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STANDING *with* STUDENTS

Listening, Reforming, Rebuilding Trust



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We should remain
students for a
lifetime. You
should be ready
and yearn to learn
from every
moment of life."

Prime Minister
Shri Narendra Modi



प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेंद्र मोदी का वक्तव्य

साथियों, विश्वस्त परीक्षा पद्धति, इसके लिए हम लगातार एक के बाद एक कदम उठा रहे हैं। टास्क फोर्स की रचना हो, फास्ट ट्रैक की रचना हो, राज्यों के सुझावों को ध्यान में लेना हो। क्योंकि पिछले कई दशकों से हर राज्य और केंद्र सरकार इस प्रकार के पेपर लीक की परेशानी झेल रही है। बच्चों के भविष्य को भी इसके कारण संकट पैदा हो रहा है। इन सबको ध्यान में रखते हुए देशव्यापी सभी राज्यों में भी और केंद्र में भी शिक्षा पद्धति में सुधार अनिवार्य हो गया है।

टेक्नोलॉजी के भरपूर उपयोग की आवश्यकता हो गई है। और साथ-साथ फिर से कोई पेपर माफिया, पेपर लीक करने वाली गैंग, देश के बच्चों के भविष्य के साथ खिलवाड़ करने वाली गैंग, उनको बख्शा नहीं जाएगा। ऐसे कठोर कानूनों की भी जरूरत है। हम संसद में बिल लेकर के गए थे और जैसा मैंने आपको वादा किया था, गत दो दिन संसद के दोनों सदनों में माननीय सांसदों ने विस्तारपूर्वक चर्चा की है। और आज दोनों सदनों ने इन कठोर कानूनों वाले प्रावधानों वाले इस बिल को पास कर दिया है।

अब विश्वस्त परीक्षा पद्धति की दिशा में जाने में एक महत्वपूर्ण काम पूर्ण हुआ है। काम आगे भी चलता रहेगा। हम ऐसी परिस्थितियों को लंबे समय तक नहीं चलने देंगे, इस विश्वास के साथ। साथियों, आइए हम सब मिलकर के विकसित भारत के स्वप्न को पूर्ण करने के लिए कंधे से कंधा मिलाकर के चलें।

स्रोत: इंस्टाग्राम



Remarks of the
BJP President
Shri Nitin Nabin

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Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji's message reaffirms the Government's unwavering commitment to protecting the aspirations of India's youth. With the passage of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, India has taken a decisive step towards ensuring transparent, secure and credible public examinations. The Modi Government remains steadfast in safeguarding the hard work of our students and ensuring that those involved in paper leak rackets are held strictly accountable.

Source: Post on X

It is with profound humility and a deep sense of responsibility that I address you for the first time as the National President of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha.

My journey to this role was not paved by political lineage or a prominent family name. It began at the grassroots as an Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad karyakarta in Vadodara, where I first learned the true meaning of selfless service.

My elevation reaffirms a core conviction instilled in me by this organisation that in the Bharatiya Janata Party, sincere work and unwavering commitment to the nation are the only credentials that matter. The fact that an ordinary karyakarta can rise to such a position is a living testament to the character and values of the party built by stalwarts like Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya

I remain deeply grateful to the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi; our National President, Shri Nitin Nabin; the Home and Cooperation Minister, Shri Amit Shah; and National Organising General Secretary, Shri BL Santosh, for entrusting me with this responsibility. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to the outgoing National President, Shri Tejasvi Surya, for his dynamic leadership of BJYM over the last six years and wish him continued success in all his future endeavours. I accept it not as a position, but as a call to service, and I dedicate myself entirely to justifying the faith the party's central leadership has placed in me.



Message from the BJYM National President **Shri Hemang Joshi**

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This edition of the BJYM Magazine arrives at a moment that has tested that faith directly: the debate around the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, and the protests that surrounded it. I want to address this candidly, because our karyakartas deserve candour, not spin. Student anxiety over examination integrity was real, but opposition parties facing upcoming elections seized it, manufacturing and amplifying the unrest for their own political mobilisation rather than working to solve the underlying problem. Familiar faces, familiar funding, and a familiar playbook converted what should have been a conversation between students and the government into a manufactured confrontation.

That is not conjecture; it is a pattern that we have seen before. Our karyakartas must learn to recognise and counter it with facts, not outrage. None of this, however, absolves us of the responsibility to listen. Even a manufactured fire needs real fuel to burn, and the underlying anxiety of India's students about fairness, about their futures is genuine and deserves a genuine response. And this monsoon session, Parliament debated the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, a debate that revealed, more clearly than most, the difference between two ways of doing politics in this country. The young person watching that debate from home was not counting political scorecards. They did not care which government was in power when a particular paper leaked, or which state was implicated in which scandal. What they wanted to know was simple: who would fix this system for them going forward? That is the argument we carried into the House: students want solutions, not politics.

The distinction matters, because for years, the Opposition has treated every examination failure as an opportunity for theatre rather than a problem to be solved. Repeated paper leaks over 200 incidents across central and state examinations in the last two decades are not a phenomenon unique to this government. What is unique to this government is the will to finally legislate against it.

The Congress introduced a similar bill in 2010 and simply let it lapse. This government did not repeat that mistake. It passed one.

Equally telling is what the Modi government actually did in the aftermath of the NEET-UG paper leak, not over months, but within days: FIRs registered, arrests made, and a re-examination conducted for lakhs of students in record time, so that no candidate's future was held hostage to an investigation. That is the difference between a government that manages a crisis and one that resolves it. As was said on the floor of the House, this government has shown before, during COVID-19 and since, that its instinct is to convert crisis into opportunity, not into a permanent grievance.

That is precisely why the response has moved beyond punishment alone: strengthening the National Testing Agency, establishing fast-track courts, and building the technological safeguards recommended by the Radhakrishnan Committee and the Nilekani task force, so a leak becomes not just punishable, but far harder to attempt in the first place.

To every karyakarta reading this: when the Opposition offers only outrage and blame, our task is to offer facts, and the record of a government that acts. Justice is not a one-way street; it is not enough to demand answers from this government while ignoring decades of institutional neglect that preceded it. Carry that argument to every student, every parent, and every classroom in your district. That is how trust, once tested, is not just restored but deepened. I look forward to working alongside each of you, shoulder to shoulder, in this new responsibility. Together, let us carry forward the mission of a Viksit Bharat, where every young Indian's merit is protected, and every young Indian's voice is heard.

Vande Mataram!

Dr. Hemang Joshi

National President, BJYM &
MP, Lok Sabha, Vadodara



For a young Indian preparing for an examination today, the stakes have never been higher, nor has the state taken the promise of fairness more seriously. Education has always been the truest measure of a nation's ambition, but for decades, India's examination and education system carried the burden of a colonial-era architecture: rote learning rewarded over reasoning, credentials valued over competence, and a chronic silence whenever the system failed the very students it was meant to serve. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, that silence has been broken, and a decade of deliberate, structural reform has begun to replace it.

The story begins with the National Education Policy 2020, the first comprehensive rewrite of India's education framework in 34 years. Where the 1986 policy measured success by degrees conferred, NEP 2020 measures it by capability built. Its 5+3+3+4 structure, its emphasis on foundational literacy

through the NIPUN Bharat Mission, its recognition of the mother tongue as the truest vehicle for early learning, and its insistence on vocational exposure from Class 6 onward together represent nothing less than an attempt to decolonise the Indian mind. This is not reform for the sake of a new vocabulary; it is a philosophical correction, restoring to the Indian student the confidence to think rather than merely memorise.

But policy alone does not rebuild trust, and trust, more than any curriculum document, is what India's youth have demanded loudest in recent years. When examinations are compromised by paper leaks, when a lakh of families invest a year of savings and hope only to see that investment betrayed by malpractice, the wound runs deeper than administrative failure. It touches a young citizen's faith in the fairness of the Republic itself. The Modi government's response has been unambiguous. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, India's first dedicated national law against organised examination fraud, was further strengthened by the 2026 Amendment, which raised penalties, mandated fast-track courts, and empowered Special Task Forces to investigate offences within a strict two-month time limit. This is a government prepared to legislate harder when the first fix proves insufficient a mark not of failure, but of institutional seriousness.

Equally telling is what followed the 2024 NEET-UG controversy: not evasion, but introspection. The High-Level Committee under Dr K. Radhakrishnan delivered 101 recommendations for restructuring the National Testing Agency, from encrypted question delivery to biometric verification. When concerns resurfaced in 2026, the government moved again, constituting a Nandan Nilekani-led task force to secure examinations through technology, dismissing officials found responsible for lapses, and accelerating the shift toward computer-based testing that would render leaks commercially worthless. A government that owns

its gaps and closes them is a government that respects its youth enough to be honest with them.

None of this exists in isolation from the broader digital transformation of Indian education. Platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha and PM eVIDYA have taken the classroom beyond four walls, reaching a village in Bastar with the same intellectual capital once reserved for a metropolis. The Academic Bank of Credits and APAAR have given every student a portable academic identity, ending the old cruelty of a "dropout" label imposed by circumstance rather than capability. PARAKH is reshaping assessment itself, from a memory test to a measure of genuine understanding. And PM SHRI schools, Skill India, and the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme are steadily closing the gap between a degree and a livelihood because a Viksit Bharat cannot be built on credentials that certify nothing.

.....
*This is not reform
for the sake of a
new vocabulary; it is
a philosophical
correction, restoring
to the Indian
student the
confidence to think
rather than merely
memorise.*
.....

There is no pretence that the work is finished. Implementation across India's federal landscape remains uneven; education spending has not yet reached the promised 6 per cent of GDP; and the trust of a generation, once shaken, is rebuilt slowly and only through consistent

delivery. But the direction is unmistakable, and it is one previous government lacked the will to pursue. This government treats a paper leak not as an embarrassment to be managed, but as an assault on merit to be punished; it treats a protesting student not as an adversary, but as a citizen owed an answer.

India's demographic dividend will not be spent in Parliament or in policy documents. It will be spent, one examination hall and one classroom at a time, by a generation that must rightly believe that its hard work will be met with fairness. That is the quiet, unglamorous work of nation-building this government has undertaken.

The Stage, the Demand, the Source

A Gen Z Guide to Spotting Hijacked Protest

Shankar Gora

President,
BJYM Rajasthan

The Gen Z for Bharat Demographics Idealism and the strategy of Systematic Co-Optation

India stands at a historic juncture with over 800 million young citizens under thirty-five. At the forefront is Gen Z for Bharat, designated as the primary architects of Viksit Bharat @ 2047 through technological innovation, scientific inquiry, and civic participation. Their demand for transparency and meritocracy makes their questioning of institutional flaws a vital catalyst for democratic growth rather than a threat.

However, vulnerabilities arise when academic rigour is replaced by rapid social media outrage loops and digital anarchy. Radical ideological networks exploit these short attention spans to co-opt organic student movements, preventing youth from understanding genuine policy reforms and government efforts. Handlers target real anxieties regarding provoke online, and veteran control of the and pragmatic

exams or legislation to emotional reactions once crowds assemble, political organisers take stage, media interactions, microphones. Ultimately, student demands like technical audits or legal safeguards are replaced by maximalist, non-negotiable demands designed to indefinitely stall governance, a tactic categorised as "Ideological Anarchist Hybrid Warfare."



A Documented Pattern with the “Same Playbook, Same Faces” Dynamic

Past national debates demonstrate how localised protests are systematically hijacked into prolonged blockades through coordinated disinformation. The exact same playbook re-emerged when a satirical online push under the CJP banner was rapidly co-opted by veteran far-left cadres to shift candidate focus away from technical exam reforms toward anti-institutional confrontation. By deliberately allowing confrontational situations to develop, the movement redirected public discourse toward allegations of suppression and state excesses to generate a “victimhood narrative,” instrumentalising conflict to broaden mobilisation and secure media attention. Transitioning from a broad critique of digital behaviour to a hard-hitting security assessment, investigative findings reveal the underlying reality of this shift: according to Delhi Police and intelligence reports, suspicious outsiders and history-sheeters with serious charges, such as murder, robbery, rioting, and violations of the Arms Act, were disguised as ordinary students and placed in the front row to incite violence. Operating without administrative permission and in violation of Section 163 of BNSS, protesters also attempted to march toward Parliament House, posing a direct threat to the security of the supreme democratic institution.

Ground Realities, Judicial Verdicts and the Jharkhand Contrast

Following exam irregularities, the NTA verified that no systemic failure compromised the test. Although courts upheld the overall integrity of the exam, external actors targeted disappointed candidates. This contrasted sharply with the JSSC CGL and JPSC paper-leak protests in Jharkhand. Lacking national political leverage, external handlers were absent, allowing local aspirants to lead focused rallies strictly for exam fairness rather than political posturing.

Explicit Anti-National Rhetoric, Key Organisers, and

Network Operations

These public gatherings were marked by the deliberate introduction of radical and explicitly violent rhetoric. Because India has emerged as the most attractive investment destination in the world, the CJP's agenda sought to instil fear in foreign investors by manufacturing domestic unrest, delivering a calculated economic strike against national industrial development and the 'Make in India' initiative. Concurrently, upon the initial violence at Jantar Mantar, certain Western media outlets and external NGOs flooded digital platforms with hostile reports to brand India as "authoritarian" and curb its rising global stature.

This physical and digital mobilisation relied on a multi-layered coalition of aligned groups:

.....
Some misguided youngsters used language that does not dignify a civilised society... But I want to forgive them. After all, they are our children.
.....

Far-Left Student Cadres: All India Students' Association (AISA), Students' Federation of India (SFI), All India Students' Federation (AISF), Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA), and Tribal Students' Union.

Identity and Religious Collectives: Muslim Students' Collective, Mahila/Nari Adhikar Manch, United Christian Forum, All India Catholic Union, and National Council of Churches in India.

Civil Society and Advocacy Groups: Pinjra Tod Collective, National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Editors Guild of India, Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and International Federation for Human Rights.

Labor and Farmer Formations: Samyukt Kisan Morcha, Bharatiya Kisan Union, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), and Indian Trade Union Federation.

Under this umbrella, public discourse quickly devolved past academic concerns into targeted

provocation. Demonstrators deployed direct threats against elected leadership, vulgar attacks targeting defence forces, assaults on sacred cultural landmarks like Ram Mandir, and polarising slogans like “Brahmanwad Se Azaadi.” Public addresses further weaponised religious figures through disrespectful political punchlines, such as remarks contrasting “Sita ke pati” with “Nita ke pati.” This deliberate strategy aimed to incite socio-religious division and distract from genuine academic concerns.

Ultimately, this operational model reflects Antonio Gramsci’s theory of Cultural Hegemony, wherein political factions unable to secure democratic mandates hijack youth movements to assault state authority. Such coercive street tactics directly embody what Dr B.R. Ambedkar denounced in 1949 as the “Grammar of Anarchy,” which systematically erodes constitutional democracy.

The Foreign Funding Ecosystem and the Network Behind

Beyond physical streets, the financial sustenance of prolonged protest ecosystems faces legislative scrutiny. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 directly addresses this by enforcing stricter central oversight of foreign contributions, mandating spending thresholds to eliminate shell operations, and requiring digital disclosures to prevent foreign capital from quietly funding political agitation and urban disruptions.

Judicial Scrutiny and Paternal Empathy for Students

When demonstrations turned violent, the higher judiciary enforced strict constitutional parameters: the Delhi High Court ordered the preservation of CCTV and wireless logs, while a Supreme Court bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant protected peaceful candidates and released detained minors, reaffirming that Article 19 confers no immunity from attacks on security forces.

Throughout the unrest, the central government carefully distinguished between the criminal paper leak and the broader student body, with Prime

Minister Shri Narendra Modi adopting an uncompromising stance against examination mafias.

"Any paper mafia, paper leak gang, or syndicate that tries to play with the future of the youth of the country will not be spared... We are taking step after step towards creating a reliable education system, whether through the creation of a task force, the establishment of fast-track courts, or the promotion of technological safeguards. A nationwide reform in the education sector is compulsory."

Yet, when responding to young students, Prime Minister Modi extended paternal understanding rather than punitive retribution:

"Some misguided youngsters used language that does not dignify a civilised society... But I want to forgive them. After all, they are our children. It is our duty as a society to guide them on the right path rather than dragging them through courts or harassing them."

Sometimes, our tongue gets caught between our teeth and bleeds, yet we do not disown or break our teeth, because both belong to us. These children belong to our nation. Mistakes happen in youth, but youth also gives the opportunity to correct those mistakes."

To guard against future algorithmic manipulation, Gen Z can build a simple digital spot-check: evaluating who holds the microphone through a Stage Test, assessing whether demands seek policy fixes or total paralysis through a Demand Test, and verifying viral clips against primary legal texts through a Source Test. By using critical thinking over social media outrage, young citizens can protect genuine student interests and ensure that their collective potential remains dedicated to building Viksit Bharat.

The examination system is one of the institutions that directly affects the lives of India's youth. The competitive exam is frequently a result of years of preparation, personal discipline, and countless family investments. A fair examination is, for the student who is thinking of going into medicine, engineering, the civil services, or government work, something far-reaching: it is a promise that a difference in geography, income, or social background is not a barrier to success through talent and hard work. That is why it's not an ordinary case of cheating when a paper leaks. They are an attack on merit, equality of opportunity, and faith in the State.

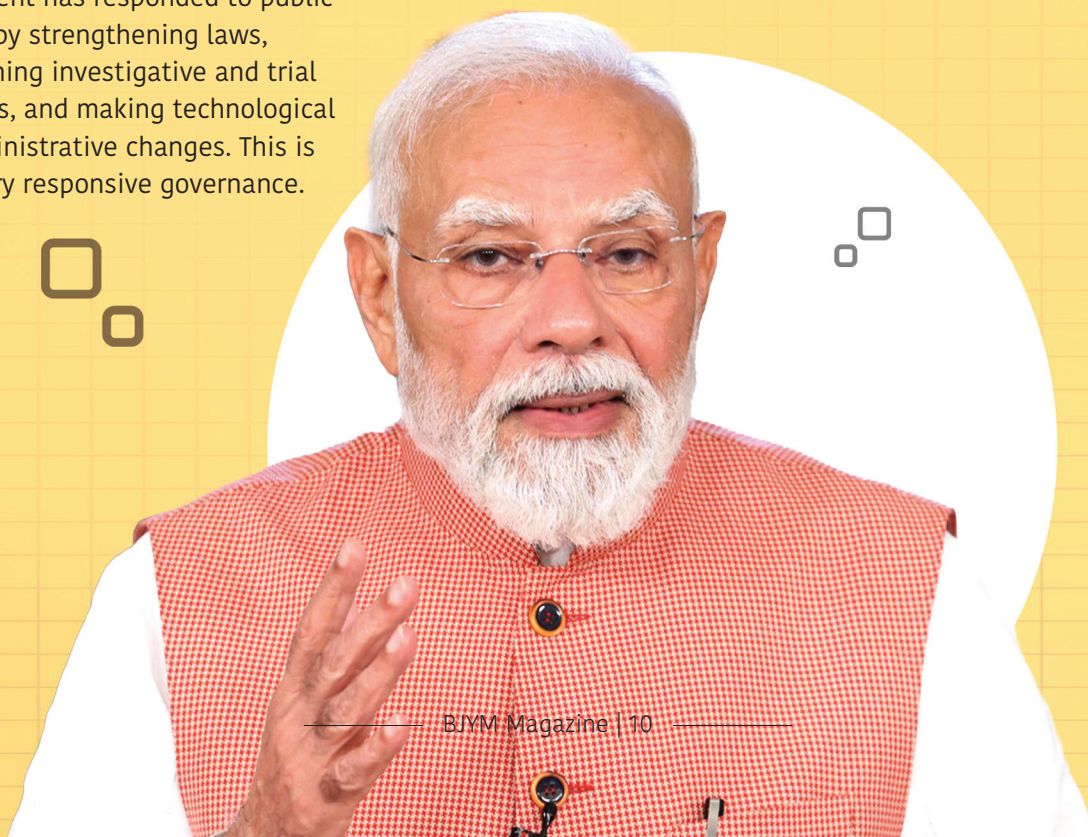
The government led by PM Shri Narendra Modi has gradually evolved its approach to examination malpractice, from treating these offences under general criminal laws to establishing a dedicated legal, investigative, and institutional regime to combat organised examination malpractice over the past few years. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026, is the latest development in this process. The government has responded to public concern by strengthening laws, streamlining investigative and trial processes, and making technological and administrative changes. This is exemplary responsive governance.

Beyond the Breach

How the Modi Government Reengineered Examination Integrity

Alok Kumar Gaurav

Assistant Professor of
Public Administration at
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Karnataka



Recognising Paper Leaks as Organised Crime: The lack of a dedicated legal framework has historically been one of the main problems in tackling examination fraud. General charges of cheating, forgery, or criminal conspiracy were frequently used to prosecute cases involving paper leakage. These were not intended to cover modern-day examination rackets, which have since grown to include coaching intermediaries, organised gangs of solvers, digital networks, examination service providers, and the advanced exploitation of confidential systems.

In 2023, the states of Gujarat and Uttarakhand took steps towards passing anti-paper-leak bills, and Uttar Pradesh followed suit in 2024. It was in the wake of these laws that a new awareness emerged in BJP-led governments that examination malpractice had become a possible organised criminal network.

In February 2024, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 was enacted by Parliament, India's first specific legislation to safeguard the integrity of major public examinations. The message was clear and loud: stealing the opportunity of India's youth would no longer be considered regular cheating.

The 2024 Experience and Institutional Learning: Good public policy is not static. Governments must learn from crises, examine institutional weaknesses, and strengthen policy when experience reveals gaps. The NEET-UG controversy of 2024 was a significant test. The Modi government responded at various levels. The CBI took over the investigation of alleged irregularities from the investigating agency. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Education set up a high-level committee chaired by former ISRO Chairman Dr K. Radhakrishnan to examine the role of the NTA and recommend changes to the examination system, data security, institutional structure, and grievance redressal. A government that acted only reactively might have confined its responses to arrests. The centre tackled

the issue of examination integrity in a way that acknowledged that criminal accountability and institutional redesign go hand in hand. The government thus began working on examination reform across several dimensions, including more robust laws, professional investigation, technological security, institutional accountability, and administrative restructuring, which were interlinked.

NEET-UG 2026, with its events, thrust examination security back in the spotlight. They also provided the opportunity to evaluate whether the existing structure needed reinforcement. The government responded quickly. Most importantly, the Union government has been prompt in introducing the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means)

Amendment Bill, 2026, to upgrade the 2024 legislation. The law was introduced in Parliament, passed by both Houses, received the President's assent, and published in the Government Gazette as the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026. The strengthening of the original national law from 2024 to 2026 is an important trait of the Modi government's style of governance, its belief that policy is a tool that can change with time and circumstances.

The 2026 amendment: Firstly, it significantly strengthens punishment for serious examination offences, thereby providing stronger deterrence. Penalties are tougher, and monetary fines are heavier, making it more expensive to engage in organised examination fraud. In particular, very rigorous measures related to organised criminal networks are aimed at recognising that there are significant commercial operations in which the leak of paper is linked to substantial illegal financial gains. This is crucial, as the economics of examination crime need to be broken down.

Second, a time-bound investigation and trial. Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the 2026 reform is its time-bound nature. It is a perennial

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PM Modi often emphasises that the aspirations of India's Yuva Shakti have been constantly at the heart of India's development journey

challenge in India's criminal justice system that if the investigation and trial process takes years, the punishment becomes less stringent and less effective. The enhanced institutional machinery thus focuses more on the timely completion of investigations and on facilitating the functioning of designated fast-track courts to handle offences expeditiously. It is more than just punishment; it is certain and timely punishment. This is important from a policy standpoint. But the effectiveness of criminal law does not rely solely on a sentence being harshly worded; it depends on the likelihood that offenders will be identified, prosecuted, and punished within a reasonable time.

Third, while targeting organised networks rather than students, the Modi government's approach also distinguishes between the normal and the organised networks that profited from examination fraud. The purpose of the law isn't to target those who truly want to be in the game. It targets the following groups and organisations systematically for financial gain: organised syndicates, facilitators, compromised insiders, service providers, and networks. This is a youth-based approach since it focuses on the genuine candidate as the primary victim.

Examination Integrity is Social Justice: There is also a greater philosophical aspect to these reforms. The competitive examination system in India is one of the best tools for social mobility. Students from a small town, an economically moderate family, or a distant district can be in the running for the same public office as students from a metropolitan, relatively affluent family. However, this promise is contingent on one condition: Fairness in the examination.

The paper hurts many people who are based solely on merit. When an examination is compromised, the worst hit are candidates who don't have access to criminal networks, influential intermediaries, or illegal financial resources. Therefore, eliminating paper leaks goes beyond administrative reform. It's a policy to ensure equality of opportunity. From this angle, the Modi government's anti-paper-leak regime dovetails with its comprehensive focus on

'tech-driven' governance and transparency.

The Next Generation of Examination Reform: The 2026 amendment is thus not the final step in the reform process but rather a solid basis for the next step. As we advance, the security of exams will rely more on technology and institutional design, the secure transmission of exam content, compartmentalised access, secure printing and distribution protocols, cybersecurity audits, digital audit trails, vendor accountability, and effective background checks and the detection of suspicious activity. The government's establishment of a high-level reform mechanism shows it is aware of this challenge. Finally, the best paper-leak prevention will be a system that not only secures many convictions but also enforces the will of the people. It will be a time when examination leaks are harder to pull off.

Governance response to the aspirations of Young India: The chronology is revealing: dedicated anti-paper-leak laws came into existence in BJP-governed states, the Modi government introduced India's first comprehensive central legislation in 2024, investigative and institutional reforms were introduced following the NEET controversy, expert committees were established to look at systemic vulnerabilities, and a tougher, more time-bound framework was put forward by the government before Parliament in 2026. It is in this way that a democratic policy should develop: recognising a problem, enacting legislation, addressing implementation, learning from experience, and reinforcing institutional response.

PM Modi often emphasises that the aspirations of India's Yuva Shakti have been constantly at the heart of India's development journey. As a necessary component of that commitment, protecting competitive examinations is vital. The vision of the government is simple: no criminal syndicate should be able to buy what an honest student earns through hard work, and students should not have to prepare late into the night in libraries, coaching centres, university hostels, or their homes.

