underscoring that the overall growth is not yet translating into widespread, population-level innovation dominance.

The most damning evidence of India's R&D gap lies in R&D expenditure. Gross Expenditure on R&D in India, covering both private and public sectors, has consistently hovered between 0.6% and 0.7% of GDP in recent years (and is slipping as GDP grows). This figure pales in comparison to major economies and innovation hubs: China spends around 2.4%, the United States is at approximately 3.5%, and Israel leads globally at over 5.4%. To grasp the magnitude of underinvestment, one only needs to compare India's entire national R&D spend with that of a single multinational corporation. In 2023, the Chinese technology giant, Huawei, invested a colossal CNY 164.7 billion (approximately $23.4 billion) into R&D. This amount of spending from just one company – no doubt driven by intense global competition and U.S. sanctions, particularly focusing on crucial areas such as semiconductor technology – exceeds the total combined R&D expenditure of all public and private entities in India, a nation of more than 1.4 billion people. As Nvidia Chairman Jensen Huang noted, Huawei's relentless investment has propelled them to be "nanoseconds" behind the U.S. in advanced semiconductor capabilities. This corporate-level intensity of R&D is the engine of next-generation technological power. India's inability to muster even a fraction of this kind of concentrated, strategic investment speaks volumes about the challenge ahead for it.

So much for the numbers. They are merely symptoms of deeper, structural problems within the Indian innovation ecosystem that it must tackle on a war footing.

> The current deficit in R&D investment cannot sustain India's ambition to become a global innovation leader

The government sector is the funds driver

Most disappointingly, private sector participation in R&D spending is abysmal. A global hallmark of a mature innovation economy is the dominant role of the private sector in R&D. In developed nations, industry typically accounts for two-thirds or more of such expenditure. In India, however, the government sector (central, State, higher education, and public sector industry) remains the main driver, contributing approximately 63.6% of R&D funds, with the private industrial sector contributing only around 36.4%. India's business tycoons need to rise to the R&D challenge, but they are instead largely complacent and myopic about it. Indian industry's low investment is driven by a focus on incremental improvements over disruptive innovation, a preference for technology licensing over domestic development, and a general risk-averse culture.

The second dismaying feature is one we had already identified in the second tenure of the United Progressive Alliance: a persistent academia-industry disconnect, the subject of a report N.R. Narayana Murthy wrote for us more than a decade ago that is sadly gathering dust. Indian academia, despite producing millions of highly skilled graduates, often operates in a silo. Research is frequently theoretical and disconnected from the immediate, market-driven needs of the industry. The mechanisms for technology transfer, commercialisation of research, and joint industry-academic projects remain underdeveloped. Nor do Indian companies look to the world of academia for help. In the U.S., companies commonly bring ideas to universities and give grants for student researchers to develop them into marketable innovations. There is no such culture in India. This gulf prevents valuable research from crossing the "valley of death" between the laboratory and the marketplace.

And there is no escaping the brain drain. While India produces a vast number of PhDs and engineers, the most ambitious and the talented often seek better infrastructure, funding, and career progression opportunities abroad. The domestic R&D environment struggles to attract and retain world-class researchers due to limited high-end research facilities and lower salary benchmarks compared to the rest of the world.

The allocation of public R&D funds is often constrained by slow bureaucratic processes. Project approval times can be excessively long, and the release of funds is frequently staggered and unpredictable, impeding the smooth execution of ambitious, long-term research programmes.

What, then, is the path forward?

The goal of building comprehensive tech and economic muscle, worthy of a "Viksit Bharat", is not a sprint but a marathon. To achieve it, India must engineer a fundamental shift in its approach. The most immediate and critical step is to raise the R&D expenditure to GDP ratio to at least 2% within the next five to seven years. This requires a massive public spending commitment, coupled with substantial tax incentives and grants to encourage the private sector to ramp up its contribution to at least 50% of the total R&D spend. The launch of the ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund by the government is a step in the right direction, provided it is disbursed efficiently and targeted towards frontier technologies.

An ambitious India needs to move away from scattered research efforts and focus on national missions in strategic, high-value domains: semiconductors, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, advanced materials and green energy. These missions require long-term, uninterrupted funding and clear, measurable outcomes tied to national security and economic sovereignty.

Universities and research

And there is no escaping India's obligation to reform higher education. Universities must transition from being purely teaching institutions to also becoming centres of excellence in research. This involves significantly boosting funding for PhD programmes, creating competitive research faculty positions, and building world-class research infrastructure. Furthermore, mandatory and structured mechanisms for industry-sponsored research chairs and joint incubation centres must be established to bridge the academic-industry gap.

India must also inculcate a robust intellectual property culture in the country. This means simplifying patent filing processes, strengthening enforcement, and creating attractive financial incentives for inventors (both academic and corporate) whose patents are commercialised.

India possesses the intellectual capital and the aspiration to become a global innovation leader. However, the current deficit in R&D investment – so glaringly exposed by the comparison to a single company such as Huawei – cannot sustain this ambition. The next decade must be dedicated to creating the structural, financial and cultural foundations for innovation. If these fundamental changes are not executed with political will and unwavering commitment, the goal of Viksit Bharat will recede well beyond 2047.

PIONEER (P-8), 29 DECEMBER 2025

When classrooms fail, look first at the staffroom

SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

As the academic year draws to a close, schools across the country move into a familiar ritual of wrapping up. Annual reports are prepared, achievements listed, photographs chosen and stories of progress assembled with care. This end-of-year exercise is meant to signal reflection and accountability, yet what is often missing is any serious examination of staffroom culture, even though it has a direct bearing on teaching quality, staff morale and the stability of classrooms.

The staffroom is sometimes treated as an informal space, but in practice it operates as the emotional and professional centre of a school, shaping daily interactions and influencing how teaching unfolds.

When classrooms begin to struggle, explanations are usually located outside the institution. Students are said to be distracted, parents are labelled demanding, technology is blamed for shrinking attention spans, and curricula described as excessive. What is rarely acknowledged is that teaching is not a neutral or mechanical activity: it is deeply emotional and relational, shaped by the conditions in which teachers work. Over time, the staffroom becomes an invisible curriculum, passing on unspoken rules about hierarchy, endurance and who is valued. When this space is marked by selective recognition, performative compliance, suppressed disagreement and quiet acceptance of fatigue, problems do not appear suddenly; they accumulate. By the final term, many teachers are not only tired but emotionally drained.

Under such conditions, teaching changes in subtle ways. Patience narrows, experimentation feels risky, and lessons drift towards routine completion rather than engagement. The focus shifts to finishing the syllabus instead of responding to pupils. Young people quickly sense inconsistency among adults. Their reaction may be indifference, withdrawal or passive resistance. What is labelled classroom disorder is often the outcome of professional environments that have already weakened teachers' sense of safety and purpose.

Leadership has a decisive role in maintaining or challenging these cultures. It is rarely dramatic. More often it appears as intolerance of dissent, unclear decision-making, uneven accountability and recognition that prioritises visibility over substance. Control is confused with authority, speed mistaken for effectiveness. Meetings become rituals of agreement, and teachers learn that compliance carries fewer risks than judgement. Fear gradually becomes the organising principle, even as it erodes trust and initiative. Alongside this is peer complicity: staffrooms can turn into spaces where gossip replaces support, average performance is defended in the name of harmony, and strong work is resented for disturbing a fragile balance.

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If year-end reflection is to matter, it must address these realities. Identifying warning signs requires honesty and courage. Superficial wellness programmes or student-centred initiatives cannot offset environments that exhaust teachers. When staffroom culture improves, other changes follow. Teachers regain confidence, collaboration strengthens, and classrooms become steadier. Discipline grows preventive rather than reactive, innovation feels shared, and learning recovers direction because educators are no longer working in survival mode for pupils, teachers, and families across the school community in the year ahead.

The writer is an educator and a counsellor

Cheap intelligence, expensive institutions: What the data really says about India

NISHANT SAHDEV

Artificial intelligence has become astonishingly cheap. India's institutions, however, still move at the same old speed. That mismatch now sits at the heart of India's AI story. As the year draws to a close, it feels like the right moment to pause — not to speculate about where artificial intelligence might go next, but to assess where it has already taken us.

Over the past year, much of my writing has focused on AI's impact on jobs, energy, governance, education, and even on how it subtly changes what we count as knowledge. These were not neutral updates. They were opinions, based on data and offered openly.

Yet as the months passed, one question returned more persistently than any other. If artificial intelligence is developing so rapidly — and becoming so cheap — why does real economic and institutional change in India still feel so slow? To answer that, we have to step away from slogans and scrutinise what the data actually says.

Earlier this year, Stanford University released its AI Index Report 2025, among the most comprehensive global assessments of artificial intelligence to date. It tracks costs, adoption, productivity, energy use, investment, and policy trends across countries. Buried beneath its charts and rankings is a simple but unsettling conclusion: intelligence is no longer scarce.