The Rebuilding of Merit

How a Decade Rebuilt the Examination System

Aastha Gupta

Advocate and
Columnist

At the gates of Nalanda Mahavihara stood a Dwara Pandit, a scholar whose sole task was to uphold the academic standards by questioning every ambitious student on logic and philosophy before allowing entry. Chinese scholar Xuanzang recorded that barely two or three in ten applicants would pass and be admitted. This one instance from India's history reveals that the idea of rigorous, merit-based examinations and unparalleled educational standards was long-standing in the country. Then why, in the 21st century, did circumstances of an agitated youth-led movement seeking a more robust educational system arise? The answer lies in the old, regressive policies of the previous administration, which eroded the path to knowledge and development. What follows is an account of how it is being rebuilt, reformed and transformed by the Narendra Modi government.



The Reforms That Redefined Examinations

1. The National Testing Agency (2017): Ending the Multiplicity of Exams

The need for a single, specialised body to conduct examinations was long recognised in the Programme of Action, 1992, which proposed national-level common entrance tests. Followed by a committee of IIT directors, which recommended creating an agency by an Act of Parliament in 2010; yet for a quarter century, the idea never saw the light of reality under the previous government. The Union Cabinet approved the creation of the NTA in November 2017 to end this fragmentation and place large-scale entrances under one specialised, technology-driven agency, relieving institutions which were never built to carry the burden and easing student struggle.

The road since then has not been smooth. After facing some setbacks, it was revealed that the agency was still largely run by contractual staff and outsourced vendors. To assess and review the situation, the government constituted the Radhakrishnan Committee, which in 2024 recommended restructuring the NTA into an empowered Apex Body with a permanent workforce and dedicated verticals for security and technology, a majority of which have now been implemented or are under active execution.

2. National Education Policy, 2020: The First Rewrite Since 1986

NEP 2020 replaced the rigid 10+2 structure with a developmentally grounded 5+3+3+4 framework, made foundational literacy a national mission, and committed the state to raising public investment in education toward 6 per cent of GDP. Its more consequential shift, for this piece, was on testing itself: NEP explicitly moved examinations away from rote learning and cramming towards a competent and comprehension-based assessment system. Based on the NEP 2020 recommendation, the CBSE Class 10 board examination will be held twice in the same year starting from the 2026

academic session.

PARAKH, a National Assessment Centre set up by the government, conducted the PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024, surveying 23 lakh students across Grades 3, 6, and 9 to measure real learning competency rather than relying solely on school data. This data is utilised directly for the Performance Grading Index, a 70-indicator framework that grades every state and district on learning outcomes, governance and infrastructure, increasing accountability and ensuring development.

3. Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024: India's First Anti-Cheating Law

Given its long history of paper leaks and unfair practices, legislation to prevent them becomes essential. This is India's first dedicated law against organised exam fraud, which makes leaks, impersonation, tampering with answer scripts, and running a cheating syndicate cognisable, non-bailable offences, with sentences of up to ten years and fines of up to a crore rupees for organised crime. Its objective is not merely punitive but structural, to fix accountability on institutions and service providers. Fast-track courts, including dedicated benches, have been established for timely redressal.

To further tackle the problem of paper leaks, Parliament passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026. It raised punishment for individuals using unfair means from 3-5 years to 5-10 years' imprisonment, with fines up from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 50 lakh, increased fines on complicit service providers from Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore and doubled their debarment period from four to eight years and empowered a dedicated Special Task Force to investigate offences within a strict two-month limit, with trials to be completed within three months.

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*Education in itself is
the greatest tool for
channelling the
potential this
population offers, for
achieving social
justice, equality, and,
moreover, the
complete realisation
of oneself.*
.....



4. Digital Public Infrastructure for Education

The Modi government's ongoing efforts to digitise Bharat could prove to be a turning point in the educational sphere. Modern educational infrastructure at the intersection of digital technologies provides renewed quality and standards that can prove revolutionary. Under the 'One Nation, One Student ID' initiative, the APAAR system gives every student a single, portable academic identity linked to Aadhaar and DigiLocker. The Academic Bank of Credits, aligned with the National Credit Framework, allows students to accumulate, transfer, and redeem credits across institutions, rather than losing them when they change course or take a break from study. DIKSHA, the government's national digital platform, now hosts the e-content for NIPUN Bharat, the mission ensuring every child achieves foundational literacy and numeracy by the end of Grade 3, so that the reforms further up the system have a genuinely literate generation to build on in the first place.

Measuring the Reforms' Progress: Tangible Outcomes in Numbers

With a clear intention of a zero-tolerance policy towards malpractice in the education and examination sphere, the government has implemented policies that signal a positive trajectory. The result lies in the figures, and the true test of any reform lies in the footprint it leaves on the ground and not only in the ambition behind it:

- 26.30 crore verified APAAR IDs had been generated across the country as of July 2026, each one a student whose academic record can now travel with them for life.
- Over 110.65 crore educational records have been uploaded to the Academic Bank of Credits portal, with 2,963 institutions registered and 196 universities having adopted the National Credit Framework.

- 388 universities now allow students to earn up to 40 % of their credits through the SWAYAM online learning platform, formalising a route into higher education that simply did not exist a decade ago.
- 52 FIRs have already been registered under the Public Examinations Act since its enforcement, a direct signal that offences once absorbed quietly now carry real legal consequences.
- Over 13,000 PM SHRI schools have been established across three years, built as exemplar institutions carrying NEP 2020's reforms into classrooms in every state.
- NCERT's annual textbook printing capacity has been scaled from 5 crore to 15 crore copies to meet the demand created by the NEP curriculum overhaul.
- The number of universities and Higher Education Institutions has surged from 760 to 1,293 and 51,534 to 64,896, respectively. Medical colleges have more than doubled, from 387 to 844, with undergraduate medical seats increasing from 51,300 to 1.39 lakh and PG seats from 31,000 to 86,300.
- Recognised startups have skyrocketed from a mere 350 to nearly 2.4 lakh, making India the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world.
- Under the SATHEE initiative with IIT Kanpur, the government now provides free, world-class coaching for competitive exams, democratizing success for students in every village.

If there is one thing that is for sure, it is that no system is perfect. There will be loopholes, shortcomings and errors. But that should not limit a government from working to rectify and improve the state apparatus, which must function smoothly for the welfare of the people. That is exactly what defines the present administration's efforts, which reflect the will to build a functional structure free from errors and unfair practices. The attempts to decolonise textbooks and transition the education system to one rooted in Indian values represent a fundamental shift in governance philosophy. Realising the present challenges, the government has prioritised providing education the technological edge it deserves. A High-Powered

Task Force led by technology visionary Nandan Nilekani, former ISRO Chairman Dr S. Somanath, and former Intelligence Bureau Director Tapan Deka signals a futuristic transformation that will further ameliorate the system's defects.

“Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya- From Darkness to Light ”

To ensure that every student receives the well-deserved education that develops their merits, it is crucial for the state authorities to scrutinise the machinery they have established to serve this purpose. India, home to a large young population, makes youth the country's biggest asset. Education in itself is the greatest tool for channelling the potential this population offers, for achieving social justice, equality, and, moreover, the complete realisation of oneself.

This reform journey shows a consistent, measurable movement out of the darkness of the decade-old system that was both rotting and timid. Nalanda's library is said to have burned for three months when it was demolished; nine centuries of accumulated knowledge, wealth, manuscripts and other books turned to ash. A civilisation that endured a loss of that scale realises the worth of knowledge as no other nation. Today's students are the architects of the global knowledge superpower, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, this realisation has been translated into reality to a great extent. This does not mark the end of this job, but rather the recognition of the need for perpetual efforts to revise, reform, and rebuild.

The Radhakrishnan Committee

Why Implementation Is the Real Reform

Siddharth Nayak

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Atharva Legal LLP

When Netflix Starts Feeling
Like Prophecy

Netflix's runaway South Korean hit of this year, *Teach You a Lesson*, imagines an Educational Rights Protection Bureau, a fictional government force empowered to march into schools and forcibly discipline a system that has rotted beyond persuasion. One watches it and winces, because the fantasy resonates uncomfortably close to home. The protests we witnessed at Jantar Mantar this January deserve our attention, but not only for the reasons the placards claimed. They are equally an indictment of what our education system has done to the minds it was supposed to build.



A generation raised on rote and reels, with attention spans measured in swipe-lengths, arrived at a national protest without having read a single page of the very report whose non-implementation was their actual grievance. Not one trending thread engaged with the 101 recommendations, the Steering Committee's status updates, or the distinction between what is legally possible and what is administratively pending. This is the abject poverty of research acumen our system has manufactured: young people intelligent enough to feel the injustice but never taught to interrogate it, making them effortless raw material for anyone with a narrative and tweet machinery. They are moved onto the board as pawns, played with practised ease, and tossed aside at the handler's discretion once the news cycle turns. That so many could be so easily herded is not merely embarrassing; it is a red alert, and it indicts every layer of our education pipeline, from the primary classroom that never taught a child to ask why to the professional colleges that produce doctors and engineers who assimilate information from thirty-second videos. The protest, then, is not just a mirror to a broken examination system.

It is an alarm bell demanding that the Government monitor and lift the quality of thinking itself, from primary school to professional practice. It may sound far-fetched, but a fictional ERPB begins to look less like dystopia and more like dark prophecy when the alternative is a citizenry that can be manipulated at will. The students' grievance, as this article will show, was entirely legitimate. Their inability to articulate it with rigour is the deeper wound, and the case for reform must therefore be made on their behalf, with the research they were never taught to conduct.

Born of a Broken Summer

In the summer of 2024, India's examination system faced its gravest crisis of public confidence. The UGC-NET was cancelled outright after its question paper surfaced on the darknet, and NEET-UG 2024,

taken by over 23 lakh medical aspirants, was engulfed in allegations of leakage and inflated marks that reached the Supreme Court in *Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India*. These were not isolated failures. Parliamentary records placed before the Lok Sabha in February 2024 acknowledged over 50 instances of paper leaks in government recruitment examinations across just eight states in eight years, jeopardising the futures of more than 1.4 crore aspirants. Independent compilations put the figure higher still: 89 leak cases and 48 forced retests across the country in a decade. Rajasthan's own Assembly was informed of 33 registered leak cases and 615 arrests since 2014; Gujarat recorded 14; Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh each contributed their share. Even the NTA, created in 2017 precisely to professionalise national testing, saw five of its examinations marred by allegations of leaks after 2021.

It was against this backdrop that the Ministry of Education, by order dated 22 June 2024, constituted a seven-member High-Level Committee of Experts under Dr K. Radhakrishnan, former Chairman of ISRO and Chairman of the Board of Governors, IIT Kanpur, with members including Dr Randeep Guleria, former Director of AIIMS. Its mandate, per the Ministry's own release, was to recommend reforms to the examination mechanism, improvements to data security protocols, and to the structure and functioning of the NTA, with reporting within two months.

The 101 Answers Nobody Read

The Committee's report, titled *The Reformation of National Common Entrance Testing in India* and submitted in October 2024, made 101 recommendations consolidated into 46 action points. Its architecture was end-to-end: a full transition to computer-based testing, and, where that was not immediately feasible, a hybrid model with encrypted digital transmission of question papers and printing at the examination centre itself, eliminating the vulnerable physical transport chain

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 The Radhakrishnan
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 in October 2024*



through which most Indian leaks occur. It proposed multi-stage and multi-session testing for very large candidate populations, Aadhaar-based biometric authentication, AI-enabled surveillance of centres, and a DIGI-EXAM security framework. Institutionally, it demanded that the NTA be rebuilt with a permanent professional cadre and dedicated verticals in place of its skeletal, outsourcing-heavy structure, and that government schools, including a proposed network of 500 secure testing centres built on the Kendriya Vidyalaya and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya network, replace privately contracted centres. It even addressed student welfare, recommending mental health support and a strengthened grievance redressal cell.

Most tellingly, the Committee anticipated its own fate. Knowing that expert reports in India routinely gather dust, it recommended a High-Powered Steering Committee under the Ministry to drive implementation “in mission mode and within a time frame”. That Steering Committee was duly constituted on 14 November 2024, under Dr Radhakrishnan himself.

Two Winters Later, the Bill Came Due

What followed is the uncomfortable part, and honesty demands we confront it. The Centre assured the Supreme Court in January 2025 that all corrective measures would be implemented. In May 2026, Dr Radhakrishnan informed the Court that a majority of recommendations had been implemented or were under active execution. Yet

the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, in its 381st Report presented in June 2026, expressed concern over continuing examination irregularities, recommended that the Department of Higher Education publish a time-bound implementation roadmap, and flagged that firms blacklisted in one state were still winning examination contracts in others for want of a national blacklist.

Then came the 2026 NEET paper leak controversy, and with it the student protests that erupted at Jantar Mantar in January this year. Whatever one thinks of how those protests were mobilised, and the opening of this article has said its piece on that, the underlying grievance was unimpeachable: it was an indictment not of the Radhakrishnan blueprint but of its incomplete execution. Had the hybrid encrypted-delivery model, the government-centre network and the NTA's structural overhaul been implemented in letter and in spirit within the Committee's own timelines, the single points of failure that leak after leak have exploited would simply not have existed, and lakhs of students would not have stood at Jantar Mantar demanding what the report had already promised them. The Government's July 2026 response, terminating 47 NTA officials, introducing the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 with enhanced punishments, and constituting the Nandan Nilekani task force for technology-led overhaul, is welcome and decisive. But it must be understood as the execution phase

the 2024 blueprint always required, not a substitute for it.

How the World Keeps Its Papers Sealed

Globally, exam integrity rests on four pillars that India must combine: physical security (South Korea sequesters its CSAT paper-setters incommunicado for weeks under KICE), independent regulation (the United Kingdom's Ofqual, a statutory regulator separate from the exam boards it audits), technology (America's shift to digital adaptive testing, where every candidate receives a different question sequence, renders a leak commercially worthless), and legislative deterrence (Australia criminalised commercial cheating services nationwide in 2020). Unitary states centralise security; successful federations professionalise the operator and separate the regulator. India's quasi-federal structure, with one NTA atop dozens of state commissions and boards, has so far achieved neither.

Jail, Not Regret: What the Law Says Elsewhere

The legislative comparison is sobering. China's Criminal Law (Ninth Amendment, 2015), Article 284, makes organised cheating in national examinations punishable with up to seven years' imprisonment, and gaokao leaks are treated as state-secret offences. South Korea prosecutes exam compromise under its Criminal Act provisions on obstruction of business alongside strict CSAT management regulations. The United Kingdom polices malpractice through Ofqual's statutory framework under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, with prosecutions under the Fraud Act 2006. The United States prosecuted the Varsity Blues admissions scandal under federal mail and wire fraud statutes, sending parents and consultants to prison. Australia's TEQSA Amendment (Prohibiting Academic Cheating Services) Act 2020 created dedicated criminal offences for contract cheating. Bangladesh has operated a Public Examinations (Offences) Act since 1980. India joined this club only in 2024, with the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act prescribing up to 10 years' imprisonment and fines of up to 1 crore rupees, now being strengthened by the 2026

Amendment Bill. The law has finally arrived; what remains is the institutional machinery the Radhakrishnan Committee designed to make the law unnecessary.

What Was Already Written

Viksit Bharat cannot be built on examinations the nation does not trust. The Radhakrishnan Committee gave India a complete, costed, sequenced blueprint in October 2024. The measure of the reforms announced in 2026 will not be the committees constituted, or the officials removed, but whether every one of those 101 recommendations is executed, audited by Parliament, and made binding on every state board and commission in the country.

The students at Jantar Mantar should not have been asking for anything new. They should have been demanding that what was already written be implemented, chapter and verse, with parliamentary timelines attached. Instead, we were served a circus: a cringe assembly of manipulated elements whose entire information diet is social media, whose outrage stemmed not from study but from ignorance, and who displayed neither the willingness to learn nor the competence to hold a government accountable in the only way that actually works, which is with facts.

Let it be said plainly: what transpired at Jantar Mantar was less a public discourse, less a rebellion, and less a protest against any policy framework than a confused cocktail of borrowed left ideology and grievances, stirred to serve the political ambitions of a few who proved equally incompetent the moment public discourse demanded substance. Key leaders who fronted it lacked the basic research acumen to read the very report they were ostensibly agitating over, including one gentleman of famously loyal dynastic pedigree holding forth on the state of affairs with the confidence of a man who has never opened a primary source in his life. Thankfully, the silent, studying majority still gives one hope. Reform for them. Implement for them. The rest is noise.

Wiring the Republic

BharatNet, DIKSHA and the Architecture of Access

Shashank Shekhar Singh

CEO & Director of the
Adhyayan Foundation for
Policy and Research

The democratisation of education in India presents one of the most complex public policy challenges in the Global South. It involves managing a vast number of students, with over 248 million in schools and 43.3 million in higher education institutions. Historically, access to quality academic resources, experienced faculty, and standardised teaching tools has been limited by geographical, economic, and institutional barriers. The democratisation of education in India presents one of the most complex public policy challenges in the Global South. It involves managing a vast number of students, with over 248 million in schools and 43.3 million in higher education institutions. Historically, access to quality academic resources, experienced faculty, and standardised teaching tools has been limited by geographical, economic, and institutional barriers.



At the core of this transformation is the strategic alignment between policy mandates and physical infrastructure development. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provided the normative blueprint by institutionalising technology-enabled learning across primary, secondary, and tertiary tiers. To operationalise this vision, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) was established as an autonomous advisory mechanism to streamline EdTech deployment across federal and state jurisdictions. Concurrently, the PM e-VIDYA umbrella platform integrated previously fragmented digital learning channels into a unified national grid.

The positive impact of these policy frameworks is enhanced by targeted capital investments in physical infrastructure. Through the BharatNet project, the government has laid over six lakh kilometres of optical fibre cable, providing high-speed broadband connectivity to nearly two lakh Gram Panchayats. This network is further supported by the PM-WANI (Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) framework, which reduces data access costs for low-income populations by establishing decentralised public Wi-Fi hotspots.

At the institutional level, initiatives such as Samagra Shiksha and PM SHRI (PM Schools for Rising India) have directly improved public school facilities by funding smart classrooms, digital whiteboards, and more than 750 virtual science laboratories, as well as 75 skilling e-labs across the country. By combining physical capacity building with the NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) program, which upskills millions of educators in digital pedagogy, the government has successfully transformed capital investments into active and blended classroom learning.

An analysis of India's school education system shows that DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) significantly promotes educational equity. By integrating "Energised Textbooks" with Quick Response (QR) codes across state and central boards, DIKSHA connects physical books to digital resources. Scanning these codes

with entry-level smartphones gives students access to 2D/3D visual explainer videos, interactive science simulations, and assessment tools in 35 Indian languages.

This innovative approach addresses subject-teacher shortages in rural areas by providing standardised visual explanations aligned with state curricula. With over 120 million students and 2.5 million educators using it, DIKSHA transforms traditional print media into an interactive learning framework for low-income households.

In higher education, the positive impact of state intervention is evident in the regulatory evolution of SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds). While Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) globally often reinforce privilege due to high dropout rates among non-elite learners, India's University Grants Commission (UGC) restructured the regulatory environment through the Credit Framework for Online Learning Courses Regulations. By permitting degree-granting institutions to allow up to 40 per cent of program credit requirements to be earned via SWAYAM, the government successfully dismantled institutional hierarchies. Students enrolled in resource-constrained tier-three regional colleges can now study under, and earn certified academic credits from, distinguished faculty at the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and Central Universities. This credit-integration policy redistributes academic capital across socio-economic strata, democratising tertiary education without compromising institutional standards.

The government has also directly targeted systemic market distortions in the competitive examination sector through SATHEE (Self Assessment Test and Help for Entrance Exams). Developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with IIT Kanpur, SATHEE utilises artificial intelligence to provide adaptive learning pathways, self-assessment analytics, and structured instruction for national entrance examinations such as JEE, NEET, and ICAR. Historically, the multi-billion-dollar private coaching industry operated as a financial

gatekeeper, concentrating success among affluent candidates. By distributing high-tier preparation materials, mock assessments, and expert guidance at no cost, SATHEE lowers financial barriers for underprivileged aspirants and reinforces merit-based entry into higher technical education.

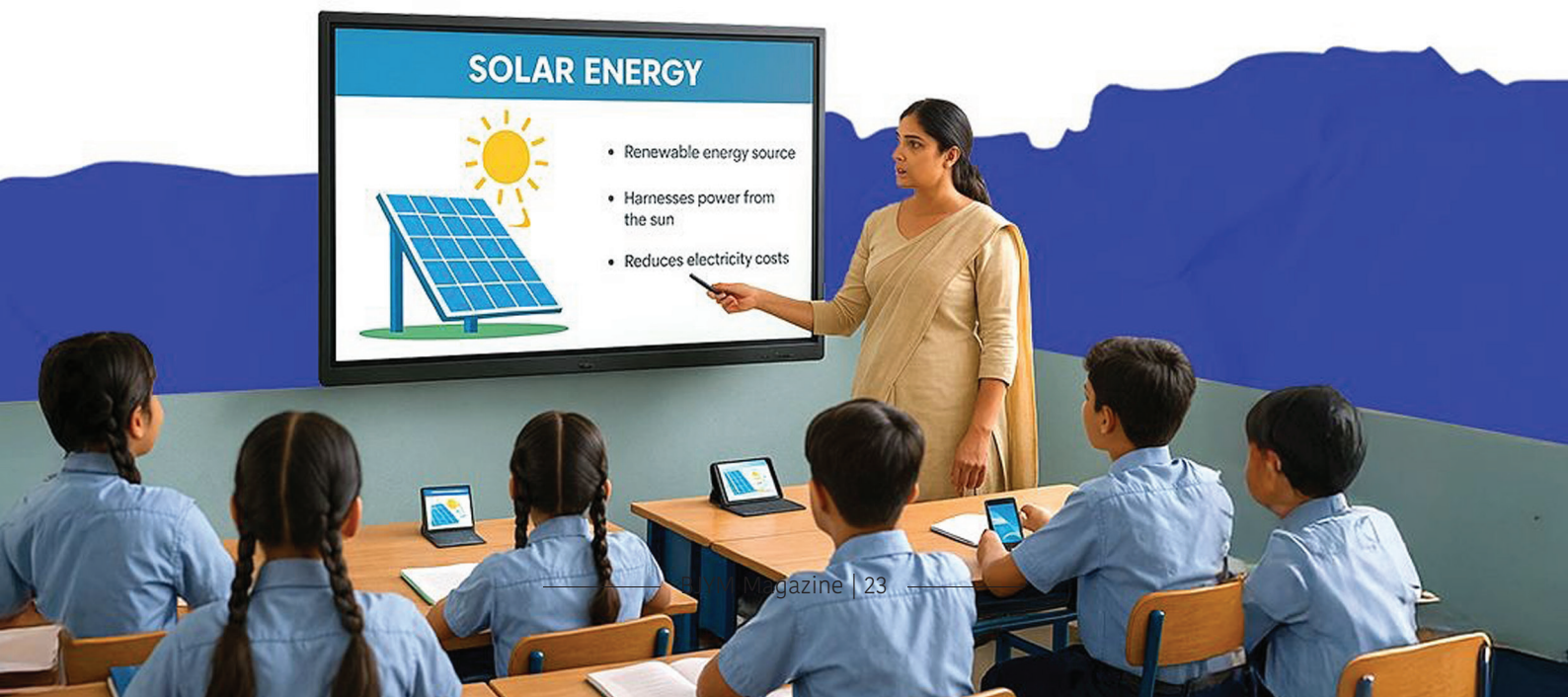
A critical strength of the state's digital strategy lies in its multi-modal design, which avoids reliance on a single technology layer. Recognising that broadband connectivity and personal hardware ownership remain uneven, the Swayam Prabha initiative leverages space technology to ensure universal coverage. Broadcasting 24x7 via the GSAT-15 satellite, Swayam Prabha operates a network of 200 dedicated Direct-To-Home (DTH) television channels delivering curriculum-aligned content in regional languages. Available free of cost on DD Free Dish and mobile portals like JioTV, this non-internet broadcast model decouples audio-visual learning from data tariffs and smartphone access. By utilising linear television as an educational delivery mechanism, the state ensures that off-grid and low-income rural households remain fully integrated into the national educational framework.

Empirical analysis of the Digital Education Access Index (DEAI) and UDISE+ data, using econometric methods, confirms that state-sponsored digital public infrastructure serves as a buffer against socioeconomic inequality. Public platforms actively compress educational Gini coefficients across various districts, while market-driven EdTech

models tend to worsen equity disparities by serving primarily those who can afford gear and data subscriptions. Research shows that student conceptual retention and engagement indicators improve statistically significantly when school-level digital infrastructure and teacher training under NISHTHA are combined. Additionally, the state's focus on vernacularization, providing digital resources in all Eighth Schedule languages, actively keeps non-English proficient students from being marginalised in the classroom. Equity is further embedded through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) features, including Digitally Accessible Information System (DAISY) audiobooks and standardised Indian Sign Language (ISL) video modules tailored for Children with Special Needs (CWSN).

While structural challenges such as rural power reliability and household device sharing persist, the state's multi-layered approach provides a tested template for sustainable progress. To consolidate and expand these gains, future policy execution can build upon five targeted optimisations:

- The deployment of Offline-First Edge Architectures entails installing low-power micro-servers pre-loaded with regional DIKSHA content in remote schools. This method facilitates interactive digital learning without requiring an active internet connection, thus benefiting students in areas with limited internet access.





- Establishing Community Hardware Banks addresses device scarcity among marginalised and female students. By expanding tablet-leasing frameworks managed by Gram Panchayats and school management committees, schools can provide dedicated devices to those in need, thereby overcoming barriers to access to technology.
- Integrating digital pedagogy into initial teacher training is essential for preparing educators for modern classrooms. By embedding digital instruction modules into national B.Ed and D.El.Ed curricula, new teachers will acquire the skills necessary for effective blended learning implementation.
- Scaling digital literacy initiatives via the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) is crucial for improving technology access among underrepresented groups. This program aims to eliminate gender disparities by implementing quotas for female learners and mother-teachers.
- Lastly, integrating AI-driven localised tutoring within DIKSHA can support first-generation scholars. By utilising open-source, regional-language AI models for personalised voice tutoring, this initiative helps bridge foundational learning gaps and promotes equity in education.