Between 2022 and 2024, the cost of running advanced AI systems collapsed. Using language models with capabilities comparable to GPT-3.5 became more than 280 times cheaper in just two years. Depending on the task, inference costs fell anywhere between nine-fold and nine-hundred-fold annually.

What once required elite research labs and large budgets is now available at near-trivial marginal cost. For a country like India, this should have been a turning point. We never suffered from a shortage of intelligence. It produces engineers at scale, exports software globally, and has built some of the world's largest digital public platforms. Historically, India's comparative advantage has not been inventing every technology first, but absorbing and deploying technologies rapidly once they become usable. Cheap intelligence should have aligned perfectly with that strength.

Yet the same data tells a more sobering story. Globally, nearly four out of five organisations reported using AI in 2024, and adoption of generative AI more than doubled in a single year. Despite this, the economic impact remains modest. Most firms reported cost savings of less than 10 per cent and revenue gains below 5 per cent.

Productivity has improved, but slowly and unevenly. In small economies, such gains barely register. In India, they should have been transformative. That they have not been tells us something crucial. The primary constraint is no longer technological capability. It is institutional absorption.

Across India — within Government departments, municipal administrations, public service systems, and even large private firms — AI has largely been layered on top of existing processes rather than allowed to alter them. Dashboards multiply, but decisions still crawl. Predictive tools exist, but final authority remains manual. Automation is introduced, then quietly neutralised through additional approvals, reviews, and signatures. Intelligence is present. The trust is not. This is not because Indian institutions are irrational or resistant to technology. It is because they have been created by history. Decades of scarcity, legal exposure, and uneven accountability have taught organisations a powerful lesson: avoid blame. A wrong decision is visible and punishable.

A delayed decision rarely is. Over time, systems evolve to protect themselves rather than optimise outcomes. When intelligence was expensive and uncertain, such caution made sense.

When intelligence is cheap and abundant, it becomes an invisible economic drag. The AI Index highlights another reality India has only begun to confront: artificial intelligence is no longer just software. It is infrastructure. The computing power required to train leading AI models now doubles roughly every five months.

Dataset sizes double every eight months. Even as hardware becomes cheaper and more energy-efficient, total energy consumption continues to rise because scale grows faster than efficiency improves. Globally, major technology companies are restructuring long-term energy strategies around AI workloads, including renewed investments in nuclear power to ensure stable supply.

This matters deeply for India. A country cannot scale intelligence faster than it can power it. Yet much of India's AI discourse remains oddly detached from electricity reliability, grid resilience, cooling capacity, land availability, and long-term energy planning. We talk endlessly about skills and models, but far less about the physical systems — power, water, heat, and infrastructure — that make intelligence usable at scale. Without these foundations, AI remains a pilot project rather than a productivity engine. Investment patterns reinforce this diagnosis. In 2024, private AI investment in the United States exceeded $109 billion. China attracted roughly $9.3 billion. India trails far behind both. This gap is not explained by GDP alone or by venture capital depth. It reflects something more fragile and harder to measure: institutional confidence.

Confidence that policies will remain stable. Confidence that infrastructure will scale. Confidence that long-term, compute-heavy investments will not be undermined by regulatory uncertainty or logistical bottlenecks.

Young Indians experience this contradiction intuitively. Many already use AI daily — to study, write, code, design, and think. For them, intelligence feels abundant. What feels scarce are institutions willing to recognise new skills, reward initiative, and redesign workflows around what technology now makes possible. When intelligence becomes cheap but opportunity remains constrained, optimism curdles into frustration. Seen through this lens, the data does not point to an AI failure. It points to an institutional one. We do not lack intelligence — human or artificial. It lacks readiness. Artificial intelligence will continue to improve.

Models will become cheaper, smaller, and more capable. The global advantage is already shifting away from those who merely invent intelligence toward those who deploy it effectively. Access is no longer the bottleneck. Absorption is.

As we enter a new year, its central AI challenge is not ambition or talent. It is whether institutions — Governments, firms, universities, and public systems — are willing to change how they decide, how they trust, and how they tolerate risk, so that cheap intelligence can translate into real productivity.

History does not reward potential. It rewards preparedness. In an age where intelligence is abundant, hesitation is no longer neutral for India. It is a choice — and an expensive one.