Through the strategic deployment of Digital Public Infrastructure, forward-looking regulatory reform, and targeted physical capacity building, India has constructed a resilient framework for educational democratisation. By systematically transforming high-quality learning resources into free public goods, government initiatives have laid a durable foundation for social mobility, ensuring that technological progress directly serves the educational aspirations of crores of students nationwide.

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From Degrees to Capabilities

Rethinking What India's Education System Should Measure

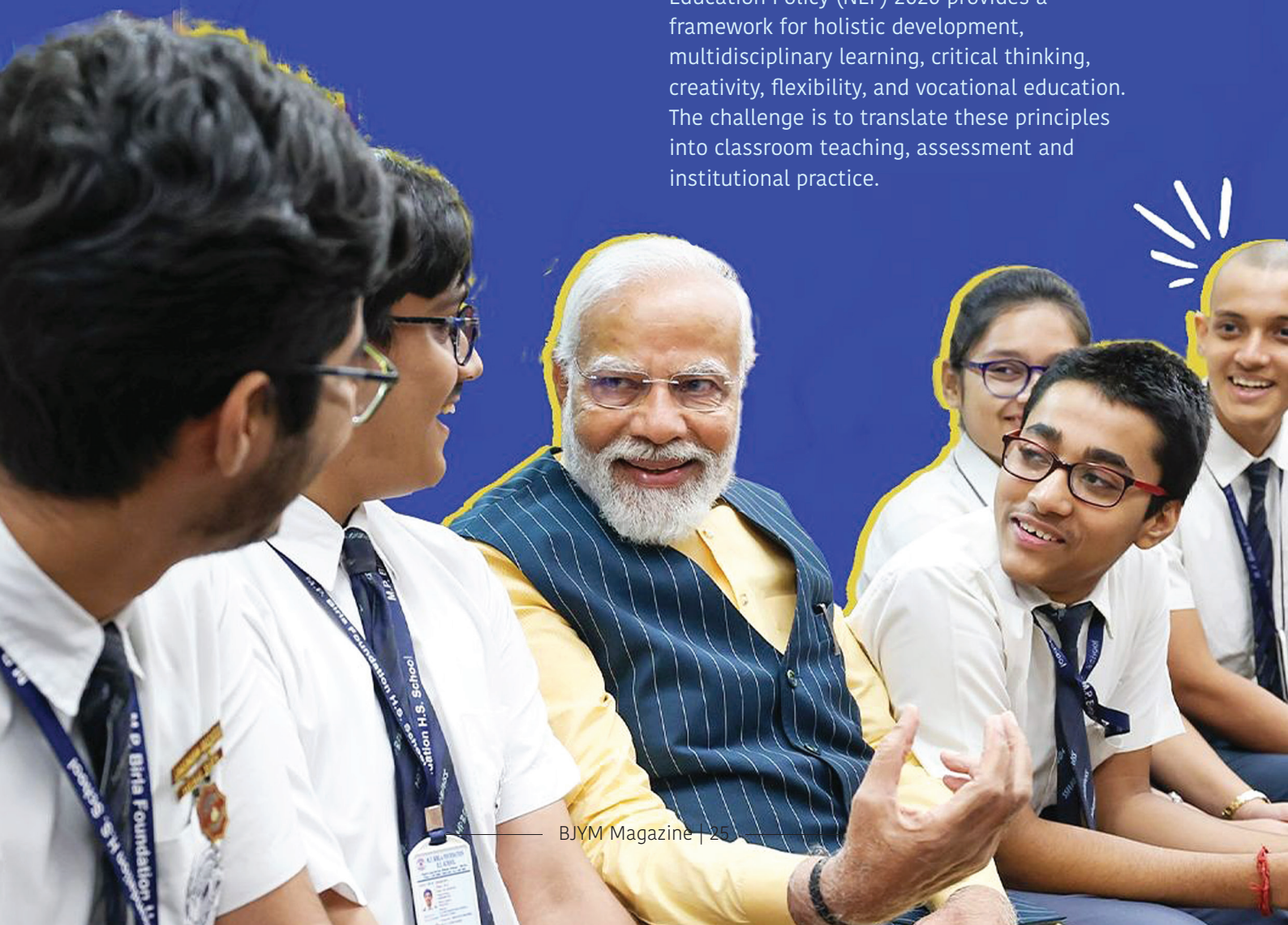
ABHISHEK SINGH PATEL

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BHARAT

An Introduction

India has expanded its education system on an unprecedented scale. Millions now enter schools, colleges, universities and skill-development programmes expecting that education will open the way to a better future. A degree carries real social and economic value: years of study, academic achievement and, often, substantial family investment. Yet one question deserves attention: is a degree, by itself, sufficient evidence of what a person can actually do?

Increasingly, the answer is no. A degree remains important, but its real value lies in the capabilities developed through education. The modern economy needs people who can understand, analyse, communicate, collaborate, solve problems, use technology, adapt and generate new ideas. India must move from an education system focused on credentials to one that emphasises capabilities. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a framework for holistic development, multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, and vocational education. The challenge is to translate these principles into classroom teaching, assessment and institutional practice.



The Degree as a Beginning, Not the Destination

For generations, Indian families have viewed qualifications as a route to social mobility. Yet a degree does not automatically ensure professional preparedness, and the gap between academic qualification and workplace capability has become increasingly visible. Mercer's India Graduate Skill Index 2025 highlighted the growing importance of critical thinking, communication and learning agility alongside technical competence, even as artificial intelligence and automation reshape labour-market demand. The question should move from "What qualification does this student possess?" to "What can this student do with what he or she has learned?"

Beyond Rote Learning

Knowledge remains the foundation of education; students cannot think critically without it. The difficulty arises when memorisation becomes the principal measure of learning. A capability-oriented system asks students to explain ideas in their own words, interpret evidence, compare alternatives and connect knowledge across contexts. Assessment must therefore evolve alongside curriculum reform: if teaching encourages critical thinking while examinations reward memorisation, students will prepare for the examination. What education measures is ultimately what education values.

This matters most in the digital age, where access to information is not the same as knowledge. Students must question sources, identify assumptions, distinguish evidence from opinion and consider alternative explanations. Education should cultivate not merely the ability to know answers, but the ability to ask better questions.

Communication and Digital Capability

Knowledge becomes useful when it can be communicated clearly in writing, presentations, discussions, and reports. Communication should

not be reduced to proficiency in English; India's multilingual character is an asset. Digital literacy, too, has moved far beyond basic computer operation to data, online collaboration, cybersecurity and the responsible use of generative artificial intelligence. The challenge is not to prevent students from using AI, but to teach them to use it intelligently: to verify information, recognise errors, protect data and maintain academic integrity. A student who uses technology to avoid thinking becomes dependent upon it; one who uses it to test and extend his or her thinking becomes more capable.

Problem-Solving and Creativity

Real problems rarely resemble textbook questions. A geography student might analyse local land-use change; an engineering student might design a low-cost solution; a computer science student might build a digital tool for a community need. Such work turns learning from passive reception into active engagement and teaches that failure can be part of learning. Creativity is not confined to the arts: scientific discovery, entrepreneurship, public policy and social innovation all require imagination.

Employability and Learning Agility

Employability is more than securing a first job. In an economy reshaped by automation, digital platforms and the gig economy, the most durable capability may be learning agility, the capacity to learn, unlearn and relearn. Graduation should mark the beginning of lifelong learning, not its end. This also changes how vocational education is viewed. The social hierarchy between academic and vocational routes cannot be sustained: the economy needs researchers and engineers, but equally technicians, healthcare workers, skilled tradespeople and entrepreneurs. NEP 2020's emphasis on vocational exposure matters because it makes the two pathways permeable rather than opposed.

.....
India's education system must move from asking "How many degrees have we produced?" to asking "How many capable young Indians have we developed?"
.....

Connecting the Campus with Real World

Universities cannot remain isolated from the society and economy around them. Internships, apprenticeships, field projects, community engagement and industry interaction help bridge the gap between theory and confident application. This does not mean turning universities into training centres; fundamental research, the humanities and independent scholarship must be protected. Intellectual depth and practical capability are not competing objectives.

Assessment Must Measure What Matters

The most consequential reform must occur in assessment. Written examinations remain necessary for conceptual understanding, but they can be complemented by projects, presentations, practical assignments, portfolios, fieldwork and problem-based tasks. Curricula should specify not only what students' study but what they should be able to demonstrate. A marksheet records performance in particular assessments; a learning portfolio shows what a student has actually learned to do. The aim is depth in one area together with the ability to work across disciplinary boundaries.

From Credentialism to Capability

Credentialism becomes problematic when the certificate matters more than the competence it represents. India cannot build a knowledge economy simply by producing more degrees. A credential says, "I completed this programme." A capability says, "I can do something meaningful with what I learned." Reform should bring these two statements together, and institutions should be judged not only by enrolment and graduation rates but by what their students can do afterwards.

Practically, this means curricula built around clear learning outcomes; assessment that rewards application and reasoning; expanded internships, apprenticeships, and fieldwork; digital, data, and AI literacy across disciplines; teamwork, leadership, and professional ethics developed through practice; and permeable academic and vocational pathways.

Education for Viksit Bharat

India's aspiration to become a developed nation requires a corresponding transformation in its human capital. A developed India needs scientists who innovate, engineers who design, teachers who inspire, entrepreneurs who create enterprises, skilled workers who operate advanced technologies and citizens who think critically. The task is to convert knowledge into capability, capability into productivity, and productivity into national progress.

Conclusion: Let the Degree Prove Capability

A degree should represent understanding; understanding should lead to capability; and capability should create confidence, employability, innovation and social contribution. The young Indian of the twenty-first century must be prepared not merely to answer questions that already exist, but to confront problems never encountered before. India's education system must move from asking "How many degrees have we produced?" to asking "How many capable young Indians have we developed?" The demographic dividend will become a lasting advantage only when education converts youthful potential into productive capacity. India does not need merely more graduates; it needs more capable graduates, young citizens who can think, communicate, create, solve, adapt and lead.



For Viksit Bharat, Reform the Civil Services Examination

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India today is blessed with a political leadership with an increasingly ambitious vision for national transformation. From building world-class infrastructure and becoming a technology powerhouse to expanding India's global role, the aspirations articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the wider BJP are significantly reshaping the possibilities for the country. Yet, the administrative machinery does not always appear capable of keeping pace with this ambition. The problem is not necessarily a lack of commitment among individual civil servants; it is also a question of whether the system is selecting and preparing the kind of professionals that a rapidly changing world requires.

If India is to transform itself into a Viksit Bharat by 2047, therefore, administrative reform cannot remain confined to training, performance management or organisational restructuring. The most consequential long-term reform must begin earlier—with who enters the civil services and how they are selected. That means rethinking the Civil Services Examination itself.

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has, over the decades, built a remarkable institutional reputation for conducting examinations at an enormous scale with integrity, consistency and professionalism. Its ability to manage one of the world's most competitive public examinations, while maintaining high standards of confidentiality, impartiality and procedural fairness, is itself a significant institutional achievement. The question before us today is not whether that foundation is sound, but whether the examination conducted on that foundation is keeping pace with the changing requirements of the Indian state. As India's economy, society, technological capabilities and global ambitions evolve, so too must the competencies we seek in those who enter its civil services.

The central question, therefore, is simple: are we testing the competencies required of a modern civil servant, or are we primarily testing the ability to prepare for an extraordinarily vast examination?

The distinction matters. The present examination is not necessarily too difficult. Difficulty is not the fundamental problem. A difficult examination can be perfectly legitimate if it reliably measures the abilities it claims to measure. The greater concern is that parts of the examination have become excessively broad, unpredictable and dependent on rote learning. Aspirants are required to master an enormous and ever-expanding body of knowledge, often creating incentives to memorise rather than analyse.

This is particularly striking when viewed in light of the direction of India's own education policy. The National Education Policy 2020 places considerable emphasis on moving away from rote learning towards conceptual understanding, critical thinking, problem-solving and competency-based assessment. Mission Karmayogi similarly seeks to map roles, activities and competencies for government officials through the Framework of Roles, Activities and Competencies (FRAC). Yet the recruitment system that determines who enters government remains only loosely connected to such competency frameworks.

India should therefore move towards a scientifically designed, competency-based civil-services examination. This does not simply mean putting the UPSC examination on a computer. Digitising an old examination is not reform. What is required is better assessment science: carefully calibrated question banks, analytical reasoning, comprehension, quantitative ability, data interpretation, situational judgement, structured problem-solving and realistic administrative case studies. India's experience with examinations such as the JEE and CAT demonstrates that large-scale competitive assessment can test reasoning and application rather than merely rewarding the ability to accumulate facts.

The second major reform should be to reconsider the optional-subject system in the Main Examination. It is difficult to justify a recruitment process in which one candidate is assessed on literature, another on physics, another on mathematics, and another on political science, while all are ultimately competing for the same administrative positions. Differences in optional-subject success rates, combined with the coaching industry's focus on "scoring" subjects, add an unnecessary element of arbitrariness to the process.

A common assessment of applied governance, public policy, reasoning and problem-solving would provide a far more comparable basis for selection. Domain expertise is important—but it should be assessed where it is actually relevant.

That points to a third reform: greater service-specific recruitment. The competencies required of an Indian Foreign Service officer are not identical to those required of a police officer, tax administrator, economic administrator or technical regulator. Why, then, should one largely horizontal examination determine entry into all these professions?

India could retain a common national aptitude and competency assessment while subsequently introducing service-specific assessments. Candidates aspiring to diplomacy could be tested on international affairs and negotiation; those

entering policing could undergo assessments relevant to leadership, law and public order; technical and economic services could incorporate appropriate domain competencies. Recruitment could consequently become more professional without sacrificing a common foundation of constitutional values and public service.

The fourth reform concerns the all-or-nothing nature of the present system. Thousands of young Indians spend several years preparing for the examination, often making repeated attempts. This has contributed to a vast coaching ecosystem and substantial opportunity costs for aspirants. We must therefore reconsider whether the present limits on age and attempts are too expansive, particularly when they allow aspirants to remain trapped in the examination cycle for years.

What begins as an effort to enter public service can, for some, gradually become an all-consuming pursuit, almost an addiction to the examination itself, sustained by the hope that the next attempt will finally bring success. This is neither healthy for young people nor necessarily optimal for the country, which loses years of productive talent to an examination-preparation cycle. The objective should be to create a system that gives talented young Indians a fair opportunity to compete without encouraging them to put their careers and lives on indefinite hold.

At the same time, alternative pathways should ensure that a strong but unsuccessful UPSC candidate does not emerge from the system with nothing to show for years of demonstrated ability. UPSC performance could, for instance, be recognised by universities and public policy institutions for admission to relevant Master's programmes, fellowships, or other higher education opportunities. Such recognition would convert what is currently an all-or-nothing competition into a broader pipeline of public-policy talent.

Finally, the examination must also become more authentically Indian in its intellectual foundations. Decolonising civil-services recruitment is important because an Indian civil servant should understand

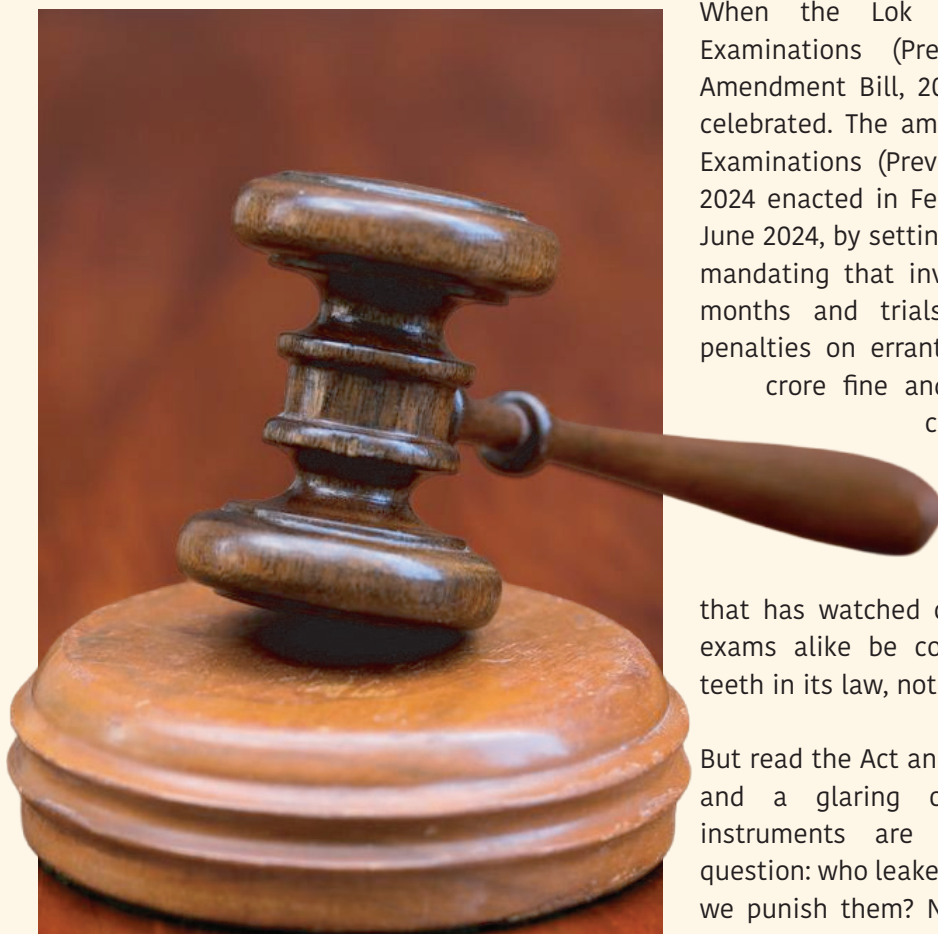
India's own civilisational history, constitutional traditions, diverse social realities, indigenous knowledge and traditions of governance. A civil service more deeply rooted in India's own civilisational experience will be better equipped to understand the society it serves and respond to its contemporary aspirations.

These are not ideas emerging in isolation. The Administrative Reforms Commissions, Mission Karmayogi, competency-based assessment initiatives and international public-service systems all point, in different ways, towards more modern, specialised and competency-oriented recruitment. The research evidence also suggests that India's examination architecture has changed incrementally over decades, without yet undergoing a fundamental redesign grounded in modern assessment science.

India's political leadership has set its sights on realising a Viksit Bharat by 2047. The administrative system must be capable of translating that vision into policy and implementation. Better training can improve existing officers; better institutions can improve organisational performance. But the most fundamental question comes first: whom are we selecting to serve the Indian state, and how are we selecting them?

If Viksit Bharat requires a professional, technologically capable, specialised, citizen-centric, and culturally rooted civil service, then its recruitment system must select precisely for those qualities.

The road to administrative reform, in other words, begins not at the end of a civil servant's career, but at the examination hall where that career begins.



Beyond the Fast-Track Court

What the
Aspirant is
still owed

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When the Lok Sabha passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 on 29 July, it was rightly celebrated. The amendment sharpens the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 enacted in February 2024, in force since 21 June 2024, by setting up Special Fast Track Courts, mandating that investigations close within two months and trials within three, and raising penalties on errant service providers from a ₹1 crore fine and four-year debarment to ₹5 crore and eight years, with jail terms for managerial staff running five to ten years. It was, in every sense, the need of the hour: a country that has watched central and state recruitment exams alike be compromised by leaks needed teeth in its law, not just intent.

But read the Act and its 2026 amendment closely, and a glaring omission stands out. Both instruments are built entirely around one question: who leaked or cheated, and how fast can we punish them? Never ask the second, equally urgent question: once an exam is cancelled or postponed, is the government obligated to conduct it again within a fixed period? The answer, as things stand, is no. Nowhere.

A framework of punishment, not of promise

The 2024 Act applies primarily to central examining bodies UPSC, SSC, the Railway Recruitment Boards, IBPS, NTA, and central ministries. States have followed with their own versions: Rajasthan's Public Examination (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means) Act (2022, replacing a 1992 law), the Bihar Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act (2024, alongside the older 1981 Conduct of Examinations Act), Uttar Pradesh's 1998 law, and similar statutes in other States. Every one of them criminalises the act of leaking or cheating, impersonation, unauthorised access to papers, organised syndicates, tampering with computer systems.

Not one contains a service-guarantee clause for the candidate. None says that if a State Public Service Commission cancels or postpones an exam for a leak, an administrative “unavoidable reason,” or anything else, it must reschedule and complete that stage within, say, 60 or 90 days. The result is a legal architecture that polices the crime but is silent on the consequence for the victim.

What the silence costs in real cycles

This is not abstract. UPPSC's PCS Prelims for 2024 were postponed three times, from 17 March to 27 October to a two-day format on 7–8 December, before being compressed into a single day on 22 December, nine months after the first notified date, pushing Mains to June–July 2025, and the interviews were conducted from 16th February to 20th March 2026. BPSC's 67th cycle saw its Prelims cancelled outright after a paper leak, then its re-exam itself postponed twice amid protests, finally held more than seven months behind schedule. As recently as 18 July 2026, BPSC postponed its 72nd Prelims originally set for 26 July with no revised date announced weeks later.

Because State PCS exams run on a three-tier Prelims–Mains–Interview cycle, a slip at any one stage cascades through the rest. A candidate does not prepare for a single exam in isolation; most candidates attempt several state and central exams in the same year, often with overlapping syllabi. When a commission's calendar slips without any statutory outer limit, it not only delays that exam; it also collides with the notified dates of others. An aspirant who has built a year's preparation around a Prelims date may find it has drifted into the same week as another state's Mains, forcing an impossible choice. No recent protests or agitations around the 2024 Act or its amendment have demanded this be fixed, because the debate has stayed fixed on leak-prevention alone.

The unaddressed geography problem

A related flaw compounds the delay problem: State PCS exams are conducted only within their own state's boundaries. A Hindi-medium candidate from Uttar Pradesh is, by language alone, a plausible

aspirant for at least 7 Hindi-belt state PCS exams: UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand. Yet to sit any beyond his home state, he must travel, often for the first time, to an unfamiliar city, find lodging near an unknown exam centre, and absorb the cost, a burden multiplied every time a commission reschedules with little notice. What purpose is served by confining exam centres to state borders when the candidate pool is explicitly multi-state by language and eligibility design? This is a policy choice, not a legal necessity, and it deserves scrutiny alongside the question of delay.

What reform should look like next?

The 2026 Amendment is a genuine step forward on integrity. The next step must be one on accountability: a statutory outer limit enforceable in the same fast-track courts now being created within which a postponed or cancelled stage must be completed, with automatic compensation or age-relaxation if it lapses; a mandated public exam calendar, published in advance and binding absent extraordinary cause, so clashes across states become foreseeable; and a fresh look at examination geography, at least for shared-language exams, so a candidate's postal address doesn't decide whether they can compete at all.

Punishing the leak is necessary. It is not sufficient. Until the law tells the government what it owes the student after the leak, and a fixed, enforceable promise of when the exam will actually happen, every reform to India's public examination system will treat only half the disease.

Sabka Vishwas

Rebuilding a Generation's Trust

**Satvik Mathur &
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For decades, the Indian education system was often described as a "filtration process" rather than a "foundation-building process." For a student in a small town in Bihar or a coaching hub in Rajasthan, an examination was never just a test of merit; it was a high-stakes gamble with their family's life savings and their own mental well-being. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated Pariksha Pe Charcha, he wasn't merely offering exam tips; he was signalling a profound shift in the national consciousness, viewing our youth not as mere data points in a literacy census, but as the primary architects of Viksit Bharat.

However, the recent demonstrations at Jantar Mantar regarding examination irregularities have brought a critical, albeit difficult, conversation to the forefront. We must engage with this not with defensiveness, but with the confidence of a government that has the courage to acknowledge systemic cracks and the political will to seal them. The unrest at



Jantar Mantar is not a sign of a failing policy, but a symptom of the unwavering trust and towering aspirations the youth have in this leadership. They know that while previous regimes might have looked away, the Modi government is a 'listening government' that treats their dreams as a national priority. They know that while previous regimes might have looked away, the Modi government is a "government which listens and acts."

The Crisis of Inheritance - A Comparative Assessment

To understand the gravity of current reforms, we must look at the legacy we inherited. The education landscape under the UPA era was defined by a colonial "Macaulayist" hangover that prioritised rote learning over critical thinking. It was a period of stagnation in which the "Coaching-Industrial Complex" was allowed to metastasise, creating a two-tier India: those who could afford to "buy" success through expensive tuitions, and the brilliant but underprivileged students left to fend for themselves in a fragmented system.

In contrast, the BJP's vision under PM Modi has been one of structural overhaul. Where in the previous era saw education as a department of grants, we see it as a pillar of national security and economic destiny. The Congress-era vision was limited to building more buildings; the BJP vision is about building the "Indian mind." The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the first indigenous policy that attempts to decolonise our classrooms, replacing the "What to think" philosophy with "How to think."

Rebuilding the Fortress - NTA and the Public Examinations Act

The establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA) was meant to bring professional, standardised excellence to a chaotic ecosystem. While challenges have emerged, the government's response has been unprecedented in its speed and severity. Unlike the past, where "paper leaks" were accepted as a

localised nuisance, the current administration has notified the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. This law is a deterrent of the highest order, targeting organised syndicates that seek to monetise our students' hard work.

By involving the CBI and resetting the leadership where necessary, the government has sent a clear message: the sanctity of the OMR sheet is non-negotiable. Rebuilding trust is a process, not an event. It involves moving toward a "Zero Error" cycle where technology, biometrics, AI-based monitoring, and end-to-end encryption remove the human element of corruption.

Beyond the Textbook - The NEP 2020 Pedagogical Shift

Examination reform is merely the surface; the NEP 2020 is the root-level transformation. For the first time in 34 years, we have a policy that acknowledges that a child's genius cannot be captured by a three-hour memory test in March. The shift toward "competency-based education" means the focus is now on applying knowledge.

The introduction of the "5+3+3+4" structure and the emphasis on the mother tongue (Matrubhasha) in the early years are game-changers. It ensures that a child's cognitive development is not stunted by the struggle to understand a foreign language. Furthermore, the flexibility to choose subjects across streams, allowing a student to study Physics with Music, is the ultimate democratic gift to our learners. It acknowledges that the future belongs to the "polymath," the individual who can synthesise different fields to solve complex global problems.

Technology - The Great Equaliser of the Amrit Kaal

In old India, quality resources were the monopoly of the elite. Today, through Digital India, the walls of the classroom have been breached in the best way possible. Platforms like SWAYAM, the PM e-VIDYA initiative, and the National Digital Library have

.....
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ensured that a student in a remote hamlet in Bastar has access to the same intellectual capital as a student in an IIT.

Technology is not just a medium of delivery; it is a tool of transparency. The "Academic Bank of Credits" allows for multiple entries and exits in higher education, ensuring that no student is labelled a "dropout" simply because of financial or personal exigencies. This is how we democratize access for 40 crore students.

Skill India - Bridging the "Degree-Employability" Chasm

One of the most legitimate frustrations among Indian youth is the gap between earning a college degree and securing a job offer. For decades, our universities produced graduates who were "educated but unemployable." The Modi government's focus on integrating vocational training from the 6th grade through Skill India is designed to fix this.

By de-stigmatising vocational labour and honouring "Shram Shakti," we are preparing our youth for the global economy. The National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC) is further streamlining this by ensuring that universities are held accountable for their students' outcomes, not just their intake.

The Way Forward - A Sankalp for Reform

As we look toward the future, the BJYM must be the vanguard of a new "Examination Ethics." We suggest a three-pronged approach for the next phase of reform:

1. **A Sacred National Examination Calendar:** To reduce anxiety, India needs a fixed, predictable calendar for all major exams, managed with the same precision as the Election Commission conducts polls.
2. **Decentralized Testing Infrastructure:** We must invest in state-of-the-art government-owned testing centers in every district, reducing the reliance on third-party private centers where most irregularities occur.

1. **Holistic Wellness:** We must move away from "High-Stakes" testing. By introducing more frequent, low-stakes assessments, we can reduce the "pressure cooker" environment in coaching hubs and protect our students' mental health.

The Demographic Destiny

India is at a unique juncture. With a median age of 28, we possess a demographic dividend that is the envy of the world. However, a dividend can only be cashed if the currency of education is pure. The integrity of our examinations is the integrity of our nation. When a student enters an exam hall, they should do so with the confidence that their merit is their only currency. The Modi government's vision for Viksit Bharat 2047 is built on this very foundation of "Sabka Vishwas." We are not just reforming an agency; we are rebuilding the broken trust of a generation.

The path of reform is often uphill, but as the youth wing, we must communicate to every student that this government is their strongest ally. The transition from a "Degree-based society" to a "Knowledge-based society" is the ultimate Yagna for our nation's future. We shall not rest until every Indian student can dream without fear and achieve without hurdles.

A Classroom Without Walls

Ten Years of Digital India in Education

Anusha Singh

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Introduction

"नास्ति विद्यासमं चक्षुः" — "There is no vision greater than education. This ancient Sanskrit wisdom serves as a fitting starting point for understanding how Digital India has transformed access to knowledge in the twenty-first century.

A classroom no longer needs four walls. The single shift, more than any policy document, captures what the Digital India Mission has done to Indian education over the past decade. Every year, lakhs of Indian students compete for a limited number of seats in the country's toughest examinations, serving as a reminder of how central education is to a young person's future, and to the nation's. As India moves towards the vision of Viksit Bharat, education has become one of the strongest pillars of that ambition.

In an era defined by globalisation and rapid technological change, nations are increasingly measuring their strength by how effectively they prepare their youth for the future. The future belongs to nations that embrace innovation and equip their citizens with skills that make them future-ready.



Recognising this necessity, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the Digital India Mission in 2015 to create a digitally empowered society. Originally envisioned to create a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy, the Digital Mission has evolved into a transformative force across sectors such as governance, healthcare, and, most significantly, education. By integrating technology, Digital India has fundamentally reshaped India's educational landscape and expanded opportunities for millions of students.

24.8 crore students are currently enrolled in India's school and higher education system, supported by nearly 1 crore teachers (Ministry of Education, Unified District Information System for Education Plus). Delivering equitable and affordable access to quality learning at this scale is one of the most difficult challenges any government has faced.

Digital Education: A Shared Gain for Every Stakeholder

Digital education is learning supported by digital technology and international best practices, effectively using technological tools. It provides a rare mutually beneficial arrangement for all stakeholders present, whether students or educational institutions. Colleges and other institutions benefit from increased enrolment while students gain a flexible alternative that allows them to study at their own pace.

Digital India has built an entire ecosystem of platforms toward this goal:

- **SWAYAM & SWAYAM Prabha** – free online and Direct-to-Home courses for remote learners
- **DIKSHA & e-Pathshala** – school resources available in over 18 Indian languages
- **National Digital Library** – a repository supporting lifelong learning
- **PM eVIDYA** – kept education running through the pandemic and now reaches an estimated 25 crore school students
- **NISHTHA** – large-scale teacher training
- **NDEAR** – a unified digital framework connecting states

- **National Scholarship Portal** – streamlined aid distribution
- **Virtual Labs** – bridging infrastructure gaps for science education

Collectively, these initiatives represent one of the world's largest publicly supported digital learning ecosystems.

Taking Quality Education Beyond the Classroom

For decades, access to quality education in India depended on geography. Students in metropolitan cities benefitted from better schools and richer opportunities, while those in rural areas often struggled to access even the basic necessities of education.

Digital India for education was built on the simple principle: Every child deserves the same quality of learning resources, regardless of geography or economic background.

Under PM Modi's vision, educational technology has become a major contributor to economic growth, extending opportunities to students who, a decade ago, would have had little access to them at all.

Transforming Education Through Technology

Digital India has not simply digitised existing platforms but rather changed how education is perceived and delivered. This shift was supported by the NEP 2020, which envisions an education system built on multi-disciplinary, competency-based learning rather than traditional rote memorisation.

Digital classrooms, virtual laboratories, multilingual resources, and adaptive learning platforms have gradually made education more engaging and student-centred. This also gives teachers access to high-quality content and professional development, and lets students learn at their own pace.

The government has streamlined the academic administration through DigiLocker and the Academic Bank of Credits. Universities now issue

report cards and marksheets through these portals, letting students securely access certificates and transfer academic credits. These reforms have significantly reduced administrative hurdles, simplified the verification processes, enabled seamless admissions and scholarship applications, and introduced academic mobility.

Preparing India's Youth for the Digital Economy

The demands of the current economy extend beyond academic qualifications. Innovation, digital literacy, entrepreneurship and technological fluency are now essential, not optional, skills.

Recognising this, the Government has aligned educational reforms with flagship initiatives such as Skill India, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, and the Atal Innovation Mission. Coding, AI, robotics and vocational education are gradually becoming integral to India's educational ecosystem, not merely to produce degree-holders, but innovators, entrepreneurs and researchers capable of contributing to the country's long-term economic growth.

Building a Transparent, Student-Centred Education System

A modern education system depends not only on the quality of learning it delivers, but on the trustworthiness of its governance. Digital India has strengthened this through secure digital records, online academic services, and simplified interfaces for students and administrators alike.

Recent concerns expressed by students about the integrity of the NEET 2026 examination have also highlighted the importance of responsive governance. Following widespread demonstrations and public demands for greater accountability, the Central Government acted swiftly and announced a series of measures to strengthen the examination ecosystem, including proposed reforms, stronger action against paper leaks, and engagement with stakeholders to pursue further improvements. These developments reflect the Government's stated commitment to addressing students' concerns while working to restore confidence in

India's examination system.

As technology evolves, digital governance will play an increasingly important role in ensuring fairness and accountability across national exams held throughout the year.

At the same time, a meaningful share of India's population, particularly in rural and low-income households, still faces real limits on internet access and device ownership, and platforms such as DIKSHA have had their own share of usability issues. The Government's priorities remain the expansion of broadband connectivity and the improvement of teacher training through continuous CBSE workshops held throughout India. These are best understood not as shortcomings, but as the next phase of an already transformative reform effort.

Conclusion

Education is among the most powerful investments a nation can make, and transparency in delivering it matters as much as the investment itself. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the Digital India Mission has moved the country's education system from a model built around enrolment and infrastructure to one built around access, competency and lifelong learning for students.

By combining technology with public policy reforms such as NEP 2020, expanding digital public infrastructure, and strengthening skill development, the government has laid the foundation for a more inclusive and future-ready system.

As India moves toward the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047, the true measure will not be the number of platforms built, but the millions of young Indians it has empowered to learn and innovate. A digitally educated generation, equipped with the right skill set and globally competitive, will become the driving force behind Atmanirbhar Bharat.

India's educational question is ultimately a question about the kind of Republic we intend to build. A nation may possess a vast young population, expanding universities and millions of aspirants, yet still fail to realise its demographic advantage if its education system rewards memory over understanding, credentials over competence and access without excellence. The journey towards Viksit Bharat must therefore begin much earlier, in the workplace and the marketplace. It begins in the classroom, in the examination hall and in the confidence of a young Indian that merit will be recognised fairly.

For India, this is not merely another sectoral reform. Education lies at the intersection of constitutional justice, national capability and civilisational self-confidence. Article 21A guarantees free and compulsory education to children between the ages of six and fourteen. Article 46 calls upon the State to promote the educational interests of weaker sections. Most significantly, Article 51A(h) speaks of developing scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform. Our constitutional vision, therefore, never contemplated education as the mechanical production of degree-holders. It envisaged citizens capable of reason, inquiry and national service.

EDUCATING THE AMRIT PEEDHI

Why Road to Viksit Bharat Runs Through the Classroom

Jagdish Trivedi

Advocate and
Columnist



A Decisive Break from the Inherited Model

For decades after Independence, India retained much of the architecture of an examination-heavy, compartmentalised and excessively centralised educational system. The problem was not that India lacked talent; it was that the system often asked talent to express itself in only one way. A student who could reproduce a textbook answer was frequently rewarded more readily than one who could interrogate an idea, build something new or solve a real problem. Vocational learning was treated as inferior to conventional degrees, Indian languages were often pushed to the margins of aspiration, and rigid subject streams forced young people into artificial academic boxes.

National Education Policy 2020 represents an attempt to change that intellectual grammar. Its importance does not lie merely in a new structure of schooling or a new vocabulary of reform. Its deeper significance is that it seeks to restore flexibility, interdisciplinarity, foundational learning, skill formation and critical thinking to the centre of Indian education. The shift from rote learning to competency-based education is, in that sense, also a shift from an inherited model designed for clerical conformity towards a model suited to an India that intends to innovate, compete and lead.

The policy's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, multidisciplinary education, vocational exposure, Indian languages, flexible subject choices, the Academic Bank of Credits and the National Credit Framework reflects a simple but powerful principle: the learner must not remain subordinate to a rigid system. The system must become capable of recognising multiple forms of learning and multiple pathways to excellence.

An Examination Is a Constitutional Question of Fairness

Yet no educational transformation can retain legitimacy if students lose faith in examinations.

For a young aspirant, a public examination is not a routine administrative event. It may represent years of disciplined preparation, a family's savings, parents' expectations, and the hope of social mobility. When allegations of paper leaks, compromised processes, unexplained irregularities, or preventable administrative failures arise, the injury is greater than the cancellation of a test. What is damaged is confidence in the State's promise that opportunity will be distributed fairly.

This is why student concerns, whether expressed through representations, litigation or peaceful demonstrations, must be heard with seriousness. Democracy is not weakened when young citizens question institutions; it is strengthened when institutions respond with facts, transparency and correction. At the same time, genuine grievance

must not be allowed to become permanent cynicism. The answer to distrust is stronger institutional design.

The Modi Government's enactment of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 is significant in this context. The statute recognises practices such as leakage of question papers or answer keys, collusion, unauthorised access to examination material, assistance to candidates, tampering with answer sheets and manipulation of assessment as serious misconduct within the public examination ecosystem. The law came into force on 21 June 2024. This is an important conceptual shift: organised corruption of an examination is not a harmless shortcut; it is an assault on the merit of every honest candidate.

But punishment after a breach cannot be the endpoint of reform. India should now move towards an examination architecture designed to prevent malpractice before it occurs.

From Reform to Examination Integrity 2.0

First, major public examinations should progressively adopt a zero-trust security architecture: tightly controlled access to sensitive

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*A confident
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intellectually
derivative.*
.....

material, encrypted transmission wherever feasible, comprehensive audit trails, independent cyber-security testing and an attributable chain of custody at every critical stage. An examination system on which millions depend should be subject to security standards comparable to those for other critical public digital infrastructure.

Second, examination authorities must institutionalise time-bound transparency. Where a substantial irregularity is alleged, candidates should not be left to learn through rumours, coaching channels or social media speculation. Pre-declared protocols should govern preliminary disclosure, grievance redressal, investigation, corrective action and communication, without compromising confidential or ongoing inquiries.

Third, accountability must become preventive rather than episodic. Major testing bodies should undergo periodic independent security and process audits, including scrutiny of vendors, question paper logistics, software systems, examination centres, and post-examination data handling. The purpose should be institutional learning, not merely blame after a crisis.

Fourth, India must carefully reduce excessive dependence on a single high-stakes examination wherever academic standards permit. Competency-oriented assessment, credible school-based evaluation, aptitude testing and multiple opportunities can complement standardised examinations. This does not mean diluting merit. On the contrary, a mature assessment system should measure merit more accurately than a three-hour memory test.

Finally, reform must remain inclusive. Digitisation cannot become a euphemism for exclusion. A technologically sophisticated examination is still unjust if a student in a remote district is disadvantaged by poor connectivity, inadequate centres or unequal access to preparation. Digital India must flatten geography, not reproduce it.

An Indian Education System for an Indian Century

There is also a larger ideological question that India can no longer avoid: should our education system

merely prepare young Indians to fit into institutions inherited from another age, or should it cultivate the confidence to build institutions of their own? For too long, educational prestige in India was often measured by distance from the Indian context, from Indian languages, Indian knowledge traditions, vocational skills, and local problem-solving. A confident civilisation does not reject global knowledge; it absorbs the best of the world without becoming intellectually derivative.

The real promise of NEP 2020 is therefore not isolation, but intellectual decolonisation: to produce an Indian student who can study artificial intelligence and the Arthashastra, quantum science and classical philosophy, constitutional law and local governance, without being told that modernity requires cultural amnesia. India's rise cannot rest on borrowed confidence.

This is where education reform converges with Atmanirbhar Bharat. Self-reliance begins in the mind before it appears in a balance sheet. A country becomes genuinely self-reliant when its young people are trained to create rather than merely consume, to solve rather than merely certify, and to turn knowledge into enterprises, research, public service and employment.

WHEN MERIT IS TESTED REBUILDING TRUST IN EXAMINATION SYSTEM

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There is a peculiar silence that precedes every important examination — the silence of a student turning the last page at midnight, of a parent who has quietly paid another coaching fee, of a family that has postponed its own needs because one child's education is its hope for a better tomorrow.

I have known that silence from two vantage points: first as a NEET aspirant, and today as a doctor and professor watching another generation walk through the same doors. It has taught me that an examination is never merely a test of knowledge; it is a test of a young person's faith that sincere effort will meet a fair opportunity. Reform, therefore, is a question of trust.

India's examinations are among its greatest instruments of social mobility, allowing merit to overcome privilege and preparation to overcome circumstance. But when a paper is leaked, an examination is cancelled, or an impersonator is admitted, the damage is not confined to a testing agency.



It strikes at the principle that makes public examinations legitimate: that every candidate must be held to the same standard, under the same rules.

“सत्यमेव जयते” — Truth alone triumphs. In the examination ecosystem, this cannot remain merely a national motto. It must become an institutional principle.

THE VOICE FROM JANTAR MANTAR

The recent student agitation at Jantar Mantar brought this crisis back into national consciousness, with students demanding accountability over alleged irregularities surrounding competitive examinations, including NEET-UG 2026. It is tempting to reduce every protest to a contest between parties. That would be a mistake. A democracy must distinguish between the politics surrounding a protest and the anxiety that produced it. For a student who has prepared for two years, a paper leak can mean another year of life suspended.

The right response is neither dismissal nor sensationalism. It is reform. The question is not simply who failed, but how we build a system in which failure becomes harder to engineer, easier to detect and impossible to conceal.

WHY INDIA MUST OVERHAUL THE TESTING ECOSYSTEM

India's examination system has vulnerabilities at every stage paper setting, printing, storage, transportation, and evaluation and a single breach can compromise an examination, affecting lakhs of aspirants. The answer lies in moving from physical chains of custody to a distributed, secured system with no single point of failure.

The stakes are constitutional. When leaks, impersonation, or organised malpractice give some candidates an unfair advantage, the damage undermines the promise of equality under Articles 14 and 16. Merit must not merely be declared; it must be protected.

The human cost is equally real: every examination carries years of preparation and family expenditure, and students from modest backgrounds bear the greatest cost of delay. An examination should be a gateway, not a waiting room.

THE 2024 ACT AND THE 2026 AMENDMENT

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 created a dedicated legal framework covering question-paper and answer-key leakage, unauthorised assistance, tampering with computer systems and manipulation of examination processes. Its significance lies in one principle: examination fraud is an organised attack on public trust, not ordinary cheating. Subsequent controversies showed that legislation must evolve alongside the threat.

The Amendment Bill, 2026, increases the imprisonment for an individual using unfair means from three-five years to five-ten years and the maximum fine from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh. Penalties for service providers rise to ₹5 crore, the minimum punishment for organised examination crime to seven years, and debarment from four years to eight.

The most consequential reform may be time-bound justice: a two-month investigation timeline, Special Fast Track Courts, day-to-day proceedings, trial completed within three months of the chargesheet, and appeals before a two-Judge Bench of the High Court. In examinations, time itself is justice: a delayed result delays counselling, and delayed counselling can cost a student an academic year.

THE NANDAN NILEKANI OPPORTUNITY

The high-powered task force on examination reforms under Nandan Nilekani, announced by the Prime Minister on 26 July 2026, offers an opportunity to reimagine examination governance as a national digital infrastructure challenge. India has built digital systems that operate at extraordinary scale; the next challenge is an

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ecosystem in which identity and the question paper are secure, evaluation is standardised, and the result is worthy of trust.

BUT A STRONGER LAW ALONE CANNOT SECURE A WEAK SYSTEM

Punishment is necessary; prevention is better. Reform must combine law, technology, accountability and educational change.

- **Just-in-time question papers.** Encrypted papers transmitted over protected government networks and decrypted at authorised centres shortly before the examination, with controlled local printing.
- **Algorithmic randomisation.** Generated papers giving candidates different question sequences of comparable difficulty, using methods such as Item Response Theory, so that a leaked sequence cannot compromise an entire examination.
- **Air-gapped networks.** Centre systems on tightly controlled local networks, isolated from unnecessary internet access, on zero-trust principles: trust no device, verify every access.
- **Sovereign infrastructure.** Government schools, Kendriya Vidyalayas, universities, IITs and NITs can progressively become secure examination hubs, with private vendors subject to cybersecurity certification and periodic audits.
- **Independent audit.** No institution should be the sole judge of its own performance. An independent body could conduct surprise inspections, review centre and cybersecurity compliance and receive whistle-blower complaints.
- **Beyond the single-day model.** Multiple examination opportunities a year, as JEE Main demonstrates, with the best score retained, would dilute the impact of a single-day disruption.
- **Identity with privacy.** Biometric authentication, where legally and ethically appropriate, must operate within safeguards of consent and data minimisation: privacy by design, security by default.

- **Reform what we test.** Assessment must move from recall towards understanding, application, analysis and problem-solving, with greater weight on practical and skill-based evaluation. As the Sanskrit wisdom reminds us, “सा विद्या या विमुक्तये” — that alone is knowledge which liberates.
- **Strengthen PARAKH.** Comparable assessment standards across school boards, combined with entrance assessments, can ensure that a single morning does not erase 12 years of education.
- **Regulate coaching without criminalising it.** Students must be protected from misleading rank guarantees and exploitative fees, so that honest preparation can compete.

A PROMISE TO INDIA'S YOUTH

India's demographic dividend is not merely a young population, but the capability and confidence we give it. What India owes every aspirant is not a guaranteed rank, but a fair examination in which preparation matters, merit prevails, and honesty is never a disadvantage.

The recent agitation is a reminder that strong institutions respond to legitimate concerns through reform, not rhetoric. The 2024 Act built the legal wall; the 2026 amendment seeks sharper deterrence and faster justice; technology, independent audits and competency-based assessment can strengthen the rest. A student should enter an examination hall thinking only about the questions, never about whether the system is fair.

As PM Modi has emphasised, India's youth is the heart of the nation's development journey. A fair examination system is not merely an administrative reform; it is a promise to that youth and a foundation for Viksit Bharat. When India's youth dream without fear, India rises with them.

Rebuilding Trust in Competitive Examinations

Transparency,
Technology &
Institutional
Accountability

Rajni Kant

President, National Executive
Committee, Paryavaran Shodh Evam
Gramin Vikas Sansthan, Patna



Introduction

Competitive examinations shape the lives of millions of young Indians. A single test may decide admission to a university, entry into a professional course or eligibility for public employment. With such high stakes, the credibility of the process matters almost as much as the examination itself. Students accept difficult papers, intense competition and even failure when they believe the process was fair. What damages confidence is the suspicion that rules were compromised, information withheld, technology failed without explanation, or responsibility was not fixed when something went wrong.

The larger institutional question is therefore: how can India build a system in which students trust not merely the result but the process that produces it? Examination integrity is a chain of safeguards that runs from question-paper preparation and registration through identity verification, centre management, evaluation, result processing, and grievance redressal. A weakness at one link affects confidence in the whole. The National Testing Agency (NTA) is central to this architecture, but universities, technology providers, examination centres, invigilators and government authorities share the same ecosystem.

Trust as the Foundation

An examination is an institutional contract. Candidates follow prescribed rules and accept the outcome; the institution guarantees security, impartiality and procedural fairness. Trust cannot be restored through assurances alone; it requires systems that withstand scrutiny. Candidates should understand how an examination is organised, how evaluation is undertaken, how objections are handled and where redress lies. Security-sensitive information may remain confidential, but confidentiality must not become an excuse for opacity.

Securing the Question Paper

Question-paper security is the most sensitive element of any high-stakes examination. A compromise can undermine the preparation of millions and destroy the legitimacy of the exercise. Preparation, access controls, secure storage, controlled movement, authentication and documented custody must form a continuous chain rather than isolated precautions. Where digital systems are used, authorised access should be recorded through time-stamped logs, so that events can be reconstructed when an irregularity is suspected. Security is credible only when it can be independently verified.

Technology and the Audit Trail

Digital systems offer one decisive advantage: traceability. Registration, authentication, centre allocation, answer submission, evaluation and result processing all generate records. An audit trail need not be public; its value lies in allowing authorised auditors to reconstruct events during a dispute when a candidate reports an interrupted computer-based test, records should establish when the session began, whether it was disrupted and whether responses were saved. Traceability is also preventive: misuse is less likely when significant actions can be detected

Identity Verification with Human Safeguards

A credible examination must confirm that the person appearing is the registered candidate. Yet authentication can fail due to mismatches or connectivity issues, so genuine candidates need clearly defined alternative procedures. Security must never exclude the candidates it exists to protect. The authentication itself should be subsequently verifiable, and the personal data collected must be handled responsibly.

Communication as Transparency

Transparency begins long before examination day. Candidates need clear and timely information on eligibility, correction windows, dates, city allocation and result procedures. Changes are sometimes unavoidable; anxiety comes from delayed or contradictory communication. Official notices should be dated, accessible and plainly written. In an age of social media, students should not depend on coaching centres or rumour to learn what an authority has decided. Consistent official communication is itself accountability.

Evaluation, Results and Grievance Redressal

Confidence ultimately rests on the result. Transparency does not require disclosure of every internal algorithm, but candidates should understand the basic principles of assessment — answer keys, objection windows, review procedures and the methodology used to maintain comparability across multiple shifts. A result should never appear as an unexplained institutional decision.

No large system can eliminate errors. What distinguishes a trustworthy institution is the quality of its response. Grievance mechanisms should be accessible, time-bound and trackable, with reference numbers and clearly defined remedies. Aggregated grievance data reveal recurring weaknesses and should inform future planning. Redressal is a source of institutional learning, not merely a service to individuals.

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Accountability Beyond Individual Blame

Deliberate wrongdoing must attract action, but not every failure is misconduct. Repeated problems at a centre may indicate inadequate supervision; a breakdown may expose weak system design or vendor management. Accountability must therefore operate at individual, institutional, technological and supervisory levels. Responsibilities should be assigned before an examination begins; contracts with service providers should include measurable standards, audit provisions, and consequences; and periodic independent audits should identify vulnerabilities early, strengthening examination authorities rather than intruding upon them.

Technology and Data Protection

Technology improves standardisation, traceability and record management, but it is not a substitute for institutional competence: software fails, servers become unavailable, and automated processes can reproduce errors on a large scale. Systems need stress and security testing, redundancy and contingency arrangements, with no single point of failure. Examination bodies also hold sensitive personal data, and transparency must never mean exposing private information. Integrity and data protection must advance together.

From Crisis Response to Prevention

A strong system examines its vulnerabilities before a controversy arises. Risk assessment, mock exercises, stress tests, centre inspections and personnel training should precede every examination cycle, and every examination should end with a structured review. Each serious incident should answer four questions: What happened? Why did it happen? Which safeguard failed? What has changed to prevent recurrence? Accountability is strongest when it produces both learning and consequences. Structured feedback from candidates and centres can expose weaknesses that remain invisible in administrative reports.

Conclusion: Trust Is the Real Examination

The credibility of an examination is not measured by the number of candidates tested or the speed of

declaration of results. Its real test is simpler: can an honest candidate believe the process was fair? Secure question papers, reliable identity verification, transparent evaluation, effective grievance redressal, digital audit trails, responsible data management and independent review together form the institutional foundation of credibility.

Young Indians do not expect examinations to be easy. They are entitled to expect that rules will be clear, the process secure, institutions responsible and preventable failures corrected. For a young India aspiring towards a Viksit Bharat, opportunity acquires legitimacy only when the institutions that distribute it are credible. The challenge is to build a system whose integrity can be demonstrated, whose decisions can be explained and whose institutions can be trusted the journey from controversy to credibility, and ultimately from uncertainty to trust.