Author is a development professional at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, U.S., and the author of the forthcoming book Last Equation Before Silence

PIONEER (P-9), 30 DECEMBER 2025

From policy vision to institutional trust: Rethinking higher education reform in India

RAMA SHANKER DUBEY

India's higher education system is at a decisive juncture where long-articulated policy vision is now confronting the realities of governance and institutional capacity. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 laid out an ambitious roadmap to transform learning, research, and academic culture. The introduction of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, currently under examination by a Joint Parliamentary Committee, represents a decisive step towards aligning that vision with a coherent regulatory framework.

For decades, higher education governance in India has been shaped by regulatory multiplicity. Overlapping authorities, fragmented mandates, and compliance-driven oversight have constrained universities' ability to innovate. Within the university system, a persistent challenge has been the gap between academic intent and regulatory execution - where well-conceived programmes, interdisciplinary initiatives, and research collaborations are routinely delayed by procedural hurdles. The cost of this disconnect has been not merely administrative inefficiency, but a steady erosion of intellectual momentum.

The NEP 2020 addressed this structural problem by placing institutional autonomy at the centre of reform, supported by accountability. Its emphasis on multidisciplinary universities, flexible degree pathways, and research-led learning assumes a governance environment that enables academic decision-making rather than restrains it. Yet many universities - particularly public and regional institutions - have struggled to operationalise these reforms within regulatory frameworks designed for an earlier academic era.

The significance of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill lies in its shift from micromanagement to outcome-based oversight. The proposed framework prioritises student learning outcomes, research impact, and societal engagement over procedural compliance. This marks a clear departure from input-driven regulation, where adherence to prescribed norms often outweighed academic results.

The implications for interdisciplinary education are immediate. Universities attempting to integrate technology, social sciences, ethics, and public policy have long encountered approval systems anchored in rigid disciplinary silos. A unified and streamlined regulatory structure enables institutions to design curricula aligned with contemporary societal and economic challenges rather than outdated classifications.

Research and innovation benefit in similar measure. NEP 2020 positions universities as centres of knowledge creation, yet excessive compliance obligations have diverted faculty time and institutional resources away from research activity. In public universities, this has led to missed funding cycles and delayed collaborations. A governance framework that evaluates outcomes rather than procedures restores academic focus on inquiry, innovation, and engagement with industry and society.

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At the same time, autonomy demands responsibility. India's higher education ecosystem remains uneven. While some institutions possess strong faculty strength and research infrastructure, many universities continue to face shortages of academic staff, uneven facilities, and administrative overload. Regulatory reform must therefore proceed alongside sustained investment in faculty development, leadership continuity, and institutional capacity-building to prevent the widening of existing disparities.

The experience of institution-building reinforces this point. Academic excellence does not emerge from infrastructure alone. Universities that command intellectual credibility have evolved through decades of mentorship, academic freedom, stable governance, and shared institutional values. Rapid expansion without nurturing these foundations produces institutions that function administratively but lack academic depth.

Equity and access remain integral to the NEP's framework. Its emphasis on regional balance, inclusion, and support for first-generation learners affirms education as a public good. Regulatory reform must strengthen this commitment by enabling quality expansion in underserved regions and supporting diverse learning modes, including digital and blended education, without diluting academic standards.

Transparency and accountability are central to institutional trust. Public disclosure of academic, financial, and operational practices, along with effective grievance redressal mechanisms, strengthens confidence among students, parents, and society. Autonomy anchored in openness ensures credibility rather than insulation.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee's deliberations therefore assume critical importance. Incorporating the perspectives of universities, faculty members, students, and state governments will determine whether regulatory reform reinforces academic vitality or merely restructures oversight.

Together, NEP 2020 and the proposed regulatory framework reflect a national resolve to position education at the core of India's developmental journey. In an era shaped by rapid technological change and complex social challenges, universities must prepare citizens not only for employment, but for ethical reasoning, democratic participation, and lifelong learning.

It is the perfect moment for India to embrace educational reform, empowering its institutions to lead the way in driving transformative changes. The real test is not whether India can reform its education laws, but whether its institutions are trusted and empowered to lead this transformation. When policy vision is matched with governance rooted in confidence, responsibility, and sustained investment, Indian higher education moves from ambition to institutional reality.

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STATESMAN (P-11), 30 DECEMBER 2025

Teacher preparedness in the age of AI: What skills will teachers need next?

NIYATI HANDA

Classrooms are witnessing a quiet but profound transformation as artificial intelligence is redefining the contours of education. For centuries, schools followed a steady routine shaped by timetables, fixed academic years and carefully paced lessons. However, with the advent of AI, that routine has been disrupted, and knowledge transmission now evolves at a speed that outpaces textbooks. This transformation is making it increasingly important for educators to rethink the essence of teaching. While AI bots can explain, repeat and evaluate with precision, they cannot replace the human connection that learning depends on, such as intuition, physical presence, emotional awareness and trust.