Deterrence Isn't Enough Securing the Exam Supply Chain

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"A nation is
advanced in
proportion as
education is spread
among the masses."

- Swami
Vivekananda

Realising Swami Vivekananda's vision of making education accessible to every section of society requires safeguarding the integrity of the systems through which students access them. Public examinations are the gateway to higher education and public employment for millions of young Indians. Their credibility is hence essential to preserving both fairness and public confidence in the education system.

Accordingly, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026 has recently been passed to strengthen the legal framework governing public examinations. This legislative action reflects a clear commitment to protecting meritocracy and restoring integrity to public recruitment.

The Amendment strengthens the 2024 framework in three important respects. It substantially increases penalties for unfair means and organised examination fraud, raising the maximum fine from ₹10 lakh to ₹50 lakh for individual offences and from ₹1 crore to ₹10 crore for organised syndicates. It also increases the minimum term of imprisonment for both categories of offenders. At the same time, it aims to deliver quicker justice by requiring investigations to be completed within two months and trials within three months of the filing of the chargesheet. Dedicated Special Task Forces and Special Public Prosecutors have been introduced to support this process. Finally, the Amendment extends accountability beyond the immediate offenders by doubling the debarment period for service providers found complicit in examination fraud.

These changes represent a significant improvement over earlier approaches that relied primarily on severe punishment. A legal framework is effective only when offences are detected quickly, investigated efficiently, and prosecuted within a reasonable time. By strengthening enforcement alongside punishment, the Amendment increases the certainty of legal consequences for organised paper leak syndicates.

Ground Realities: Why Penal Laws Alone Cannot Quell Student Unrest

A sharper enforcement pipeline can address a breach after it happens, but can it prevent it in the first place? The case of Jharkhand answers this decisively. Back in 2023, the State of Jharkhand had already passed an exceptionally strict state anti-paper-leak law with severe prison terms and heavy fines. Despite these tough statutory measures, state recruitment tests have continued to face severe operational failures, including leaked question papers and OMR sheet irregularities, culminating in the protests currently underway in Ranchi over the JPSC and JSSC-CGL examinations.

The same lesson emerged from the NEET-UG

controversy. Although the circumstances differed, both cases exposed the same underlying weakness. Public confidence collapses when examination systems fail, regardless of how severe the penalties are after the event.

When youth aspirants take to the streets, their demands go beyond post-crime arrests. They call for evaluation transparency, access to OMR sheets, independent verification, and reliable exam administration. Paper leaks are not just criminal offences handled after the fact, but administrative failures that occur before the exam even begins. One of the cardinal rules of life is that prevention is better than cure, and the legal framework must reflect this ethos by strengthening preventive reforms.

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From Policy Intent to Operational Security: Suggested Reforms

The Central Government has already begun addressing the administrative weaknesses that enable examination fraud. Building on earlier expert recommendations, it constituted a high-powered task force chaired by Nandan Nilekani to recommend structural, technological, and governance reforms for the National

Testing Agency. The proposed measures include wider use of Digital Public Infrastructure, multi-factor biometric authentication, and stronger digital security protocols across the examination process. These initiatives signal a shift towards a more secure examination ecosystem. The challenge now lies in implementing them consistently across a complex national supply chain.

To translate administrative intent into operational reality, policy focus must shift from reacting to breaches toward foreclosing them before they occur. As the Central Government frames the Rules under the Act, there is an opportunity to further strengthen the examination ecosystem through the following measures:

- 1. Secure the Examination Supply Chain

- Private vendors now handle critical functions such as printing question papers, managing examination software, and operating test centres. Yet vendor selection remains fragmented, with security standards varying across agencies. These weak links can be exploited by organised paper leak syndicates.
- The rules under the 2026 Act should establish a central accreditation framework for all vendors involved in public examinations, administered by a dedicated Examination Security Cell. Only accredited vendors should be eligible to bid for examination contracts. Accreditation should require annual cybersecurity audits, personnel background verification, dual-custody protection for digital question banks, and end-to-end custody logs for physical papers. Vendors responsible for security breaches should face automatic blacklisting and recovery of re-conduct costs. These measures shift the focus from responding to breaches to preventing them.

• **2. Create a Common National Standard**

The Central Act creates common criminal offences, but operational safeguards continue to vary across states. Public Service Commissions follow different procurement practices, security protocols, and administrative procedures. Organised paper leak networks operating across state borders can exploit these inconsistencies.

The Department of Personnel and Training should issue Model Rules under the 2026 Act prescribing minimum standards for vendor accreditation, custody protocols, and digital security. States could adopt these rules through executive notification while retaining the flexibility to prescribe stricter safeguards. A common statutory baseline would strengthen examination security without undermining India's federal structure.

• **3. Strengthen Transparency and Independent Oversight**

Public confidence suffers when examination processes remain opaque. Audits typically begin only after allegations emerge, while

- candidates often have limited access to evaluation records. Once doubts arise, delayed disclosures do little to restore confidence.

An independent Public Examination Auditor General should oversee examination security throughout the examination cycle. Major examinations should require a pre-examination Security Clearance and a post-examination Security Compliance Certificate. Candidates should also have a statutory right to access digitised OMR sheets, time-stamped answer keys, and score normalisation formulas before the final merit list is published. A fixed window for raising objections would strengthen procedural fairness and reduce avoidable disputes. Fulfilling the Promise of Meritocracy for India's Youth

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Act, 2026 marks an important step towards strengthening accountability in India's examination system. Its long-term success, however, will depend on how quickly its promise is translated into practice. The timely notification of comprehensive Rules to operationalise the Act should therefore be treated as a priority. These Rules should secure the examination supply chain, establish common operational standards across states, and strengthen transparency and independent oversight. Together, they can translate legislative intent into lasting institutional reform.

The integrity of public examinations is ultimately an investment in the future of India's youth. For millions of students and job aspirants, these examinations represent the promise that hard work, talent, and perseverance will be rewarded fairly. Every paper leak or recruitment irregularity weakens that promise and erodes confidence in the institutions responsible for safeguarding merit. Protecting that promise requires institutions that inspire confidence before an examination is ever conducted. Only then can India build an examination system that inspires confidence among millions of young aspirants and strengthens trust in public institutions.

Democratising the Degree

How Technology Is Democratising Access

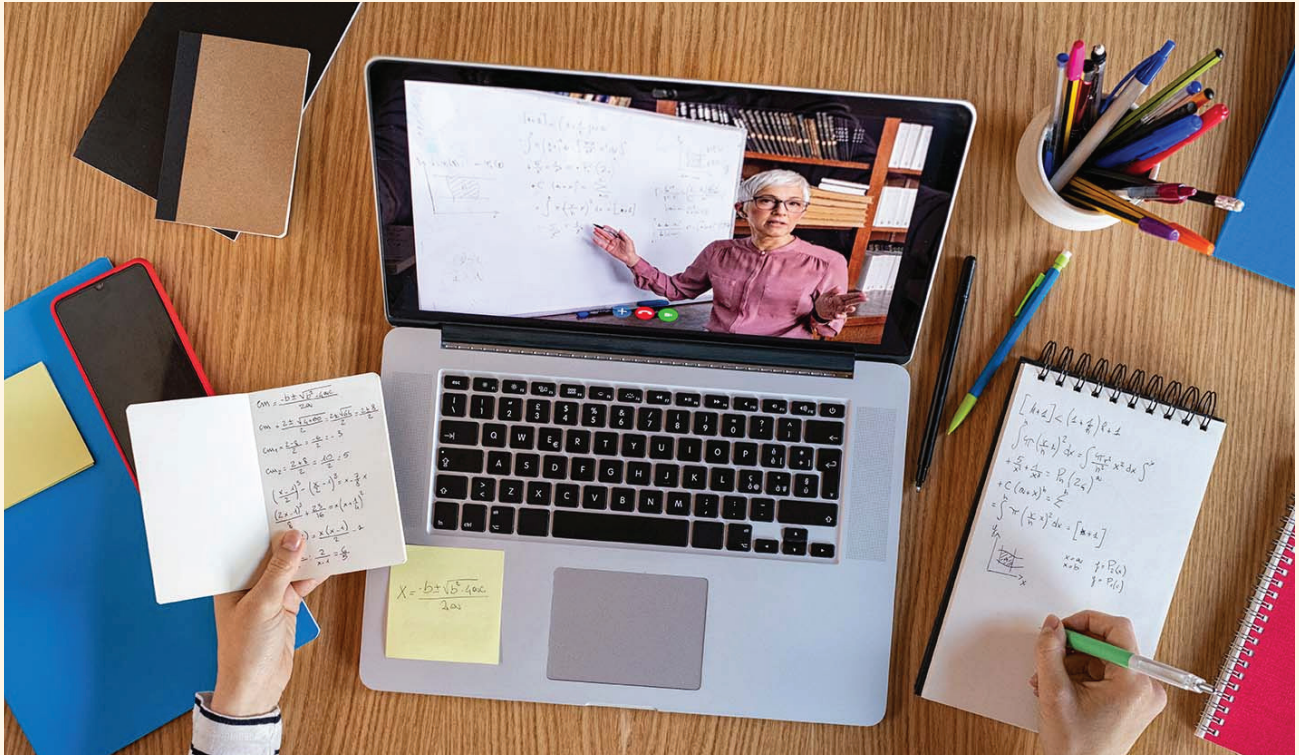
Dhruv Rampuria
Chief Communications Officer
for The Public Diplomacy
Forum, JGU

As the Digital India project turns more than a decade old, this proposition of Swami Vivekananda finds its true manifestation in the intricate and thoughtful amalgamation of technology and accessible education. It is a reality made possible by the farsightedness and deliberate policy intervention by the Modi Government since 2015.

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*If the poor boy
cannot come to
education,
education must go
to him”*

– Swami Vivekananda
from Chicago, to H. H. the
Maharaja of Mysore on
June 23, 1894





Conceived from the vision of an India transformed into a “digitally empowered society and knowledge economy”, the Digital India initiative has been growing exponentially and redefining the quality of life for citizens “through the digital delivery of services, expanding the digital economy and employment opportunities”. Rather than adopting a narrow approach, the initiative spans a plethora of sectors, such as education, the economy, legal access, and business. This policy measure was a conscious and focused effort, arising from the larger objective of an immaculate digital infrastructure that complements the realisation of the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047.

Of the many sectors that this initiative has deeply and significantly impacted, its effect on education has not only been seminal but also a watershed moment in the history of the Indian Education System since Independence. The confluence of technology and education has not only effected a pedagogical overhaul but also democratised access to education, thereby promoting equal opportunity for all students to learn and gain regardless of their social, cultural or economic conditions. It reinforces not only this Government’s commitment to quality

education but also aligns with the global mandate that “everyone has the right to education”, as envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In this context, understanding democratisation becomes imperative. To put it succinctly, democratising education means emancipating the education system from hierarchical structures, replacing domination of one group over another with legality and equality, and ensuring the educational process is accessible to all students. A prima facie analysis of this definition unearths certain intrinsic silos of democratisation premised on the anvil of equality, equity and accessibility. The overhaul of the education system in India, through the Digital India initiative, surpasses these restrictive notions to redefine democratisation of education.

Since 2015, the Government of India has introduced a plethora of initiatives aimed at digitising education and making it accessible to the last mile. This becomes even more significant in the context of COVID-19, where the world was forced to shift to digital alternatives of education. While the world

ideated, India was a step ahead, enjoying the fruits from the trees it sowed well in advance.

SWAYAM, fundamentally built on the principles of access, equality and quality, is committed to closing the digital divide by extending educational access to underserved students, enabling fuller participation in the knowledge economy. Along with SWAYAM Prabha, which broadcasts educational content through 48 dedicated DTH channels and extends access to learning to the last mile, SWAYAM offers free online courses from Class IX to the postgraduate level through reputed institutions. Data as of January 2026 reveals that it hosts over 4,400 courses across disciplines.

DIKSHA, which promotes school education through distance learning, provides a digital platform that bridges gaps among teachers, students, and schools across states, offering digital textbooks, interactive learning modules, and training courses in multiple regional languages via a central portal and mobile app. As of March 2026, DIKSHA has crossed over 2 crore registered users.

E-GRANTHALAYA was created with the objective of digitising and making libraries and their resources accessible. Data suggest that the programme is used by over 7,000 libraries, with the current version used by over 3,000 libraries in the cloud.

Furthering the objectives of convenience, certainty, and conspicuousness, PM e-Vidya was launched to integrate these initiatives into a single framework, providing uninterrupted, multi-mode learning. The same allows quality education to expand and percolate through the various layers of society, thus serving as testimony to equity in policy-making.

While these initiatives directly impact education and human capital development, the indirect and infrastructural advancements cannot be overlooked. Initiatives such as Digital India facilitate the broader objective of unifying the country through equal access to technology, connectivity, and the internet. From 2014 to 2025, the country experienced a massive increase in internet users, from 250 million to nearly 1.02 billion. Additionally,

cheap smartphones and low-cost data have made India the world's second-largest smartphone market, with close to 750 million devices in use today. Average monthly data consumption per user has also risen sharply, growing from a mere 62 megabytes in 2014 to roughly 24 gigabytes in 2025.

As an effort towards holistic development and objective fulfilment, the Government even came up with the PRAGYATA (Planning, Reviewing, Arranging, Guiding, Yak (Talk), Assigning, Tracking and Appreciating) guidelines on digital education with an aim to improve online education and ensure the safety and academic welfare of the students.

However, holistic implementation would require integrating digital opportunities into the administrative spheres of educational institutions. While digital access remains structurally uneven despite accelerated growth in connectivity and accessibility, simultaneous attention may also be paid to institutionalisation of digitalisation initiatives.

As one perorates, an attempt to summarise the answer to this article's fundamental question, i.e., how technology is democratising access for crores of students, can be successful only by recognising that initiatives of this Government have crossed leaps and bounds to establish its efforts as an attempt to democratise access to education for crores of students. The same is corroborated by data furnished herein. Simply put, it is answered by the intricate complexities and simple juxtaposition of initiatives, infrastructural development, and policy interventions, delivered through convenience and a dynamic approach that not only allows the initiative to reach the last mile but also mitigates any repercussions that the well-intended policy may create.



India's Classrooms in the Modi Era

Preparing a Generation for 2047

Ashmit Mishra

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Geojuristoday

India is a young country in an ageing world. More than 65 per cent of our population is under 35. We have the scale of a continent, the ambition of a rising power and a generation impatient to build, earn and lead. This is India's demographic dividend. What we too often overlook is that youth itself does not produce prosperity.

A young populace is only an opportunity. Its value depends on whether education can convert ambition into capability: whether students think beyond the model answer, graduates apply knowledge beyond the examination hall and talent is offered credible futures.

Over the past decade, India has expanded educational capacity, carried out numerous assessment reforms, and invested in universities, ITIs and apprenticeships. The task now is to carry these reforms further, so education does not merely sort young Indians by marks but equips them to create, solve, build and lead. Viksit Bharat must begin by building the capabilities of those expected to create it. In Atal Bihari Vajpayee's words, "The linkage between education and development is direct and simple."

India's Narrow and Uneven Window

India's working-age population is expected to grow until around 2044, overlapping with our journey towards Viksit Bharat in 2047. By 2036, Indians aged 15-59 are projected to number 98.85 crore, 64.9 per cent of the population. Few countries are handed such an alignment of people, time and purpose.

Yet this window is neither permanent nor is India ageing uniformly. During 2031-41, working-age populations are projected to decline in eleven major states while continuing to rise in states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. A student in Bihar today may become a technician in Gujarat or an entrepreneur in Tamil Nadu tomorrow. Education in one state will increasingly shape productivity in another.

Viksit Bharat, therefore, cannot rest on a geography of first- and second-class institutions. The Aspirational Districts Programme offers measurable indicators, public monitoring and competition based on improvement. That framework could now track school completion, entry into universities and ITIs, apprenticeships and employment after training.

Changing What Examinations Reward

Given our scale, standardised examinations and marks serve as a necessary yardstick for assessing merit across diverse languages and institutional landscapes. Nonetheless, a common measure need not remain shallow. Too many of India's

examinations have long measured outcomes: the final answer, the mark, the rank, not the reasoning and skills it produced. When predictable formats and coaching patterns secure the mark, students prepare accordingly. Reform must change not only what is taught, but what success requires.

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam famously said, "Learning gives creativity. Creativity leads to thinking. Thinking provides knowledge. Knowledge makes you great." He describes a chain of learning, not a single output. An examination focused solely on the final link rewards memorisation over judgement.

The transition has begun. CBSE now gives 50 per cent weightage to competency-focused questions in Classes X and XII theory papers, while PARAKH provides a route towards common standards across

boards. Teacher training must evolve too, or new formats will produce new coaching formulas. Written examinations may remain central but be supplemented, where credible, by laboratory work, data interpretation, and research assignments.

Given scarcity of positions, examination integrity is equally important. In 2026, 15.38 lakh JEE Main candidates competed for 67,323

JoSAA seats. NEET drew 22.79 lakh registrations for 1.37 lakh MBBS seats. At that scale, an irregularity can throw years of preparation into uncertainty. The government responded strongly to malpractice. The next test will be deterrence, transparency and time-bound resolution. A fair system must test richer learning, protect the credibility of the system on which merit is judged, and widen opportunities to make use of our demographic's talents beyond single-outcome examinations.

From Expansion to Capability

India's expansion of educational capacity is a substantial achievement. Since 2014, IITs have grown from 16 to 23, AIIMS from 7 to 23, medical colleges from 387 to over 800 and universities from 760 to more than 1,300. The next frontier is quality beyond the flagships. Most students will study in

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Fields such as engineering or medicine are widely perceived as reliable paths to economic security and social standing, and a family pushing a child toward them was one acting rationally.

state universities, affiliated colleges and regional institutions. PM-USHA provides an important framework for strengthening them, but its success must gradually become visible in functioning laboratories, current curricula, rigorous teaching, and pathways into employment, enterprise, or research.

In parallel, while universities must remain places of intellectual development, knowledge becomes stronger when tested against reality. Structured internships improve practical skills and job readiness when integrated into curricula. Students should therefore engage with businesses, research organisations, government departments, archives, policy institutions and field projects. Such experience should carry academic credit, assessment and mentorship, rather than becoming another résumé certificate. India already has a workable model in the UGC's Apprenticeship Embedded Degree Programme, which integrates workplace training, academic credit and employer participation. Expanding this approach across suitable degrees would make internships a structured part of skill-building and employability.

Making Apprenticeships Mainstream

Not every credible future runs through a university gate. Yet among Indians aged 15–29, only 4.9 per cent had received formal vocational or technical training. Another 21.2 per cent had learned informally, often without portable certification or recognised progression. More than 50 lakh apprentices have been engaged through NAPS since 2016, while PM-SETU is upgrading 1,000 government ITIs through 200 hubs and 800 spokes. These are important foundations, but apprenticeship coverage must and will grow substantially.

That requires 4 unglamorous fixes already underway: enforcing existing obligations while easing participation for medium-sized employers; expanding apprenticeships in services and retail; making academic credit portable; and embedding ongoing industry input in ITI curricula.

Scale must also match status. An ITI certificate is still often treated as the consolation prize for a

student who could not enter college. Germany and Switzerland offer a useful model and principles: employer-led training, clear wage progression and qualifications linked to strong job outcomes. Germany blends classroom instruction with paid apprenticeships, while Switzerland links vocational schools with industry placements.

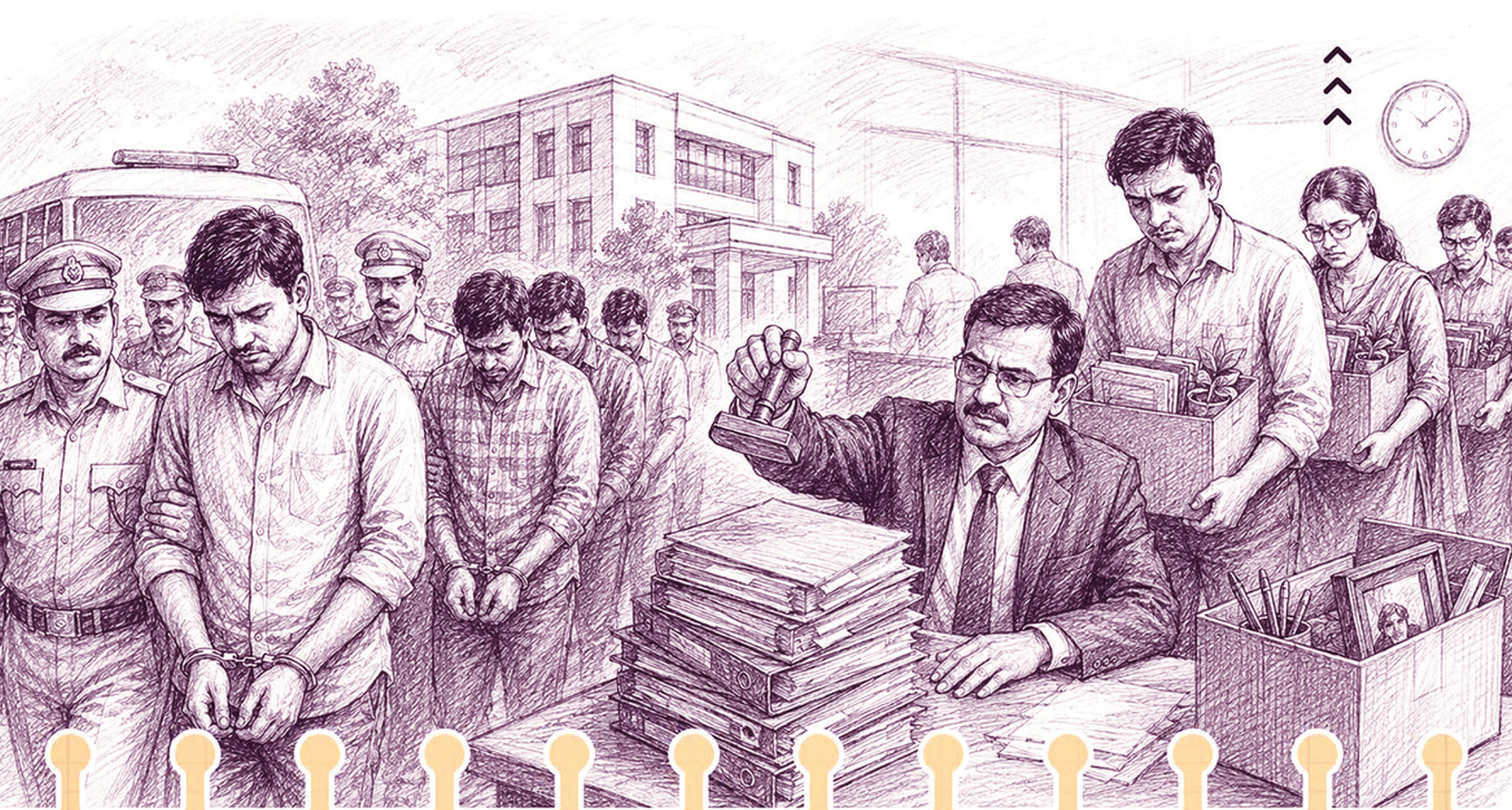
Widening the Meaning of Opportunity

Certain professions earn a family's trust more for reasons that rarely track a child's actual talent. Fields such as engineering or medicine are widely perceived as reliable paths to economic security and social standing, and a family pushing a child toward them was one acting rationally. But a demographic dividend this large cannot be spent competing for the same few seats.

Entrepreneurship, design, research, sport, the arts and public service all require serious pathways. Opportunity widens when institutions reduce the risks associated with pursuing it. Entrepreneurship needs incubators, mentors and access to early capital, while research, sport, the arts and public service each require credible institutions and practical pathways. Initiatives such as Startup India, INSPIRE, and KHELO INDIA have begun to build these pathways. The greater promise we strive towards is an India where the immense diversity of its young talent is no longer funnelled into the same few careers but put to work across every field in which the nation can build, discover and lead.

The Choice Before India

Viksit Bharat will not be built only in industrial corridors, capital markets or government offices. I believe it will be built in the examination hall where reasoning is rewarded and effort is treated fairly; in the college where knowledge confronts a real problem; in the ITI where skill acquires dignity; in the apprenticeship where learning earns a wage; and in the university where an idea becomes research, enterprise or public service. The demographic dividend will not be delivered by population arithmetic. It will be earned, one examination, one institution, one enterprise and one apprenticeship at a time.



Making Merit Accessible

Why Exam Reform is Social Reform

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Introduction

Competitive examinations occupy a distinctive place in India's educational and social landscape. For millions of young people, an examination determines admission to a university, entry into a profession, or access to public employment. For students from families with limited means or little educational history, a credible examination is a route to advancement based on ability and effort rather than inherited privilege. Examination reform must therefore be seen not only as an administrative or technological exercise but as a form of social reform. Merit can be identified fairly only when the conditions for demonstrating it are reasonably accessible. This does not mean equal outcomes or lower standards; it means reducing avoidable barriers that arise before the examination begins.

Examinations and Social Mobility

Education remains one of India's principal avenues of social mobility. A transparent selection process reduces the influence of personal connections and inherited privilege by making demonstrated performance the basis for advancement. Yet the promise depends on what happens before the examination. Some candidates have access to better schools, specialised coaching, private tutors, and personal devices; others prepare with limited institutional support. The examination may be formally identical, but the circumstances in which candidates reach it are not. The answer is not identical resources for everyone, but a reasonable minimum level of opportunity for every capable student.

The Geography of Merit

India's talent is not confined to metropolitan centres; it exists in villages, small towns, tribal districts, hill regions and aspirational districts. Educational infrastructure, however, remains unevenly distributed. Large cities concentrate universities, coaching institutions, libraries and hostels, while students in remote areas may have to migrate simply to prepare. Bringing high-quality resources closer to students district libraries, digital learning centres, community study spaces, reliable internet access, recorded lectures, and mock tests can strengthen local preparation ecosystems. Geography should influence where a student lives, not how far that student can aspire.

The Economics of Preparation

India's coaching economy provides structured courses, test series and peer support, and many students benefit from it. The difficulty arises when commercial coaching becomes an implicit prerequisite for success, since the real cost extends beyond fees to accommodation, transport, devices and repeated attempts. If quality preparation is available mainly to those who can afford it, economic inequality enters the system even when the test itself is impartial. A stronger public

preparation ecosystem free study material, open online courses, standardised mock tests, public libraries and community study centres is the corrective. Coaching may confer an advantage, but its absence should not close the door to merit.