As per the Student Generative AI Survey 2025, the use of AI amongst students globally has surged sharply over the past year, with 92 per cent now using AI in some form, up from 66 per cent in 2024. The report also found that 88 per cent of students have used generative AI for assessments, compared to just 53 per cent the previous year. These numbers are not just indicators of technological growth but signs of a fundamental shift in the education ecosystem.

Why does human connection still matter in learning?

In an age dominated by screens and algorithms, learning is still shaped most deeply by human connection. This is precisely why school curricula can no longer remain centred on information absorption and retention alone. The shift has to be towards a more human-centred approach that focuses deeply on the overall well-being of students. In a landscape where artificial intelligence is defining how information is accessed and processed, the role of a teacher extends far beyond that of an instructor or evaluator alone. There has been significant psychological and educational research that has shown that positive student-teacher relationships are among the most powerful predictors of learning outcomes. When students feel emotionally supported by their teachers, they are more likely to display higher levels of attention, better memory retention, greater motivation and stronger problem-solving skills. Emotional safety in classrooms allows their brains to shift from a state of survival to a state of learning, which is very important to unlock a child's cognitive potential.

Learning through real experiences

This human-centred shift must also be reflected in the kind of experiences schools prioritise. There must be emphasis on real hands-on experiences with activities like farming, woodwork, painting, weaving, theatre, music and craft that will help them gain physical engagement with the world around them. The act of crafting something with their own hands, struggling and experimenting with materials, learning through failures and refining their skills with consistent practice, helps them build patience, motor skills, emotional regulation and self-esteem. In fact, as machines will continue to generate limitless digital experiences, these hands-on experiences will become essential in preserving a child's connection to reality, effort, and self-worth.

The relevance of core academic skills in a digital age

At the same time, easy access to digital resources is reshaping how children perceive core academic skills such as reading and writing. With essays, stories and research papers being generated in seconds, students may begin to question the relevance of reading and writing altogether. Earlier, writing was a cognitively demanding process requiring thinking, organisation of ideas and emotional investment. Today, that intellectual labour risks being outsourced to artificial intelligence. This is where teachers must evolve into guides and mentors, encouraging children to collect their thoughts, make judgments, and find their own language and reasoning. Because ultimately, the labour may be exhaustive, but it shall strengthen neural pathways and sharpen intellectual capacity.

Why must humanity stay at the heart of education?

It is vital to understand that learning is not shaped by tools alone, but by human relationships. Through daily exchanges with teachers and peers, students learn empathy, conflict resolution, cooperation, and self-regulation. These are not skills that can be downloaded or simulated through screens alone. A teacher's encouragement, a timely correction, a patient explanation, or even silent belief in a struggling student can contribute to a child's intellectual growth. So, the real dilemma before us is not that machines will become too intelligent, but it is that of how humans may grow emotionally and cognitively disengaged if education fails to adapt. The goal, therefore, is not to resist AI but to integrate it thoughtfully while collectively protecting human processes that build depth, resilience, and wisdom.

If artificial intelligence is to become the new infrastructure of learning, then human connection must remain in its soul. The classrooms of the future must not only teach children how to use intelligent machines but also how to remain deeply, consciously, and compassionately human in a world increasingly shaped by technology. Teachers will have to become emotional anchors and guides, helping children navigate not just academic challenges but also the psychological consequences of growing up alongside intelligent machines. Lessons will have to be designed not merely to transmit facts, but to shape character, build emotional intelligence, and strengthen interpersonal understanding!

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Beyond crime scenes: Forensic education advancing justice and cybersecurity

SUPRIYA PATTANAYAK

Forensics, the application of scientific methods and principles to enable decision making in criminal cases, has evolved beyond the crime scenes. Today, we see it as a discipline that can strengthen the fabric of modern society as it can support law enforcement, cybersecurity, corporate transparency, and ultimately lead to ethical governance. We often come across cases of financial fraud, data breaches, and digital breaches; there is an increase in demand for forensic experts who can decode evidence not just at physical but also in virtual space as well. Thus, modern courses need to be skill-based, preparing students to adapt to the evolving landscape by blending science and technology using investigative thinking.

In India, forensic education has grown significantly in the last 10 years. The field has expanded since 2010, when nine universities offered forensic degrees. Since 2009, several National Forensic Sciences Universities (NFSUs) have been established, with expansion increasing since 2020. Additionally, forensic science courses have been added at approximately 165 private colleges and universities. Nonetheless, a 40.3 per cent vacancy rate for scientific positions has been observed in 26 forensic laboratories.

India has 806 districts, 27 state forensic science labs, 80 or more regional FSLs, and 9 CFSLs. In such a large population, figuring out how many forensic labs and colleges we need can be quite tricky. We really need to ramp up the number of specialised institutes to keep up with the growing number and complexity of cases.

Universities must provide a multifaceted strategy to solve this. First, we can immediately cover the laboratories by providing paid internships to students who have undergone rigorous training. Secondly, placing the skilled graduates in long-term roles creates capacity over time. Third, hiring retired forensic specialists could offer temporary protection. We have the opportunity to enhance the forensic capabilities of labs across the nation and tackle the challenge of finding qualified specialists to staff these facilities. By forming strong partnerships with universities and private organisations, we can ensure that all authorised positions are filled in a timely and efficient manner.

We can create a robust pool of professionals by collaborating with institutions and universities working toward skill-based education. There is a special emphasis needed for practical forensic training. This will ensure that the country's forensic infrastructure keeps pace with the steadily mounting demands of justice and scientific precision. Attention now needs to be directed at scaling up such institutions with qualified instructors and robust infrastructure to meet the growing demand for forensic professionals.

The universities that provide skill-oriented education can collaborate with the state police. Such a pioneering collaboration will provide students with unsurpassed practical exposure and stand as a milestone in connecting academics with law enforcement. At state-of-the-art labs and police stations, forensic sciences students will engage directly with real-life cases, progressing from theoretical simulations to practical situations that cultivate employable skills. This partnership gives the state police new talent.

Another problem that we may face on this path is the availability of qualified faculty. In order to overcome the lack of properly qualified professors in forensic science, one can propose PhD-qualified academics to teach at the university level, while also utilising experienced scientists, physicians, and retired law enforcement officers as visiting or adjunct faculty to provide exposure to real-world experiences.

Simultaneously, we must invest in faculty development programs to develop young faculty's rigour in the laboratory and research training support. In order to maintain unwavering standards of quality in our educational programs, strategic international collaborations and the use of virtual labs can support both short-term and long-term strategies to guarantee that students have the chance to interact with instructors who possess the educational background and practical experience in the field of forensic science. Those who look beyond generic courses and realise that the workforce needs people who already have practical knowledge of their disciplines have a bright future. Both the industry and the students benefit from this strategy. And this approach will enable forensic education to help in cybersecurity.

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TRIBUNE, (P-7), 30 DECEMBER 2025

Let's resist attempts to weaponise ignorance

AVIJIT PATHAK
SOCIOLOGIST

IN this terribly toxic, violent and polarised world, it is easy to get carried away by the all-pervading negativity that characterises our times. Yet, as a teacher, I continue to feel that we should not give up, and we must sow the seeds of hope and inspire the new generation to imagine and strive for a better world.

I wish to appeal to the teaching fraternity to welcome the new year with a heart-felt prayer: Let the pedagogy of hope alter the dynamics of the classroom, redefine the purpose of education and activate the power of critical thinking, creative imagination, empathy and love.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the despair we see among contemporary students and teachers often manifests itself in the form of some sort of cynical pragmatism.

As the market-driven/instrumental logic of neoliberalism robs education of a higher and nobler purpose, and transforms into a mere technical skill for economic productivity, many youngsters begin to regard social Darwinism or hyper-competitiveness as a new virtue, money as a new God, and egotistic pride as a status symbol.

No flower blooms in their inner world; seldom do they converse with Gandhi and Marx; and they have no 'surplus' time to struggle for equity, ecology, peace and justice. Yes, this sort of pragmatism means the absence of hope for a new world.

Likewise, the cult of hyper-nationalism further intensifies this sort of pragmatism among many teachers. As surveillance is normalised, many teachers in our colleges and universities begin to feel that they are being constantly monitored and observed.

And possibly, this sort of fear makes them extremely cautious of what they can teach, speak and write. As the colonisation of the academic sphere by the discourse of hyper-nationalism robs education of its libertarian potential, it is not impossible to find a significant section of teachers who prefer to remain silent, or become over-enthusiastic to show their loyalty to the system.

It is, therefore, not surprising that these 'pragmatic' teachers fail to arouse a new imagination, or the language of resistance amongst their students.

Here is a world tormented by war, authoritarianism and climate emergency. Yet, our colleges and universities refuse to see anything beyond the menace of 'ranking', and the narratives of 'placements and salary packages'.