First-Generation Learners and Women

Economic disadvantages are only part of the problem. Many young Indians are first-generation learners who possess ambition and ability but lack familiarity with academic institutions, examination procedures and career pathways. Structured career guidance, examination orientation, mentoring and scholarship information can bridge this gap. The social impact extends to young women, whose choices are shaped by concerns about travel, safety, accommodation and social expectation; a distant

centre or prolonged migration imposes a heavier practical burden on them. Accessible centres, safe transport, and quality digital preparation closer to home can broaden participation, with benefits that reach households, communities, and the wider economy.

Linguistic and Digital Inclusion

India's linguistic diversity is another dimension of equity. A candidate may

understand a concept thoroughly yet struggle with unfamiliar terminology, particularly after schooling in a regional language. High-quality multilingual material, translated to preserve conceptual meaning, supports the principle of common academic standards and wider linguistic access. Digital technology similarly extends opportunity beyond geography, and initiatives such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM and PM e-VIDYA show the potential of multimodal delivery. Yet digital access remains unequal: a student with a laptop and broadband is not placed in the same position as one dependent on a shared smartphone, so connectivity, affordable devices, and offline resources must accompany reform. The objective is to democratise access, not digitise existing inequalities.

Examination Centres and Trust

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Preparation alone does not guarantee accessibility; a candidate must also be able to reach the examination centre. Candidate density, transport connectivity and geographical accessibility should guide allocation, and spatial analysis can identify underserved areas. For candidates with disabilities, accessible infrastructure, assistive technology and reasonable examination support must be built in from the outset. An examination has social value only when candidates believe the process is fair. Trust rests on secure question papers, predictable schedules, reliable technology, fair evaluation and timely grievance redressal. Strong security is not opposed to social justice; it is one of its foundations, provided it operates alongside transparency.

Reducing the Social Cost of Failure

Competition inevitably produces failure, but one unsuccessful attempt should not carry an excessive social and economic cost. Years of preparation and repeated attempts can consume family savings and intensify emotional pressure. Reform should therefore be accompanied by credible alternatives – flexible higher education, vocational training, apprenticeships and skill development – so that failure in one examination does not become failure in life.

From Formal Equality to Substantive Opportunity

Formal equality requires every candidate to take the same examination under the same rules. Substantive opportunity asks whether candidates had a reasonable chance to reach it at all. The same digital resource does not ensure equal access when some lack devices; the same centre rule does not create identical conditions when travel distances vary widely. Examination equity therefore reduces structural barriers while maintaining common academic standards. The formula is not equal outcomes, but equal dignity, common standards and fair opportunity an approach that strengthens meritocracy rather than diluting it.

An Agenda for Viksit Bharat

Practical measures follow: regular accessibility audits of centres and facilities; district-level

learning infrastructure; free or low-cost preparation material in multiple Indian languages; stronger career guidance for first-generation learners; low-bandwidth and offline alternatives; predictable calendars; and accessible, time-bound grievance redress. Policy should be judged by participation and social reach alongside security and efficiency.

A developed India is inseparable from the development of its people. Talent is widely distributed; opportunity is not. If a village student can access quality preparation, a first-generation learner reliable guidance, a young woman a safe centre, and a regional-language student a clear question paper, the examination system becomes an institution of national opportunity.

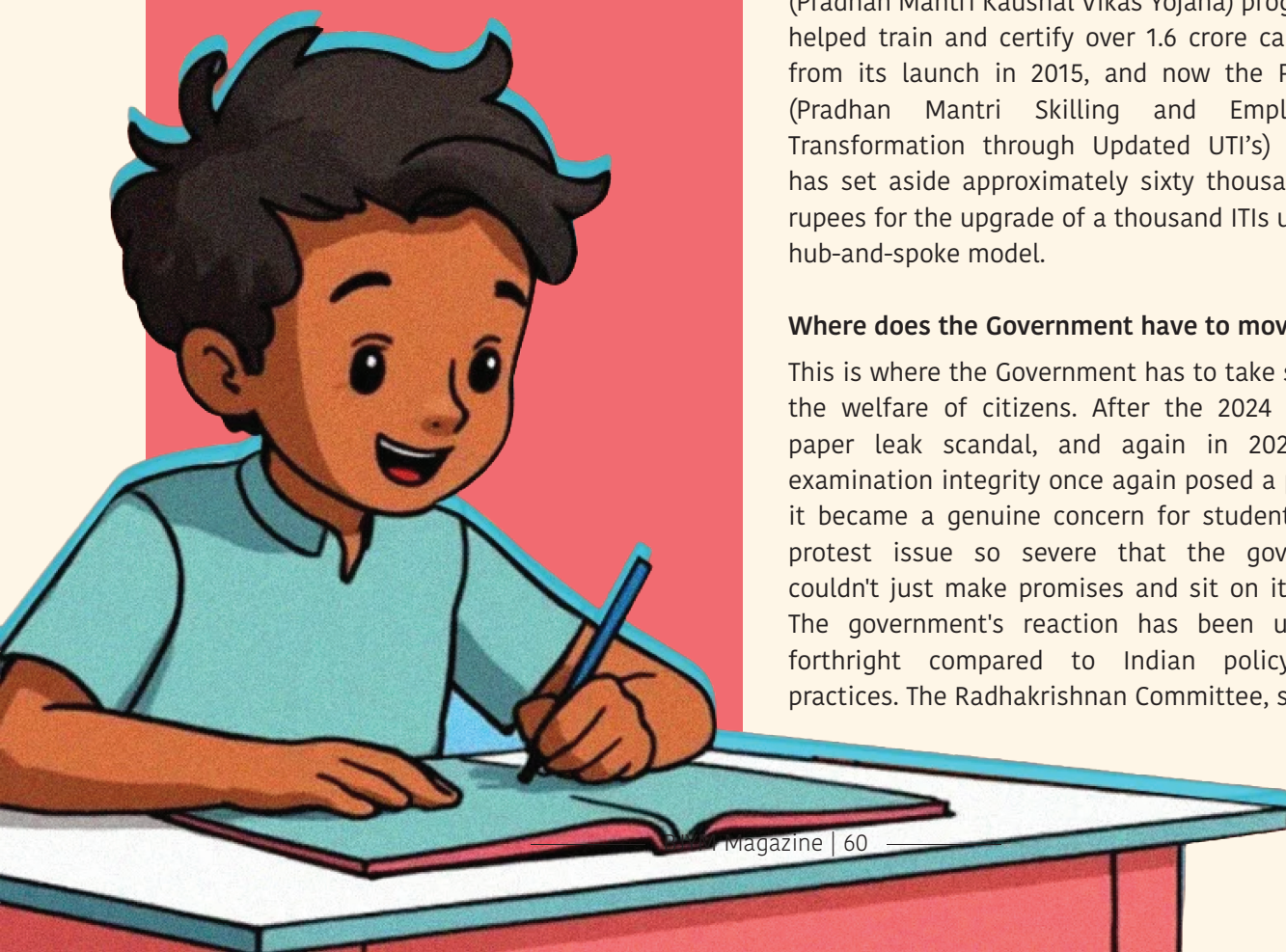
Reform is not about making competition easier, but about making it more credible. When barriers fall, merit becomes more visible, and social mobility expands. For New India, the principle should be clear: talent may be born anywhere, but opportunity must reach everywhere. That is why examination reform is social reform.

From Reform to Result

Why Getting Education Right Can't Wait

Arthya. H

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The share of youth in India's population is nearly one-quarter of the overall population and is expected to begin declining before the end of the decade. What we do in this decade will determine if the twenty-first century belongs to India, or whether we'll look back only to say how it might have belonged to us, had we done things differently. Of all the tools available to policymakers, none plays a more important role than education in determining whether India writes its own story.

A decade of Structural Intent

The NEP 2020 continues to be the most sweeping reform India's education sector has seen since its liberation, and at its core, it got everything right: no more degrees with rote certification; time to build application-based skills right from the foundational stage onwards; and inclusion of many more practical learning methods as well as the flexibility of the number of years of learning. NIPUN Bharat put this core philosophy into primary education classes. ABC (Academic Bank of Credits) brought the core philosophy to universities, where students could take credits with them across institutions rather than being confined to a single degree course. In terms of skill development, the PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana) program has helped train and certify over 1.6 crore candidates from its launch in 2015, and now the PM SETU (Pradhan Mantri Skilling and Employability Transformation through Updated UTI's) program has set aside approximately sixty thousand crore rupees for the upgrade of a thousand ITIs using the hub-and-spoke model.

Where does the Government have to move fast?

This is where the Government has to take steps for the welfare of citizens. After the 2024 NEET-UG paper leak scandal, and again in 2026 when examination integrity once again posed a problem, it became a genuine concern for students and a protest issue so severe that the government couldn't just make promises and sit on its hands. The government's reaction has been unusually forthright compared to Indian policy-making practices. The Radhakrishnan Committee, set up by

the government in 2024, proposed 101 recommendations for structural changes in NTA, including biometric verification of candidates, the use of AI, and encrypted question delivery. In 2026, following concerns about exam integrity, the government established a high-powered task force under Nandan Nilekani for securing examinations technologically against any leakages, has taken steps to dismiss those NTA employees who were found responsible for the leakages, and passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 in Lok Sabha. Under this bill, there is increased punishment for anyone caught leaking exam papers; they will now face 10 years in jail and a 50 lakh rupees fine.

It needs to be said straight out that the government's first attempt at reform did not fully solve the problem, and further steps were necessary. It is not a failing of the reform process. A government that doubles down with tougher legislation and a fresh technical task force when the first fix proves insufficient is behaving as a serious institution should.

The Test of Employability:

Reforms on paper mean nothing unless they manifest in results, and this is where the challenge becomes tougher for the government: rather than getting any simpler, both in implementation and in holding checks. Unemployment among youth aged 15 to 29 years is around 10 per cent on average annually, and it surged above 16 per cent at the monthly level throughout 2026, about three times the general unemployment rate. More revealingly, more than two-thirds of the unemployed youth in India have completed their higher education degrees, and less than half of the total number of graduates in India is currently working in any form; this raises a serious question about managing employment and the importance of skill-based practical learning rather than rote learning. Meanwhile, the India Skills Report 2026 shows employability climbing to 56 per cent nationally, with computer science and IT graduates crossing 80 per cent, while ITI and polytechnic output still lags at near 46 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively.

This leads to a point where the gap is in scale and speed, rather than in design.

The Road Ahead:

There are three things that should take precedence in the upcoming years. The first one is that the recommendations of the Nilekani task force should actually see the light of day through a transparent, measurable plan of action and not fizzle out like other portions of the 2024 report which needed a student uprising to make any sort of an impact. Second, vocational course integration needs to shift from being a promise by the NEP 2020 to an actual graduation criterion, with ITI and polytechnic employability being a metric measured by the government on a par with the GDP rate. And lastly, the paper leak prevention law requires the appropriate investment into the technology infrastructure for this law to have an effect. Technology can be entrusted a major role to play in the educational sector. Apart from using technology to facilitate online learning, it can be used to place the required checks and balances, so that loopholes are not bypassed easily. Technology can be used to aid correction activities, if implemented systematically and with proper integration for a system that deals with lakhs of students every year, thus ensuring that human labour is not exhausted and diverse options can be presented without any hurdles.

Whether Viksit Bharat comes true in 2047 or not will depend on whether a student appearing for exams in 2030 has the same trust in the system, and whether he or she who graduates from the system is truly employable. The central government has demonstrated, particularly in 2026, that it is ready to legislate tougher and change faster if its current attempt fails. This readiness must become the constant institutional habit rather than something done in response only when students protest in the streets of Delhi. Getting things right in the educational process, both in class and at the examinations, is not a priority among others. It is the one without which all other promises will remain promises.

Counting What Counts

India's Decade of Human Capital Gains

Himanshu Joshi

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When economists speak about Human Capital, they are really speaking about a country's future productivity. Education lies at the heart of that equation: What children learn, how they learn and whether those capabilities translate into productive lives determine the quality of the workforce a country will have decades from now.

The ultimate test of school reform is not merely whether students perform better in examinations, but whether improved foundational learning and competencies translate into better progression into higher education, skills, employment and productive work. A key metric that measures how much of a child's productive potential will be realised upon graduation from school is the World Bank's Human Capital Index Plus (HCI+). HCI+ combines multiple indicators of health, education and employment. Among all the metrics that HCI measures, education remains the single most powerful lever for long-term economic growth because every additional year of quality schooling improves students' quality and their ability to meaningfully contribute to the country's economic growth.



HCIP Score (Only Women) - Top 5 % Improvement			
Country	Score (2015)	Score (2025)	% Improvement
Republic of Congo	99	131	32%
Türkiye	169	211	25%
India	110	136	24%
Bangladesh	103	126	22%
Albania	164	200	22%
Middle Income Countries	138	169	22%

HCIP Score (Overall) - Top 5 % improvement			
Country	Score (2015)	Score (2025)	% Improvement
Republic of Congo	93	124	33%
Albania	169	203	20%
North Macadonia	169	202	20%
Morocco	124	147	19%
India	134	159	19%
Middle Income Countries	155	180	16%

As per the World Bank's Human Capital Index Plus (HCI+), India has made measurable progress in building human capital, as India's score has steadily risen from 134 in 2015 to 159 in 2025, translating to a 18% increase in score within a decade. This places India amongst Top 5 in terms of % improvement in scores with the Top 3 being, Republic of Congo at 34% followed by Albania and North Macadonia at 20%.

What is even more remarkable is the HCI+ score for females, where India has risen from 110 in 2015 to 136 in 2025, giving a 24% overall increase in score, placing India at No.3 in terms of % increase, just behind the Republic of Congo at 34% and Türkiye at 25%. Comparing both the overall and female categories, % improvement for India, with the average of middle-income countries, outperforms by at least 2 percentage points, clearly showing how India has grown better than its peers globally. The numbers, although showing an upward trend, illustrate both India's progress and also the distance yet to be covered. Just for comparison's sake, the similar figures for Vietnam, although way above India, have been stagnant at 215 over the same period (2015-2025), while for China, it has marginally increased from 210 to 219 (2020-2025).

Almost a decade ago, India's biggest education challenge was about Access. Today, the challenge has shifted to Quality, Foundational learning and Employability. This transition reflects one of the

most significant policy shifts in India's education system since independence. Recognising this reality, India's education reforms over the past decade have increasingly focused on learning outcomes rather than only enrolment statistics.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marked a fundamental shift from schooling as the accumulation of years and credentials to schooling as the acquisition of competencies. NEP 2020 redesigned school education around competencies rather than rote learning. The policy introduced the 5+3+3+4 curricular structure, multidisciplinary learning, flexibility in subject choices and greater emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving. While the Foundational stage (of the initial 5 years) starts with a focus on play, activities, and language, the Preparatory stage (of 3 years) builds core ideas in maths, language, science, and the arts. This is followed by the Middle stage (of 3 years), which adds to critical thinking, coding, and hands-on exposure to science, fostering a Tinkering mindset. Lastly, the Secondary stage (4 years), comprising Classes 9-12, offers flexible choices across streams.

The other transformative intervention is NIPUN Bharat, launched in 2021 to ensure that every child achieves foundational literacy and numeracy by Grade 3. International evidence consistently shows that children who fail to acquire basic reading and

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The next phase of India's human capital journey will therefore be determined not by how many children enter classrooms, but by what they actually learn inside them.

arithmetic skills by age ten struggle throughout their educational journey, making this early intervention the highest-return investment in human capital.

Digital transformation has reinforced these reforms. Platforms such as DIKSHA, PM eVIDYA, SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha have created one of the world's largest digital learning ecosystems, enabling millions of teachers and students to access high-quality educational resources irrespective of geography. During the pandemic, this digital infrastructure prevented a complete collapse of learning continuity and has since become an integral component of blended education across the school ecosystem.

Equally significant has been the emphasis on equity. Programmes such as Samagra Shiksha have strengthened school infrastructure, expanded pre-primary education through Anganwadis, and increased focus on girls' education, thereby widening participation while reducing structural barriers to learning. Another important policy initiative has been the launch of Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) in 2016. Over the past decade, 10,000 such labs have been created in schools across all 28 states to foster curiosity, creativity, and imagination in young minds and to inculcate skills such as a design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, and physical computing. These ATLs have since impacted close to 1.2 crore students since their launch in 2016. As a result, the Union Cabinet announced the setting up of 50,000 more such labs in the 2024 budget speech.

While many initiatives have been pioneered by the Ministry of Education, the challenge is no longer primarily one of policy design; it is increasingly one of implementation at scale. Reforming a system that serves more than 25 crore school students across nearly 15 lakh schools presents its own challenges, with only China as a benchmark in sheer numbers, but language and regional complexity are something that even the Chinese education system doesn't encounter.

Over the past decade, India has shifted from expanding educational access to improving educational quality. The next phase of India's human capital journey will therefore be determined not by how many children enter classrooms, but by what they actually learn inside them. This new phase of its educational journey from expanding access to converting schooling into actual human capability, and the success of that transition will determine whether India's demographic advantage becomes a productivity advantage. If India succeeds in closing its learning gap while maintaining universal access, it will not only improve its Human Capital Index; it will also strengthen productivity, innovation, and global competitiveness for an entire generation.

An Overview

India has entered a decisive phase in its educational journey. Over the past decade, policy has moved beyond enrolment and access towards quality, skills, technology, inclusion and learning outcomes. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 expresses this shift most clearly, moving Indian education beyond content and examinations towards understanding, critical thinking and holistic development.

Yet no policy is judged by its language or the scale of its announcements. The decisive question is simpler: what changes in the student's everyday experience? This is the last-mile challenge — the distance between policy formulation and classroom practice, between infrastructure created and infrastructure used, between enrolment and genuine learning. Closing this gap is essential if reform is to strengthen India's human capital and the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Where Policy Meets the Child

The Last - Mile Test of NEP 2020

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Mainpuri, U.P



From Policy Intent to Classroom Reality

Education policy travels through layers: the Union Government frames programmes, States implement, districts translate direction into practice, and teachers meet students. At every stage, a policy can gain momentum or lose it. Training, infrastructure, teacher shortages, limited training, isolation or weak monitoring do not indicate policy failure; they show that implementation is itself complex.

India's educational geography makes this critical. A metropolitan school, a village school and a Himalayan district do not share the same needs, so a national vision must accommodate local variation. UDISE+ covered nearly 1.47 million schools, 248 million students and 9.8 million teachers in 2023–24; the next step is to use such data for timely corrective action, not merely to describe problems.

The Last Mile Begins with the School

For an administrator, progress means schools covered, funds released and devices distributed. For a student, the experience is direct: Is the teacher present? Is the classroom functional? Can the lesson be understood? Is support available when the student falls behind?

Governance must move from measuring inputs to examining how inputs affect learning. An unused computer laboratory transforms nothing; a library students rarely enter fulfils no purpose. Infrastructure matters, but its value lies in how it is used. The real chain is input, implementation, usage and outcome.

Teachers: The Critical Link

No reform succeeds without teachers. The issue is not the number of teachers but their distribution remote schools face shortages even when aggregate figures look satisfactory, and UDISE+ still records single-teacher schools. NEP 2020's emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, competency-based learning and experiential education needs continuous professional support,

not occasional training sessions.

Infrastructure and Digital Access

A school needs more than a building: safe classrooms, electricity, water, sanitation, libraries, laboratories and digital resources. The PM SHRI Schools initiative seeks to develop more than 14,500 exemplar schools demonstrating NEP principles. Their value depends on whether successful practices reach neighbouring schools rather than remaining islands of excellence.

Digital education has its own last mile. A student may lack a device, connectivity, electricity or digital literacy; in many households one smartphone is shared. India needs a multi-channel model in which online learning is supported by television, radio, offline content and community digital centres. Access must be matched by digital pedagogy: the indicator is not how many devices exist, but how many students learn through them.

Local Institutions as Partners

Schools function within communities. Panchayats, municipalities, libraries, universities and local enterprises can strengthen the ecosystem without replacing the formal system: a village library offers study space, a local college provides academic mentoring, a university supports teacher development. Such partnerships matter most in aspirational districts where specialised resources are limited.

From Enrolment to Learning

The most important shift is from asking whether children attend school to whether they are learning. A child who completes a grade without expected reading, writing and numeracy skills carries those gaps forward, and learning deficits accumulate quietly. Foundational literacy and numeracy, therefore, deserve sustained attention, and assessment should close learning gaps rather than rank students.

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Measuring What Matters

Not all indicators carry equal value. Schools constructed is useful; students actually learning is more significant. Teachers' training matters; changing classroom practice matters more. Governance can work across four levels: access, inputs, processes and outcomes, so administration is concerned with results rather than expenditure alone.

The District as the Last-Mile Unit

The district is the natural bridge between national policy and local reality. District authorities can map teacher shortages, monitor infrastructure, examine learning outcomes and coordinate local institutions. The objective is differentiated support within a common national framework — most acutely in tribal areas, hill districts and remote villages, where residential facilities, transport, teacher incentives and mobile libraries can bridge exceptional gaps.

From Vision to Visible Change

A policy document cannot change a classroom by itself. Competency-based education matters when classroom questions move beyond memorisation; vocational education matters when students acquire practical skills; multilingual education matters when students grasp complex concepts in familiar languages; digital education matters when technology improves learning rather than screen time.

India also has numerous programmes that must work as a coherent system. A student should not experience education as a collection of unrelated schemes; infrastructure, teacher development, digital learning, scholarships, nutrition and assessment should reinforce one another. A child does not experience government through separate departments, but through their combined effect.

A Practical Reform Agenda

Major programmes should carry student-level outcomes alongside administrative targets, and district plans should respond to local conditions rather than uniform templates. Teacher

deployment should reflect actual school requirements, and professional development should be continuous and classroom oriented. Infrastructure should be judged on functionality and usage, and digital education should pair online platforms with low-bandwidth alternatives. Above all, education data should drive timely intervention rather than reporting.

Conclusion: The Policy Must Reach the Child

India's transformation will be complete not when another policy is announced or another building inaugurated, but when reform becomes visible in the life of the student: a safe and functional classroom, a well-prepared teacher, and early support for every child who falls behind.

NEP 2020 has established the framework; digital initiatives have widened access; UDISE+ has strengthened the data system; and PM SHRI is developing exemplar schools. The task now is to make these reforms visible at the student level, as policy travels from New Delhi to the State, the district, the school, the classroom and finally to the mind of the child. The ultimate measure is not schemes announced, but the number of children whose learning, confidence and opportunities have genuinely improved.

The last mile is not the end of education reform. It is where education reform begins to matter.

Building Institutions

Beyond Enforcement, Toward Trust

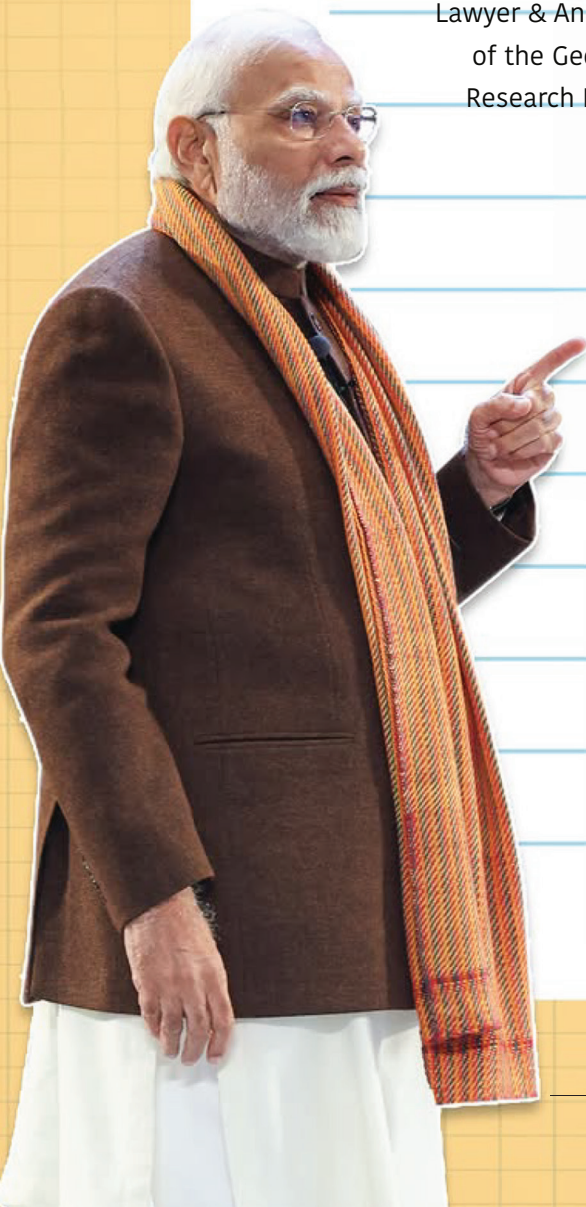
Kuvamjeet Singh

Lawyer & Analyst, the COO
of the Geojuristoday
Research Foundation.



*“If youth knew,
if age could”*

Educated youth have long occupied a unique place in India's political fabric. Throughout the years, Students from all walks of life, even those who graduated from Colonial Institutions of centuries past, have not been strangers to political activism. It is within the nature of education that those who receive it often tend to spend their days moulding those around them to their vision of the “greater good”.



Beyond the Freedom Struggle, beyond the JP Movement of 1974 and even the dark days of the Emergency, young citizens have repeatedly acted as catalysts for political reform. The recent demonstrations at Jantar Mantar, therefore, are nothing new to the Indian political scene. Even the former Education Minister himself once hit the streets of Bhubaneswar as a student leader associated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) to protest against the Janaki Patnaik Government's failure to prevent a paper leak.

The recent protests, however, reflected not just this tradition of political participation but also something deeper: a growing sense of political disenchantment among educated youth, deepening institutional mistrust exacerbated by the rapid flow of information, all amplified by social media. While the demonstrations initially remained tethered to specific grievances, they snowballed into a nationwide political moment that highlighted weaknesses in both public communication & protest management.