Hence, the question arises: What is the pedagogy of hope I am referring to? And is it at all possible? Let it be understood clearly that it is not an empty ideal, or an imaginary utopian act.

It's impossible to nurture it without critical pedagogy; the 'kind of education that encourages the young learner to regain his/her creative agency, and question what damages the possibility of a just, egalitarian, humane and ecologically-sensitive world.

CREATIVITY: Let the teaching fraternity not forget the pedagogy of hope. GETTY

> Education cannot be reduced to a mere technical skill; it is essentially about awakened intelligence.

It is like understanding and theorising rigorously, say, the aggression of hyper-nationalism that causes war, genocide, militancy, terrorism and religious fundamentalism; the greed implicit in the logic of modern technocratic capitalism that reduces everything — be it a tree, a river, a forest or a mountain — into a mere 'resource' for ceaseless 'growth' and 'development', and leads to the horrors of climate emergency; and above all, the unholy alliance of billionaire technocrats and neo-fascists that erodes the spirit of democracy.

Moreover, the pedagogy of hope means that education cannot be reduced to a mere technical skill; instead, it is essentially about awakened intelligence, or what Henry Giroux — one of the finest educationists in our times — would have characterised as a transformative tool for nurturing informed and politically aware democratic citizens. This is the only way to resist the weaponisation of ignorance.

Apart from critical thinking, the pedagogy of hope needs something more. It needs a mode of learning that arouses every young learner's hidden potential — I mean, the courage to dream of a new world; the willingness to unite knowledge and praxis, thinking and feeling, art and science and aesthetics.

In a way, it seeks to unite the power of critique and the redemptive possibility of love and compassionate listening. In fact, every serious proponent of the pedagogy of hope needs to engage in a continual conversation with Paulo Freire and bell hooks, Rabindranath Tagore and Jiddu Krishnamurti, or, for that matter, Martin Luther King (Jr) and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Even as a retired professor, I interact with young minds, and witness their dilemmas, anxieties and confusions. And I love to share with them the other stories — of course, outside the official curriculum.

In a communally polarised world, I tell them the tales of Mahatma Gandhi's Noakhali days (1946-47), and his ceaseless effort to arouse goodness in people's hearts, combat communal violence, and spread the message of love, empathy and cross-religious dialogues.

In a world that celebrates man's brute instincts, I sit with them, and listen to John Lennon's remarkably illuminating song: "You may say I am a dreamer/But I am not the only one/I hope someday you will join us/And the world will live as one."

And in a world where consumerism is the most cherished doctrine, and 'development' is the most addictive drug, I love to read with them Henry David Thoreau's classic *Walden*, and experience his sensitivity to nature, his austerity, and his poetic wonder.

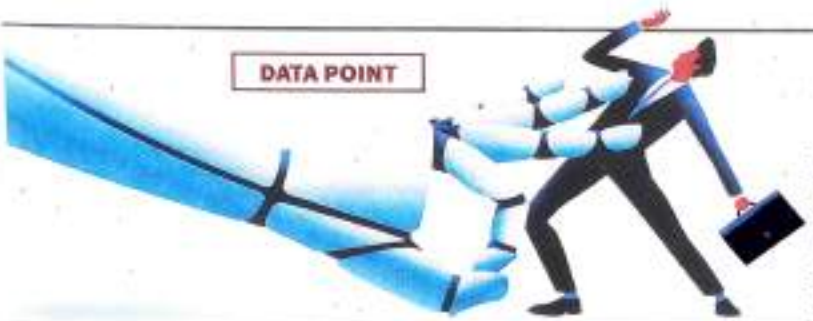
And yes, when in this techno-savvy world, the intoxication with social media is giving birth to an anxious generation, and even our policy-makers are planning to introduce artificial intelligence from Class 3, I wish to invoke Jiddu Krishnamurti, and urge them to watch a raindrop or an amazing sunset, and realise that sensitivity is the highest form of intelligence.

Let the teaching fraternity not forget the pedagogy of hope.