To even begin to deconstruct why and how the protest went down the way it did, we must first understand that the BJP has consistently and publicly presented itself as a party that prioritises education and students. A reading of the Party Manifestos for 2014, 2019 & 2024 all show this emphasis. Even if we disregard campaign promises for a moment, the Government has routinely committed to outreach programs through its extensive social media presence & initiatives such as Pariksha Pe Charcha (PPC), Viksit Bharat @2047 - Voice of Youth, Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) & Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue. The numbers themselves are staggering,

PPC 2025 alone recorded over 5 crore participants and achieved a Guinness World Record with 3.53 crore registrations, marking its largest global engagement milestone. Over 2 crore youth and 1.2 lakh organisations engaged through a unified digital ecosystem for learning, leadership, and

service for MY Bharat.

Even if we look at the first year of PM Modi's tenure, the attempt is visible. On the 5th of September 2014, over 90 million students from 8.5 lakh schools participated in the special Teachers' Day programme, during which he addressed students and teachers across the country.

Going by every metric of Political popularity, the protests should not have taken this route, and yet they did. The episode therefore demonstrates that modern protests are no longer determined solely by the nature of demands. They are equally shaped by public perception, digital narratives, and the state's ability to communicate its actions effectively.

The students' immediate demands were varied, ranging from concerns about education & examinations to broader questions of accountability and democratic participation, as evidenced by CJP's 5 Point Demand Charter. Yet these demands resonated because they emerged against a backdrop of growing uncertainty among young Indians.

India possesses one of the world's youngest populations, but this demographic advantage has also generated heightened expectations. Competitive examinations, recruitment delays, rising educational costs, and concerns over economic mobility have created frustration among many. While these grievances differ across states and institutions, they collectively contribute to a broader perception that political institutions fail to adequately respond to youth concerns. Consequently, the Jantar Mantar demonstrations became more than a protest over individual policies. They evolved into an outlet for accumulated dissatisfaction among sections of India's youth.

An often-overlooked aspect of the demonstrations is that they remained relatively limited in scale during their early stages. Although organisers

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*Institutional Crisis
 Communication
 Protocols are
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attempted to mobilise public participation, the protests did not immediately attract widespread national participation. What changed was Sonam Wangchuk's detention on July 18th. Though the detention occurred after judicial directions from the Delhi High Court, the manner in which it was conducted, along with videos of the event going viral, ensured that legal justification proved insufficient in the court of public opinion.

History repeatedly demonstrates that protest movements often derive their greatest momentum not from their founding demands but from the state's response. Images of confrontation often confer moral legitimacy on a movement that previously struggled to attract public attention. Many citizens saw the detentions as evidence of state intolerance toward peaceful dissent. The legal context surrounding the enforcement measures was lost in public discussion, while visual imagery of detentions spread rapidly across digital platforms. The result was a classic communication failure: a legally authorised action became widely perceived as political repression.

With images & videos of barricades, police personnel, detained students, tear gas shells & lathi

charges causing emotional confrontations that circulated almost instantly through social media; in only a few hours, what had been a Delhi-based protest suddenly became a national conversation. This illustrates an important reality of twenty-first-century governance: public perception develops faster than official communication. Governments may possess legal authority, but delayed or ineffective public outreach will rapidly erode that authority.

Unlike earlier movements, contemporary protests operate within an ecosystem shaped by continuous digital engagement. Information no longer passes through traditional media gatekeepers before reaching the public, creating a distinct sphere of communication that does not follow conventional norms. Instead, short video clips & footage, hashtags, and influencer commentary freely shape public understanding.

Protests compelled national attention toward concerns that had previously received relatively limited public debate. Issues such as examination transparency, recruitment timelines, employment uncertainty, and institutional accountability entered mainstream political discourse.



The protests also serve as definitive proof that the coming generation is more democratically sound; India's youth increasingly expect responsive governance rather than periodic electoral engagement. Equally significant was the demonstration of civil society's continued capacity to influence national conversations without formal political leadership. Rather than viewing the episode solely through the lens of law and order, policymakers should recognise it as an opportunity to strengthen democratic engagement and re-align themselves for the coming breed of voters.

Firstly, the state must address the issue of scarcity. Nearly two million students appeared for NEET this year; more than half qualified, but the heavily subsidised and equally prestigious government medical colleges, where an entire medical degree can cost less than 30,000 rupees, have room for fewer than 6% of those who qualify. Candidates who miss out often face private college fees running into tens or even hundreds of thousands of rupees. The same is true for all national exams; our educational infrastructure crumbles beneath the sheer scale of our youth population.

Dr Debananda Misra at the School of Public Policy, IIT Delhi, said that "As long as a single test determines access to scarce opportunities, there will be strong incentives for exam malpractice, regardless of the testing format."

Secondly, the Parliament should establish permanent institutional mechanisms for structured dialogue with student organisations. A National Student Consultation Council comprising representatives from universities, technical institutions, and civil society could provide regular channels for communication before legitimate frustrations escalate into street mobilisation.

Moreover, the policing of peaceful demonstrations should always prioritise de-escalation over confrontation. International best practices increasingly favour negotiated protest management, in which organisers and law enforcement coordinate routes, timings, and security arrangements through continuous dialogue rather than through reactive enforcement and

prohibitions on movement.

Finally, on a more idealistic note, governments should recognise youth participation as a democratic resource rather than merely a security concern. Perhaps the creation of a "National Students Council of India", where representatives from the education ministry, along with representatives of all recognised student bodies in India, convene in a parallel "Student" Parliament to address such issues. Institutional Crisis Communication Protocols are also needed to ensure that all state communication does not deepen mistrust.

Neither unrestricted confrontation nor excessive state intervention provides a durable solution. Instead, democratic resilience depends upon stronger institutions for dialogue, transparent communication, accountable governance, and proportionate policing.

If governments respond only through enforcement, public distrust may deepen. If protest movements rely solely on digital mobilisation without coherent policy engagement, lasting reform becomes difficult. The challenge for India is therefore not merely managing protests more effectively but ensuring that democratic institutions remain sufficiently responsive that large-scale confrontations become the exception rather than the norm.

The Wager of 2047 Converting Demography into Dividend

Mahiman Tiwari

Advocate and
Social Worker

There is a single season in the life of a nation when the young outnumber the dependent, when the arithmetic of population briefly favours production over provision, and a country can compound its way into prosperity. Countries like Japan, South Korea and China used this season with ferocious discipline. Bharat is living inside that season now. Our demographic window of the world's largest youth population runs from roughly 2005 to 2055, nearly five decades, longer than any comparable economy has enjoyed.

This is the largest opportunity in our modern history. A young population that is literate, numerate, skilled and productively employed becomes an asset. The same population, left untrained, becomes a permanent claim on the exchequer. The historic significance of the National Education Policy 2020 is that this Government recognised precisely that and acted.

38 Years of Wait

Until 2020, India operated under a framework drafted in 1986 that had become obsolete, but no one had the political will to replace it. Reforming education meant confronting entrenched interests, state governments, university bureaucracies and an examination industry built on rote learning. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, it was no longer delayed or ignored. NEP 2020 replaced the 1986 policy after the widest public consultation in the history of Indian education policy, reaching down to the panchayat level. That alone marks a change in how this country governs: through generational reforms built through consultation rather than imposed by force.

The Foundation Laid

NEP 2020 was the first national policy to declare foundational literacy and numeracy an urgent national mission. The NIPUN Bharat Mission set a hard, measurable target — universal foundational literacy and numeracy for children



aged three to nine by 2026-27. This is the highest-return intervention available to any state on earth. A child who reads fluently by Class 3 compounds forward for a decade, whereas the children who cannot read fluently by then often miss out on that compounding of learning.

The results are already visible. ASER 2024 recorded a significant rise in the aforesaid aimed ability of fluent reading among Class 3 students, with parallel gains in arithmetic, representing a genuine national reversal of learning loss, attributed by ASER's own researchers to the foundational-learning focus introduced by this policy. Anganwadis are being integrated into the schooling continuum rather than left adjacent to it. For the first time in our history, every state in the Union is working towards one shared learning goal.

Skill and Scale

NEP 2020 mandates vocational exposure from Class 6, with internships, not as a remedial provision for those who could not manage academics, but as part of the mainstream curriculum for everyone. The National Skills Qualifications Framework and National Credit Framework now allow vocational learning to carry academic credit, be banked, transferred, and built upon. When a child spends a term with a carpenter, an electrician, or a coder, she gains competence and loses prejudice. A nation that intends to manufacture for the world cannot afford a population that regards making things as beneath it. Alongside this sits the restoration of the mother tongue and of Indian Knowledge Systems. Children acquire concepts fastest in the language they think in, and a country that mistranslates its own inheritance to itself will only ever administer imported frameworks competently. Civilisational confidence is a productive asset. Nations that build from their own foundations innovate; nations that imitate remain permanently one cycle behind.

The scale being achieved is unprecedented. AISHE 2023-24 records higher education enrolment at a record 4.5 crore, up from 3.42 crore in 2014-15. The Gross Enrolment Ratio has risen from 23.7 to 30 in a

decade, with female GER at 31.2 — now ahead of the overall figure, a quiet revolution in itself. STEM enrolment has crossed one crore for the first time. 54 Indian institutions feature in the QS World University Rankings 2026, a fivefold increase from 2015.

Investment has matched ambition. The Union education budget reached a record ₹1.39 lakh crore in 2026-27, with over ₹3 lakh crore committed to NEP-linked programmes in five years. The restructured Skill India Programme has consolidated PMKVY 4.0, apprenticeship promotion, and the Jan Shikshan Sansthan network into a single mission; over 1.63 crore candidates have been trained under PMKVY, and more than 43 lakh apprentices have been engaged under PM apprenticeship programmes. The Prime Minister's Internship Scheme targets one crore internships across India's 500 largest companies. What was once a scatter of disconnected schemes is now a single national pipeline: from foundational learning to a credential for skill, to apprenticeship, to formal employment, with credit flowing across every junction instead of stopping at each one.

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The Wager of 2047

Bharat was, for most of recorded history, a knowledge civilisation. Nalanda and Takshashila drew scholars across a continent not because India were wealthy, but because India was where knowledge was made, and the wealth followed. That is the oldest lesson in our own history, and this Government is the first in the modern era to build policy upon it. The children entering school today are among the last batches that can be shaped inside the widest part of our demographic window. Everything done for them between now and 2035 determines what India is in 2047. Highways, ports, semiconductor fabs, and defence corridors are all necessary, but each is operated by Human Capital. A nation's hard power rests on its human capital and never rises above it. Under PM Modi's leadership, the wager on Viksit Bharat through the classroom is finally being settled, as it is receiving the attention it has always deserved.



The Classroom is the Dividend

Why Getting Education Right Is India's Most Urgent Priority

Mudit Vashishth
Director Of Vashishth Shishu
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With India moving towards the dream of Viksit Bharat @2047, one question looms larger than all the others: Will India's demographic dividend be its greatest strength or its greatest missed opportunity? It is not only the economic policies or infrastructure projects that will answer the question, but the quality of education that millions of young Indians get on a daily basis.

India has the largest youth population in the world, with almost 65 per cent of its population under 35. The population strength is unparalleled and comes at a time when most developed economies, such as Japan, Germany, and many European countries, are grappling with ageing populations and dwindling workforces.

However, history shows that a large youth population does not necessarily mean prosperity. The demographic dividend is not a right but an opportunity that requires hard work and investment in education, skills, innovation, and human capital.

Hence, education is not only a social sector, but the basis of nation-building. It produces good labourers, good citizens, good entrepreneurs and good leaders. In a way, all classrooms nowadays are training grounds for India 2047.

Since the Government of India has realised this fact, one of the most extensive changes to the education ecosystem since Independence has begun. The core of this change is the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is expected to shift from an obsolete model of rote memorisation to one that encourages critical thinking, problem-solving and multidisciplinary learning.

Indian students have been largely evaluated on the basis of their cramming, memorisation, and writing of information in examinations over the decades. This method has resulted in graduates who are not only numerically excellent but perhaps

not even practical for real-life professionalism, which is critical in a rapidly evolving global economy. NEP 2020 attempts to eliminate this shortcoming by encouraging experiential education, versatility in subjects, career exposure, teaching the mother tongue in the lower classes and holistic growth. It recognises that education must not only prepare students to work but to be lifelong learners, capable of surviving technological, societal and cultural change.

This instructional change is accompanied by a new focus on competency-based testing. Exams should be replaced with applications of memory, analysis, and application. The recent scandals of competitive examinations have disrupted the trust of both students and parents. The need for better institutional safeguards has been brought to the fore by the paper leaks and allegations of leaks during the due process.

The government has introduced structural changes to regain people's trust, such as enacting tougher laws against unjustified practices, using technology to administer exams, biometric checks, online tracking and the constant endeavour to enhance institutional responsibility. No



examination system is without its challenges, but these changes recognise that trust is the cornerstone of any viable assessment system. It is also necessary that the redressal mechanisms for grievances must be transparent, responsive and student-focused.

Today, education reform is far beyond the classroom and examination halls. The use of digital tools such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and PM eVIDYA has helped ensure equitable access to quality learning materials, especially among students in remote and Tier 3 regions. A student in a small village can nowadays attend lectures, read, and access online and digital content that was previously available only to students at Tier 1 educational institutions. This sharing of knowledge is significant for addressing inequality in education and ensuring that opportunity is based on talent rather than geography.

After that, degrees will not be enough to achieve the Skill India Mission. Flexibility and innovation will be rewarded in the future economy. This is something the government has realised and is taking vocational education to the mainstream schools. Increasing focus on fellowships, industry connections, entrepreneurship, and employability will help reduce the long-standing gap between academic qualifications and labour market requirements. New technologies like AI, robotics and green energy are changing global industries. The labour force in India must be prepared to work in, and even spearhead, these industries.

Transformative policies are not always transformative in their results, however. It is a matter of trick. Digital infrastructure and quality education, teacher training and learning outcomes, and interstate and inter-district conflict persist. Rural schools lack access to trained teachers and digital resources, and urban institutions face overcrowding and unequal access. Long-term investment, cooperative federalism and constant supervision of learning outcomes, not just an increase in enrolment, are what will fill these gaps. Teacher empowerment should be given special consideration. Nevertheless, no matter how progressive an education policy is, it cannot

succeed without inspired and highly qualified educators. Continuous professional development, increased use of educational technology, performance support and institutional autonomy should be the basis of future reforms. On the same note, to become a global knowledge economy, India must first strengthen its research universities and foster innovation ecosystems and industry-academia partnerships.

Finally, the dream of Viksit Bharat is mingled with the dream of an educated Bharat. Infrastructure (roads, railways), digital infrastructure, and manufacturing capacity are vital to development, but educated citizens are the ones who design, run and maintain these assets. An effective labour force is a tool for attracting investment, fostering innovation, strengthening governance, and improving India's global competitiveness.

The decades to come will tell whether India's demographic dividend will be a national driver of development or a historic opportunity lost. All policies that enhance our schools, modernise our exams, empower our teachers, and equip our youth with future skills are direct investments in the future of our country.

With India on the verge of celebrating the 100th anniversary of its Independence, the real measure of success will not be the size of the economy but the quality of opportunities offered to all young Indians. The demographic dividend is India's largest national asset and can be unlocked only through education. When India is able to make each and every classroom a learning centre, each and every exam a test of true ability, and each and every student a confident contributor to the nation's development, then Viksit Bharat 2047 will not be a dream but an experience.

One Standard, Many Languages

Making Exams Linguistically Fair

Introduction

In examination system operates within an extraordinarily diverse linguistic landscape. Candidates come from different States, school systems and language backgrounds Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Kannada, Odia, Urdu and others while many are educated primarily through English. This diversity is not an administrative inconvenience; it is an integral part of India's educational reality. Language shapes the way ideas are understood and expressed. A candidate may grasp a subject well yet struggle when the examination language is unfamiliar or when technical terminology is poorly translated. The challenge is to maintain common academic standards while ensuring that linguistic diversity does not become a barrier to equal opportunity. Fairness does not require linguistic uniformity; it requires that language should not become an unintended obstacle to merit.

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Language Is Not Merit

A competitive examination exists to distinguish knowledge, aptitude and reasoning. Difficulty arises when linguistic familiarity begins to influence results alongside the competence being measured. One student may hesitate over an unfamiliar technical expression that another recognises immediately from their textbooks; the difference in performance then reflects familiarity rather than preparation.

Where language proficiency or literature is itself assessed, linguistic competence is obviously relevant. But in mathematics, science, geography or reasoning, the question should convey its meaning as clearly and precisely as possible. An examination should test what it claims to test. Linguistic equity is not about lowering standards; it is about improving the accuracy and fairness of assessment.

Mother-Tongue Learning and the Transition Gap

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises multilingualism and the use of the mother tongue or regional language in the foundational stages of education. Children internalise concepts more effectively in a language they know well, which also builds a stronger foundation for study in additional languages. These benefits should not disappear as students move towards higher education and competitive examinations. If conceptual understanding is developed through Indian languages, students must also have meaningful opportunities to demonstrate it.

The Challenge of Translation

Offering an examination in several languages is an important step towards inclusion, but multilingual assessment must preserve meaning. A poorly translated question introduces ambiguity even when the original is clear a serious risk in science, mathematics, law and medicine, where a slight change in terminology alters meaning. Academic terminology is not used uniformly across regions and institutions, and candidates may be separated

by only a few marks.

Translation should therefore be treated as much an academic exercise as a linguistic one, with subject specialists and language experts reviewing questions for conceptual equivalence, clarity, and consistency. Technology can help build terminology databases and prepare preliminary translations, but in high-stakes assessment human review remains essential.

Regional Languages and National Examinations

National examinations must balance diversity with standardisation. Common syllabi and evaluation standards are necessary when candidates from different parts of the country compete within the same selection process, but participation should not require candidates to abandon their linguistic background. The important distinction is between uniform standards and uniform language: the syllabus, difficulty level and assessment criteria can remain common while the linguistic medium varies. Such an arrangement need not weaken national integration, for India's unity has never depended upon linguistic uniformity.

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The aim is not to make examinations easier; it is to make them more accurate and fairer.
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The Geography of Language and Opportunity

Educational resources are not equally available in every language. Some have extensive networks of textbooks, coaching material and online lectures; students working through languages with smaller educational markets have far fewer specialised resources. Even when the examination offers linguistic choice, preparation for it may remain unequal.

Linguistic inclusion must therefore extend beyond the examination hall. Recorded lectures, e-books, glossaries, and mock tests can be produced in several Indian languages, and public libraries and community digital centres can bring them to smaller towns and rural areas.

Technology and Digital Inclusion

India's digital transformation has widened access to

learning material through platforms such as DIKSHA. Yet digital inclusion cannot be reduced to uploading content: students need devices, electricity, connectivity, and digital literacy, so online resources should be complemented by downloadable materials, offline repositories, and community facilities.

Students from Rural and Disadvantaged Backgrounds

For students schooled in rural or economically constrained settings, the linguistic issue is sharper still. Many have limited exposure to English-language academic environments or specialised coaching and must spend time familiarising themselves with the terminology before concentrating on the subject itself a hidden cost of preparation. District libraries, digital learning centres and community study spaces can become important points of access, particularly in tribal, hill, border and remote regions.

Questions should likewise be framed around the concept being assessed rather than familiarity with a particular regional setting. Indian contexts enrich examinations; what matters is that a student from a Himalayan village and one from a coastal metropolis can approach them on comparable academic terms.

Maintaining Common National Standards

Expanding linguistic options raises legitimate questions about comparability and administrative complexity. Yet diversity and standardisation are not inherently contradictory. A well-designed examination can maintain a common syllabus, difficulty level, evaluation standard and moderation process while offering appropriate linguistic options. The key requirement is institutional capacity: trained translation teams, question banks built with multilingual equivalence in mind, reviewed terminology, interfaces that work across scripts, and grievance mechanisms for translation-related problems. The guiding principle may be expressed as one academic standard, many linguistic pathways.

A Practical Agenda

Several measures would strengthen linguistic fairness. National examination authorities should adopt clear multilingual protocols covering translation, terminology, review, and quality assurance, and develop standard technical glossaries with universities and subject specialists. Preparation material and mock examinations must be expanded in Indian languages rather than confining inclusion to the question paper itself. Translation for high-stakes examinations should pass through more than one level of expert scrutiny, and candidates need a clear, time-bound mechanism for reporting genuine translation errors.

Conclusion: Language Should Connect Opportunity, Not Divide It

Competitive examinations are a principal channel through which the aspirations of India's young population become opportunities in higher education, professional life and public service. The credibility of that system depends not only on secure question papers and transparent evaluation, but also on whether students can understand what is being asked, find adequate preparation materials, and demonstrate their knowledge without encountering avoidable linguistic barriers. The aim is not to make examinations easier; it is to make them more accurate and fairer.

The vision of Viksit Bharat requires India to identify and develop talent wherever it exists, and that talent does not speak in one language. One nation need not mean one language of opportunity: one nation, many learners, many languages, and one fair standard of opportunity.

Listening as Reform

The Real Shift Examinations Need

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For millions of Indian students, an examination is much more than a test. It is a gateway to higher education, employment and social mobility. For a young person from an ordinary family, months, and sometimes years, of preparation culminate in a few hours of the examination. Therefore, when the integrity of an examination is questioned, the issue is not merely administrative; it touches the aspirations, dignity and future of an entire generation.

Recent student demonstrations and public concerns surrounding competitive examinations have once again highlighted the need to examine India's examination ecosystem with seriousness and sensitivity. Student concerns regarding paper leaks, examination irregularities, technical problems, delays and transparency deserve to be heard. At the same time, it is important to recognise that examination reform is a continuous institutional process and cannot be reduced to political slogans. The objective must be to create an examination system that is secure, transparent, technologically robust and, above all, trusted by students.



The establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA) in 2018 was an important institutional reform. The idea was to create a specialised organisation capable of conducting entrance and fellowship examinations using modern testing methodologies. Since its establishment, the NTA has conducted hundreds of examinations involving crores of candidates. However, the scale and importance of these examinations have also created enormous institutional responsibilities. Any weakness in the examination chain can have consequences for a very large number of aspirants.

The examination controversies of 2024 demonstrated that technological modernisation alone cannot guarantee the integrity of examinations. Security must be in place at every stage, from question paper preparation and printing to transportation, storage, centre allocation, candidate authentication, examination conduct, evaluation, and result declaration.

Recognising the seriousness of these challenges, the Ministry of Education constituted a High-Level Committee of Experts under the chairmanship of former ISRO Chairman Dr K. Radhakrishnan in June 2024. The committee submitted its report in October 2024 and proposed a comprehensive restructuring of national entrance testing. Its recommendations included strengthening the NTA, developing institutional linkages with States and districts, improving candidate authentication, strengthening examination security and involving test-indenting agencies more closely in the examination process. This is significant because it represents a shift from responding to individual incidents towards addressing the examination system.

From Examination Management to Examination Governance

The central challenge before India is to move from examination management to examination governance. Management focuses on conducting an examination successfully; governance focuses on creating institutions, procedures and accountability mechanisms that make malpractice difficult and transparency unavoidable.

The reforms recommended for the NTA reflect this broader approach. Standard Operating Procedures for preventing breaches in both pen-and-paper and computer-based examinations, improved protocols for question paper setting and vetting, stronger test centre allocation mechanisms, and enhanced grievance redressal have been recommended. The government has also created additional senior-level posts in the NTA and constituted a High-Powered Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of reforms.

Technology can play a transformative role in this process. Digital authentication, secure data systems, encrypted communication, artificial intelligence and machine-learning-based anomaly detection can help identify suspicious patterns. But technology should be treated as an instrument of governance, not as a substitute for institutional accountability. A secure examination system requires trained personnel, independent oversight, clearly defined responsibility and swift corrective action.

NEP 2020: Changing the Philosophy of Assessment

Examination reform should also be understood within the larger framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The policy seeks to move Indian education away from excessive dependence on rote memorisation towards conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and competency-based learning.

This is a fundamental philosophical change. If education changes but examinations remain based primarily on memorisation, the reform will remain incomplete.

NEP 2020 therefore envisages more regular and formative assessment, competency-based evaluation and greater emphasis on higher-order skills. It also provides for the National Assessment Centre, PARAKH, to develop standards and guidelines for assessment and encourage examination boards to move towards competency-based assessment.

The importance of PARAKH lies in its potential to make assessment more scientific, comparable and learning-oriented. Assessment should not merely determine who has secured the highest marks; it should help determine what a student actually knows, understands and can apply.

This approach can also reduce the psychological pressure associated with the belief that a single examination determines an individual's entire future.

Listening to Students Is Also a Reform

Any meaningful examination reform must place the student at the centre. Students who protest against irregularities are not necessarily opposing the examination system itself. In many cases, they demand that the system they depend on be fair.

A mature democracy must have the institutional capacity to listen to such concerns without compromising the integrity of the examination. Grievance mechanisms should be easily accessible, time-bound and transparent. Students should know where to complain, how their complaints will be examined and when they can expect a response. At the same time, students must also receive accurate and timely information from examination authorities. Confusion regarding examination dates, centres, answer keys, results or correction procedures can unnecessarily increase anxiety. Transparent communication should therefore become an integral part of examination governance.

The Way Forward

India now needs a five-fold approach to examination reform.

- First, examination security must be treated as a national priority. Question paper preparation, storage, transportation, and distribution should follow rigorous security protocols.
- Second, accountability must be clearly established. Every stage of the examination process should have identifiable institutional responsibility, supported by regular audits and independent monitoring.

- Third, technology should be expanded intelligently. Secure computer-based testing, candidate authentication, encrypted systems and AI-assisted detection mechanisms can strengthen the examination ecosystem.
- Fourth, grievance redressal must become faster and more student-friendly. A student should not have to approach multiple authorities merely to obtain clarification about an examination.
- Fifth, the examination system itself must evolve. Competency-based assessment, multiple opportunities, continuous evaluation and flexible learning pathways can gradually reduce the excessive dependence on a single high-stakes examination.

India's demographic strength is ultimately meaningful only when young people have confidence in the institutions that shape their opportunities. An examination system that is technologically advanced but lacks public trust cannot fulfil its purpose. Conversely, an examination system that combines technology with transparency, accountability, fairness and empathy can become an instrument of social justice.

The reform journey, therefore, should not be understood as a defence of institutions against students or as students against the government. It should be understood as a shared national responsibility. The aspirations of India's youth and the credibility of India's institutions are closely connected.