HINDU (P-6), 31 DECEMBER 2025

Why programming is losing its 'gold standard' status to GenAI

AI proficiency is outpacing traditional coding in both demand and dollar value



Change in tech hierarchy

Generative AI is rewriting the tech career playbook. Programming, once the gold standard for high-paying jobs, is now viewed as a secondary skill that is 'less essential' to the future workforce. Because learning AI is more accessible to beginners, the disruption to traditional coding has multiplied. With AI/ML roles commanding significantly higher salaries than standard development jobs, the industry's transition is only gathering speed. The above conclusions are based on the World Economic Forum's "New Economy Skills: Building AI, Data and Digital Capabilities for Growth". By **The Hindu Data Team**

CHART 1: While skills like programming, mathematics, and teaching are receding in importance, 'AI & Big Data' and 'Creative Thinking' are taking centre stage as core requirements for the future. Amid this change, technology literacy — defined as the ability to adapt digital tools to solve real-world problems — remains a critical asset for the modern workforce

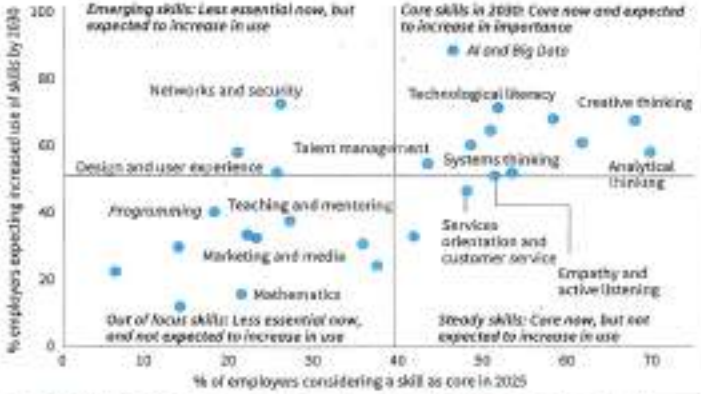


CHART 2: While AI and Big Data skills can be acquired in half the time it takes to learn programming, Coursera's 2025 data reveals that the total hours spent on AI-related learning is six times higher than for programming. This signals that millions are pivoting toward AI to future-proof their careers

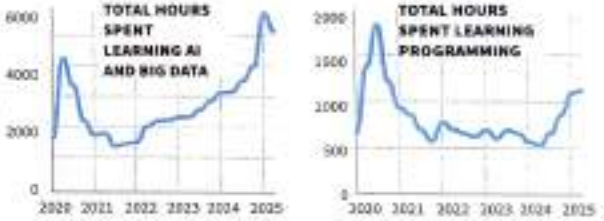


CHART 4: Within the broader field of AI, Gen AI-specific learning has seen explosive growth. Following an initial surge during the pandemic, interest in AI competencies accelerated sharply in 2022. While core AI skills continued their expansion, demand for Gen AI skyrocketed following the release of ChatGPT

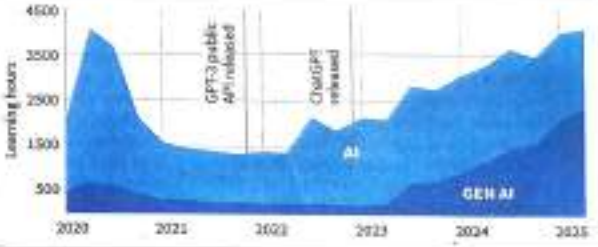
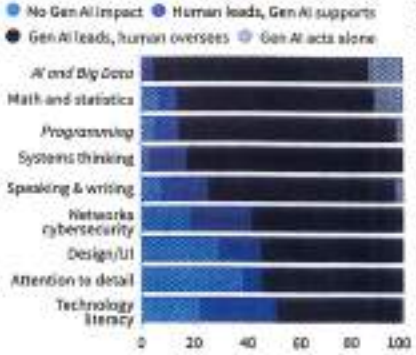


CHART 3: With AI and Big Data requiring fewer than half the learning hours of programming to reach beginner proficiency, the tech landscape is shifting rapidly. This transition is being driven by young challengers who are entering the field thick and fast, leveraging their ability to master new tools far more quickly than the established workforce. The chart shows the **average learning hours needed** to achieve various proficiency levels

Mean 0% — 150%

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
AI and Big Data	30.4	83.8	136.8
Design and user experience	32.0	73.4	107.9
Networks and cybersecurity	57.3	107.8	155.3
Programming	67.3	116.3	144.0
Technological literacy	61.2	116.2	143.5

CHART 5: The chart shows the capacity of GenAI to transform a given skill as a share of all granular skills within each skill group



An analysis of 2,500 Indeed skills (July 2025) via GPT-4.1 and Claude 4 reveals that programming skills are most ripe for transformation as Gen AI automates routine tasks. Conversely, technology literacy remains largely shielded, as it relies on human judgment and adaptation

CHART 6: The chart shows the seven-month moving average of average wages across various skill levels