The task before the Modi Government is not merely to conduct examinations more efficiently but to build an examination ecosystem in which every deserving student can believe that merit will be recognised, effort will be respected, and fairness will prevail.

That is the real meaning of examination reform and an essential foundation for building a Viksit Bharat.

From Rhetoric to Reform

Ending the Menace of Paper Leaks

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Post-Independence India has witnessed more than 100 major examination paper leaks and related malpractices, including controversies around the UPSC Preliminary Examination in 1991, CBSE examinations and the Indian Navy recruitment examination. The same political opposition that governed the country through those decades now positions itself as the champion of student rights. Yet India's youth can see through a narrative focused more on electoral positioning than on the systemic reforms now underway. For decades, paper leaks affected the futures of lakhs of students. What has changed is the willingness to create a dedicated legal framework and strengthen examinations through technology, accountability and institutional reform.



A nationwide anti-cheating law was introduced by the Modi Government in 2024 and expanded through an amendment in July 2026. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, is India's first dedicated national legislation on cheating, paper leaks, and organised examination fraud, establishing stringent deterrents and punishments for those involved. Paper leaks are not a recent phenomenon; what is significant today is that a specific legal and institutional framework now exists to tackle the menace.

In the past, responses were limited: examinations continued despite concerns, investigations stalled, and no central law addressed organised examination rackets. The handling of NEET-UG 2026 was different. The examination was cancelled within days of a leak by rogue teachers and brokers, and more than 22 lakh candidates were re-examined under enhanced security, placing honest students above administrative convenience.

Technology is central to that shift. The previous Education Minister indicated that Computer-Based Tests would be introduced to ensure examination security and deliver results faster. Computer-based examinations reduce the vulnerability of physical question papers and bring standardisation, quicker evaluation and less post-examination uncertainty. The National Testing Agency, established in 2017 and operational from 2019, conducts India's principal entrance examinations and freed bodies such as CBSE and AICTE to focus on academics. Centres now use CCTV surveillance, AI-based monitoring and Aadhaar-based verification.

Concerns about the 2024 medical entrance examination led to the formation of a High-Level Committee chaired by Dr K. Radhakrishnan, which recommended deeper institutional reforms: stronger Standard Operating Procedures for the transport and custody of question papers, stricter accountability for examination functionaries,

better grading and monitoring of centres, and closer district-level coordination. Examination security cannot rest on a single intervention; the entire chain must be strengthened.

The NEET timeline shows the value of acting swiftly. The examination was held on May 3, 2026; the National Testing Agency received information from a teacher on May 7; the matter was referred to enforcement agencies on May 8; and by May 12, the examination was cancelled. A wider nexus was not ruled out, the CBI took over the investigation, and the accused were arrested. The message to students was clear: anyone profiting from the hard work of lakhs of candidates will face legal consequences.

Communication, however, lagged behind action. Students consume news largely through social media, and many analysts feel the Government's message did not reach them effectively. Technical problems in downloading re-examination admit cards added to the anxiety. A modern examination system needs not only security and enforcement but timely communication and reliable digital infrastructure.

The larger transformation extends beyond examinations. NEP 2020, approved on July 29, 2020, was the first national education policy in 34 years, prepared after consultations that drew more than two lakh suggestions over five years. It envisions flexible, multidisciplinary and globally aligned institutions, a four-year undergraduate programme with multiple exit options, credit portability through the Academic Bank of Credits, and a Choice-Based Credit System that allows interdisciplinary combinations while encouraging critical thinking and Indian heritage.

Access has widened too. The PM Vidya Lakshmi Scheme, launched in November 2024, offers collateral-free education loans for students in India's top 860 institutions, up to ₹7.5 lakh with a 75 per cent credit guarantee, and is expected to benefit more than 22 lakh students annually. NPTEL,

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a joint initiative of the IITs and IISc on the SWAYAM platform, has recorded more than 1.86 billion views, over 3.79 crore enrolments, 75.6 lakh examination registrations and participation from over 7,900 colleges. SWAYAM has more than 5.15 crore enrolments, Virtual Labs has more than 900 laboratories, and the National Digital Library of India has over 8 crore resources. PM-USHA has given ₹100 crore each to 35 universities for autonomy, digital infrastructure and global linkages.

Employability is improving. India Skills Report data show the employability of BTech/BE graduates rising from about 49 per cent in 2020 to 71.5 per cent in 2025, reflecting an emphasis on hands-on experience, coding, certifications, and internships. A new Internship Portal connects students with corporates and currently lists about 1.5 lakh opportunities. In skill development, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, launched in July 2015, has trained and certified more than 1.64 crore candidates through courses of 100 to 450 hours. At the school level, NEP 2020 emphasises foundational learning, Indian languages and Indian knowledge systems, so that children understand rather than memorise while acquiring skills for the future economy. The aspiration to raise education spending towards 6 per cent of GDP treats education as an investment in human capital rather than welfare expenditure.

The discussion around India's youth must also move beyond portraying Gen Z as inherently anti-establishment. Students have constructive avenues for voicing their concerns rather than resorting to protest. As RSS Sarsanghchalak Dr Mohan Bhagwat has said, dialogue, mutual respect and constructive participation are the foundation of a healthy democracy. Young Indians face an unprecedented volume of information through social media, and the Government's responsibility is not only to implement reforms but to communicate them to the generation that will inherit the country. For decades, students lived with an examination system vulnerable to malpractice and no dedicated national framework to hold wrongdoers to account.



Today a student from a small town can learn from the IITs and IISc online, a deserving candidate without collateral can finance higher education, and a young person can acquire industry-relevant skills through government-supported programmes. The Modi Government has begun building the legal, technological and institutional foundations of that transformation; the task now is to strengthen them, close remaining loopholes and sustain a strong deterrent.



Students, Stress and the Examination

Towards a Student-Centred Assessment System

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For millions of young Indians, competitive examinations are far more than academic tests. They are gateways to higher education, professional courses, public employment and social mobility. Pressure is therefore inevitable. The difficulty arises when that pressure is deepened by uncertainty repeated attempts, unpredictable schedules, delayed results, high preparation costs and doubts about fairness. At that point, examination stress ceases to be an individual experience and becomes a matter of institutional responsibility. India runs one of the world's largest examination systems, and its sheer scale makes one principle essential: the system must meet administrative requirements without losing sight of students' legitimate needs.

Understanding Examination Stress

Some pressure is unavoidable. A competitive examination must distinguish between levels of performance. But not all stress is inherent in competition; some is produced by the system itself. A postponement, a delayed result or a procedural ambiguity can disrupt carefully planned preparation. The distinction between necessary pressure and avoidable uncertainty is therefore crucial. A demanding syllabus is part of academic competition; unclear procedures, repeated delays and inadequate communication are not.

The Examination as a Public Institution

An examination is not simply a student sitting in front of a question paper. It is a chain of processes — registration, eligibility, scheduling, question paper preparation, centres, technology, evaluation, results, counselling, and grievance redressal. A weakness at any stage reaches the candidate. Authorities must communicate the rules and apply them consistently. What matters is whether decisions are reasonable, transparent and properly explained. A system earns trust not by avoiding problems but by responding to them responsibly.

Repeated Attempts and the Cost of Failure

A second or third attempt is a valuable opportunity, and persistence should not be discouraged. Yet repeated attempts carry substantial financial and emotional costs. The answer is not to discourage perseverance but to create multiple credible pathways: higher education, vocational training, apprenticeships, professional certification and entrepreneurship must not be presented as inferior choices. Failure in one examination should not become failure in life.

Predictability and the Stress of Waiting

Few reforms reduce examination stress as effectively as predictability. Students organise their preparation, college applications, employment decisions, and family commitments around

examination calendars, and sudden changes disrupt them all. Postponements are sometimes unavoidable; what can always be improved is communication. Calendars should be announced well in advance, and changes conveyed promptly through authoritative channels, so that students need not depend on rumour or social media speculation. Answer keys, objections, results, counselling and admissions can stretch uncertainty over months. Authorities should publish indicative timelines. The student's question is simple: what happens next, and when?

Counselling Beyond Seat Allocation

Counselling should be more than a mechanism for allocating seats. Students and families need clear information about courses, eligibility, fees, scholarships, institutional facilities and career possibilities. A student-friendly system should be informative, transparent and accessible, recognising that financial, geographical, academic and family circumstances differ from one student to another.

The Social Environment of Competition

Institutions do not create examination stress alone. Families, schools, teachers and coaching centres also shape the experience of competition. Constant comparison with peers, repeated discussion of ranks and the belief that one examination is the only respectable route to success intensify pressure. Coaching institutions provide genuine academic support, but preparation should encourage discipline rather than fear of failure. The broader educational culture must move from fear-driven to informed competition.

The Geography of Stress

Stress also has a geographical dimension. Students in metropolitan centres can easily access coaching, libraries and specialised teachers; students from remote rural areas, small towns, tribal regions and hill districts often travel to larger cities to prepare

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or to sit an examination, adding the costs of transport, accommodation, food and digital access. District-level libraries, digital learning centres, multilingual resources and accessible examination centres can reduce the need to migrate simply to prepare for a test. Where a student lives should not determine how difficult preparation becomes.

Technology, Grievance Redressal and Accountability

Online applications, computer-based tests, digital verification and technology-assisted evaluation improve efficiency and transparency, but they create new responsibilities. Not every candidate has the same device access, connectivity or digital familiarity, so systems need clear instructions, accessible help mechanisms and a recognised channel when something fails. The human element must not disappear behind the screen. Equally, a credible system needs time-bound grievance redressal: students should know where to file a complaint, what is required, and when a response is due. Accountability strengthens trust; silence weakens it.

Security and Student Welfare Must Work Together

Strong security protects honest candidates: question paper leakage, impersonation, and organised cheating undermine the efforts of thousands. Security and student welfare are therefore not competing objectives. Identity verification, secure question-paper systems and standardised procedures protect examination integrity, while clear communication, accessible facilities and grievance mechanisms protect legitimate student interests. The ideal system is strict against malpractice and considerate towards genuine difficulty.

Towards a More Humane Assessment System

A humane assessment system is not an easy examination system. What must change is the avoidable burden surrounding the examination: predictable schedules, clear eligibility rules, reliable communication, accessible centres, affordable preparation resources, multilingual support, transparent evaluation and reasonable timelines for

results and counselling. This requires looking at the entire student journey rather than examination day alone. Examination reform then becomes a continuous effort to improve the relationship between the student and the institution.

Conclusion: From Anxiety to Confidence

India cannot, and should not, remove all pressure from competitive examinations. What the system can remove is pressure created by avoidable uncertainty. India needs examinations rigorous enough to protect academic standards, secure enough to protect honest candidates, transparent enough to command public confidence and humane enough to recognise legitimate student needs. The objective is not to guarantee success but to ensure that success or failure reflects performance rather than avoidable differences in information, access or institutional uncertainty. As India advances towards *Viksit Bharat*, its examination system must evolve from merely conducting tests to creating trustworthy pathways. The journey should be from examination anxiety to examination confidence, and from an examination-centred system to a student-centred assessment ecosystem.

The Map of Merit

A Geography- Sensitive Reform Agenda

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India's examination system is usually debated in terms of paper security, syllabus, evaluation and technology. An equally important dimension receives less attention: geography. Where a student lives shapes the schools and teachers available, access to coaching, digital connectivity, distance from an examination centre, the language of instruction and the cost of travel.

Geography does not determine merit, but it shapes the conditions in which merit is developed and demonstrated. A talented student in a tribal district, hill region or border area may match a metropolitan peer in ability and ambition, yet differ sharply in access to teachers, libraries, technology and examination facilities. The real question is whether India can build a system in which place of residence is not an unintended disadvantage.



Education and the Geography of Opportunity

Educational infrastructure has developed unevenly. Metropolitan cities concentrate schools, universities, libraries, coaching institutions and hostels; district towns offer a thinner layer; many villages operate with limited resources. These gaps matter most in competitive examinations, which reward sustained practice, specialised guidance and quick doubt-clearing. Digital platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM and PM e-VIDYA have begun to loosen this dependence on location. Yet digital access has its own geography: a student with broadband and a quiet room is not placed like one sharing a smartphone on intermittent connectivity.

Rural-Urban Differences and the Coaching Economy

Coaching centres in Kota, Delhi and Hyderabad attract students nationwide by offering specialised teachers, test series and peer groups. But migration is expensive: fees are only part of the burden, alongside accommodation, food, transport and books. Competitive examinations promise an equal chance to demonstrate ability, yet preparation itself is unequally distributed. The policy objective should be to keep coaching a choice rather than a geographical compulsion. Affordable study material, online lectures, mock tests, public libraries and community study centres can make effective preparation possible closer to home.

The Geography of Examination Centres

Preparation is only half the problem. A well-prepared student in a remote district, hill area, island, or border region may still have to travel long distances, arrive in the city a day early, and arrange accommodation, adding avoidable costs and stress to an already demanding examination. Accessibility must be built into centre planning, not only into institution planning. Authorities must balance access against security, infrastructure and standardised conditions; simply adding centres is not the answer, because location matters as much

as number. Geographical information systems can identify areas of unusually long travel by incorporating population distribution, connectivity, candidate density, and building availability into planning.

Digital India and the Changing Geography of Learning

Technology has weakened the dependence of learning on physical proximity. The multimodal approach of PM e-VIDYA, spanning online platforms, television and radio, and the DTH channels of SWAYAM Prabha matters precisely because India's students do not live in identical technological circumstances. Digital inclusion must mean more than uploading content: it requires reliable connectivity, electricity, affordable devices and offline alternatives.

Language and Examination Opportunity

Language is itself a geographical dimension. Students schooled in regional languages enter national examinations that use unfamiliar terminology and modes of expression. A student may understand a subject well yet be blocked by the language in which it is assessed. High-quality multilingual preparation material, lectures and practice papers should

be available in Indian languages, with accurate and technically consistent translation; poor translation undermines the fairness it is meant to promote. Multilingualism is not a dilution of standards. Examinations assess knowledge and ability, and language should not interfere with that assessment.

Students from Remote, Tribal, Hill and Border Regions

Students in tribal areas, Himalayan districts, border regions, islands and desert areas often face several disadvantages at once: fewer specialised teachers, weak transport, poor digital infrastructure and limited peer interaction. They are not merely recipients of assistance but also a significant part

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of India's human resource potential. Their success in national examinations shows that talent is not concentrated in metropolitan India. Targeted investment should address structural disadvantages rather than replicate identical facilities everywhere: a reasonable minimum of opportunity across regions, with additional support where conditions are most challenging.

From Migration for Opportunity to Distributed Opportunity

Educational migration has long been the default response to regional disparity. Mobility is valuable, but when students must leave home simply to obtain basic preparation, it signals a geographical imbalance. Established centres will retain their importance through accumulated expertise and institutional networks; what must change is the concentration of access to knowledge. Teaching resources, study material and examination expertise can be shared through digital platforms, regional centres, public libraries and academic networks.

Examination Reform as Social and Territorial Mobility

For students without family connections or financial resources, a transparent competitive examination is among the most important routes to higher education and public employment, a promise that depends on equitable access to the examination itself. Secure papers and reliable evaluation are essential, but they must be accompanied by accessible preparation, sensible centre locations, multilingual support and affordable resources. An inclusive system should satisfy five tests: can students obtain good preparation material, afford to prepare, understand what is asked, reach the centre without unreasonable difficulty, and trust that they will be assessed fairly?

Towards a Geography-Sensitive Examination Reform Agenda

A geographically sensitive approach does not require a new system, only greater attention to spatial realities. Map examination accessibility to guide the future distribution of centres. Strengthen

district-level preparation through public libraries, digital learning centres and affordable mock tests. Expand quality multilingual resources with strong control over translation. Support low-bandwidth and offline learning. Bring transport into centre planning for remote, hill, tribal, border and island regions. Make quality preparation available at little or no cost, so that expensive coaching is not a prerequisite for success. Strengthen accessibility for students with disabilities, addressing physical, technological and academic barriers.

Conclusion: From Geographical Disadvantage to Geographical Opportunity

A large youth population becomes a demographic dividend only when young people can convert their abilities into opportunities. The geography of India must not become a geography of educational inequality. No student should have to leave a village for basic preparation, lose ground because the nearest centre is beyond convenient reach, or find linguistic unfamiliarity an obstacle to demonstrating merit. The National Education Policy 2020 and digital education initiatives have created strong foundations; the next task is to connect them to India's geographical realities. Merit should be national, even when opportunity begins locally. The real test of reform is not only whether a question paper reaches the hall securely, but whether students across India can reasonably reach that hall.



राष्ट्र कक्षा में गढ़ा जाता है राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति और भारत का भविष्य

विजयता पाण्डेय

पीएचडी शोधार्थी
जनसंचार एवं पत्रकारिता

किसी राष्ट्र की सबसे बड़ी पूँजी उसकी खदानें नहीं, उसकी कक्षाएँ होती हैं। सड़कें, बंदरगाह, कारखाने और उपग्रह किसी भी विकसित देश की पहचान हैं, परंतु इन सबको बनाने, चलाने और इनसे आगे सोचने वाला नागरिक अंततः एक कक्षा में ही गढ़ा जाता है। यही कारण है कि राष्ट्र-निर्माण का सबसे प्रभावी साधन न कोई योजना है, न कोई बजट, बल्कि शिक्षा है। इसी विश्वास पर राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति 2020 खड़ी है, और इसी कारण वह विकसित भारत 2047 का केवल एक अंग नहीं, बल्कि उसका वैचारिक एवं नीतिगत आधार है।

चौतीस वर्ष की प्रतीक्षा

1986 की राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति, जिसमें 1992 में मामूली संशोधन हुआ, पूरे चौतीस वर्षों तक अपरिवर्तित रही। इस बीच भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था खुली, तकनीक ने संसार बदल दिया, और एक नई पीढ़ी की आकांक्षाएँ आसमान छूने लगीं। पर शिक्षा का ढाँचा वहीं ठहरा रहा, यानी वही औपनिवेशिक ढाँचा जो क्लर्क गढ़ने, विषय रटाने और प्रमाणपत्र बाँटने के लिए बनाया गया था। जिस देश ने संसार को शून्य और दशमलव प्रणाली दी, वह अपने बच्चों को केवल याद करना सिखा रहा था।

डॉ. के. कस्तूरीरंगन की अध्यक्षता में तैयार और जुलाई 2020 में स्वीकृत नई शिक्षा नीति इसी जड़ता को तोड़ने का प्रयास है। इसका पहला संकेत प्रतीकात्मक था, पर गहरा। "मानव संसाधन विकास मंत्रालय" पुनः "शिक्षा मंत्रालय" बना। संदेश स्पष्ट था कि मनुष्य किसी उत्पादन-प्रक्रिया का संसाधन नहीं, स्वयं साध्य है। यह केवल नाम का परिवर्तन नहीं, दृष्टि का परिवर्तन था।

नींव पर काम, पहली बार

किसी भी शिक्षा व्यवस्था की परीक्षा इस बात से होती है कि वह अपने सबसे छोटे बच्चे के साथ क्या करती है। NEP 2020 ने 10+2 के स्थान पर 5+3+3+4 संरचना लाकर तीन से आठ वर्ष की आयु को पहली बार औपचारिक शिक्षा-चक्र में जोड़ा। जून 2026 तक 32 राज्यों एवं केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों ने यह संरचना अपना ली है, राष्ट्रीय पाठ्यचर्या की रूपरेखा अधिसूचित हो चुकी है और उसके अनुरूप नई पाठ्यपुस्तकें कक्षाओं तक पहुंच रही हैं।

निपुण भारत मिशन के अंतर्गत आधारभूत साक्षरता एवं संख्या-ज्ञान पहली बार राष्ट्रीय प्राथमिकता बना। एक करोड़ दस लाख से अधिक बच्चे बालवाटिका में पंजीकृत हैं, आधारभूत स्तर की पाठ्यचर्या सभी 36 राज्यों एवं केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों ने अपनाई है, और 121 बहुभाषी प्रवेशिकाएँ तैयार हुई हैं। जादुई पिटारा जैसी पहलों ने खेल-आधारित शिक्षण को कक्षा का हिस्सा बनाया है। मातृभाषा में प्रारंभिक शिक्षा का प्रावधान इस नीति का सबसे भारतीय और सबसे वैज्ञानिक निर्णय है, क्योंकि बालक सबसे पहले उसी भाषा में सोचता है जिसमें वह सपने देखता है।

परिणाम दिखने भी लगे हैं। PARAKH राष्ट्रीय सर्वेक्षण 2024 में लगभग 85,000 विद्यालयों के 23 लाख बच्चों का आकलन हुआ, जिसमें कक्षा 3 के सरकारी विद्यालयों के बच्चों ने भाषा और गणित में निजी तथा शहरी विद्यालयों के बच्चों से बेहतर प्रदर्शन किया। ASER 2024 के अनुसार संख्या-ज्ञान में 2018 की तुलना में लगभग सात प्रतिशत अंकों का सुधार दर्ज हुआ।

रटत से चिंतन की ओर

NEP 2020 का सबसे मौलिक योगदान मूल्यांकन की परिभाषा बदलना है। नीति कहती है कि परीक्षा यह न नापे कि बालक ने कितना याद किया, बल्कि यह नापे कि वह सीखे हुए का उपयोग कर पाता है या नहीं। इसी उद्देश्य से 2023 में NCERT के अंतर्गत PARAKH नामक राष्ट्रीय आकलन केंद्र स्थापित हुआ, और SAFAL ढाँचा कक्षा 3, 5 तथा 8 के लिए नैदानिक आकलन कर रहा है, जो अंक देने के बजाय यह बताता है कि बालक कहाँ अटका है।

नीति यह भी कहती है कि बोर्ड परीक्षाओं का उच्च-दाँव स्वरूप समाप्त हो और वे वर्ष में दो बार आयोजित हों, ताकि एक दिन के प्रदर्शन पर पूरे भविष्य का बोझ न पड़े। इसी दिशा में CBSE ने 2026 से कक्षा 10 की बोर्ड परीक्षा वर्ष में दो बार कराने की व्यवस्था आरंभ की है। समग्र प्रगति पत्र विद्यार्थी के केवल अंक नहीं, उसकी रचनात्मकता, सहभागिता और सामाजिक कौशल भी दर्ज करता है। यह उस कोचिंग-निर्भर संस्कृति का सबसे प्रभावी उत्तर है जिसने पीढ़ियों का बचपन निगल लिया।

कौशल, अनुसंधान और वैश्विक भारत

विकसित राष्ट्र केवल डिग्रीधारी नहीं, दक्ष नागरिक बनाते हैं। NEP 2020 ने कक्षा 6 से व्यावसायिक शिक्षा को मुख्यधारा में जोड़ा,

जिसका लक्ष्य 2027 तक आधे विद्यार्थियों को व्यावसायिक अनुभव देना है। राष्ट्रीय क्रेडिट ढाँचा पहली बार शैक्षणिक और कौशल-आधारित शिक्षा को एक ही मापदंड पर लाता है, जिससे डिग्री और रोजगार के बीच की दूरी घटती है।

उच्च शिक्षा में परिवर्तन उतना ही गहरा है। चार-वर्षीय स्नातक कार्यक्रम, बहु-प्रवेश एवं बहु-निकास की सुविधा और एकेडमिक बैंक ऑफ क्रेडिट्स ने विद्यार्थी को अपनी पढ़ाई का स्वामी बनाया है; 620 से अधिक विश्वविद्यालय इस व्यवस्था से जुड़ चुके हैं। अनुसंधान राष्ट्रीय अनुसंधान फाउंडेशन को ₹50,000 करोड़ का परिव्यय मिला है, तीन विदेशी विश्वविद्यालयों के परिसर भारत में संचालित हो रहे हैं, और भारतीय संस्थान विदेशों में परिसर खोल रहे हैं। PM SHRI योजना के प्रथम चरण में 6,448 विद्यालय आदर्श विद्यालय बनाए जा रहे हैं, और केंद्रीय बजट 2026-27 में शिक्षा व्यय बढ़कर ₹1.39 लाख करोड़ हो गया है। दीक्षा और पीएम ई-विद्या जैसे मंचों ने गुणवत्तापूर्ण सामग्री को गाँव-गाँव तक पहुँचाया है।

जो अभी शेष है

किसी नीति के प्रति सच्ची निष्ठा उसकी अधूरी बातें स्वीकार करने में है। शिक्षा पर सकल घरेलू उत्पाद का छह प्रतिशत व्यय करने का लक्ष्य अभी लगभग 3.2 प्रतिशत पर खड़ा है। भारतीय उच्च शिक्षा आयोग की परिकल्पना अब भी विधेयक के स्तर पर प्रतीक्षारत है। कार्यान्वयन की गति सभी राज्यों में समान नहीं है, और शिक्षक-प्रशिक्षण का विस्तार अभी आवश्यकता से पीछे है। ये कमियाँ नीति की असफलता नहीं, बल्कि आने वाले वर्षों का कार्यभार हैं। इन्हें स्वीकार करना ही अगला कदम तय करने की पहली शर्त है।

विकसित भारत का सबसे अनिवार्य निवेश

2047 का लक्ष्य किसी एक बजट, किसी एक योजना या किसी एक सरकार से पूरा नहीं होगा। वह उस पीढ़ी से पूरा होगा जो आज कक्षा में बैठी है। हमारी जनसांख्यिकीय पूँजी की खिड़की अनंत नहीं है, और जो राष्ट्र इस अवसर को पहचानने में देर करते हैं, उन्हें इतिहास दूसरा अवसर नहीं देता। यदि आज का किशोर दक्ष, आत्मविश्वासी, जिज्ञासु और मूल्यों में दृढ़ नागरिक बनकर निकलता है, तो 2047 का लक्ष्य स्वतः सधेगा।

राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति 2020 ने दिशा सही तय की है। अब दायित्व केवल सरकार का नहीं रह जाता। युवा मोर्चा के प्रत्येक कार्यकर्ता का काम इस नीति का प्रचार भर नहीं, अपने ज़िले के विद्यालय तक इसके कार्यान्वयन की निगरानी भी है। इमारत कितनी भी ऊँची बने, वह अपनी नींव से ऊँची नहीं हो सकती। विकसित भारत की नींव आज की कक्षा में रखी जा रही है, और वही सच्चा राष्ट्र-निर्माण है।



BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY