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...K.V.Chowdary, Central Vigilance Commissioner, Central Vigilance Commission (2015)



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Analysis

Is increasing enrolment in private schools a threat to government schools

Despite the number of initiatives taken in the past few years to improve infrastructure, to universalize primary education and to provide quality education in government primary schools, the number and percentage of enrolment in private schools at primary level is increasing. There is a dire need to introspect the causes of diminishing preference for government schools even when a number of initiatives are being taken to improve the quality of education in government schools

Mumtaz Ahmed

The increasing number of private schools in almost all the states suggests the growing preference of parents for private schools for the education of their children. The number of private schools and dependency on them is not only increasing in urban areas of the country but also in the rural areas. The number of private schools has been increasing in almost all states/UTs of the country every year. The statistics of private schools of last ten years were analysed to understand the trend of rising no of private schools in the country, which suggests that a significant number of private schools have been increased in the last ten years with additions in the total number of private schools every year.

To understand the scenario of increasing number of private schools and their enrolment in the country the data of the District Information System for Education (DISE), which compiles the data annually on different aspects and on different indicators of elementary education for the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) has been analysed.

As per the DISE data for the year 2007-08, the number of private schools in the country was 2,43895 constituting 19.56

percent of total schools. The number of private schools increased to 3,49412 in the year 2016-17 which was 23.80 percent of the total schools (government, private recognized & unrecognized and Madarsa)



In the year 2007-08 the number of private schools in the rural areas of the country was 1,60122 which constituted around 14.64 percent of the total elementary schools (government and private) in rural India. In the year 2016-17 the number of elementary schools in rural areas of the country increased to 2,20,308 which constituted around 18.15 percent of the total number of schools (government + private schools) in the rural India.

The DISE data of enrolment in private schools at elementary level of past ten years also suggests that the enrolment of students in private schools is increasing rapidly. In the year 2007-08 the number of students enrolled in private schools was 51,090375 which was around 27.61 percent

The number of private schools increased to 3,49412 in the year 2016-17 which was 23.08 percent of the total schools (government, private recognized & unrecognized and Madarsa)

of the total enrolment at primary level enrolment. The enrolment in private schools at primary level in the year 2016-17 was 7,31,52801 which was around 38.52 percent of the total enrolment (enrolment in government schools, enrolment in private schools and enrolment in Madarasas/ unrecognized schools) at elementary level.

The rising number and percentage enrolment in private schools of both urban and rural areas of the country is apparently because of the increasing demand for private schools among the people and the growing preference of parents to send their children to private schools.

In some of the states/UTs the percentage of enrolment in private schools has reached 50 percent or more.

In the year 2016-2017 the states/UTs where the percentage of enrolment in private schools at elementary level was more than 50 percent were Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur, Nagaland, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The states/UTs where the percentage of enrolment in private schools at elementary level was 40 or above but less than 50 were Andhra Pradesh, Daman & Diu, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Punjab and Rajasthan.

At a time when all efforts are being made to implement the Right to Education (RTE), the increasing dependence on private schools calls for thorough introspection and investigation to understand the factors influencing the preference for private schools.

It should be a matter of concern for policy makers as number of initiatives and measures have been taken by the government including budgetary improvement for elementary education so that the demand of the RTE – which guarantees free and compulsory primary education with quality–can be fulfilled. An analysis of the reasons for the increasing preference for private schools brings out a number of conflicting issues.

Interestingly, it reveals that everything is not wrong with the government schools as the trend of increasing number of private schools and enrolments in private schools suggests. The initiatives taken by the union and state governments to improve the school level education across the country shows that in the past few years the infrastructure of the government schools at elementary level – particularly school buildings, appointment of female teachers in the schools and availability of Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) – have improved at great extent. The percentage of the female teachers at national level in the year 2016-17 has reached around 48 percent. The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in government schools has also improved consistently. The overall PTR in the year 2016-17 was 23. Free textbooks up to class VIII and free uniforms to the students are the other features of SSA-RTE.

Apart from improving the infrastructure under SSA-RTE, the focus is also given to improve the quality education. To fulfill this commitment measures like availability of teachers, in-service training of teachers etc. have been provided. As per the Annual Report (2015-16) of the

The initiatives taken by the union and state governments to improve the school level education across the country shows that in the past few years the infrastructure of the government schools at elementary level - particularly school buildings, appointment of female teachers in the schools and availability of Teaching Learning Materials (TLM)– have improved at great extent.

Ministry of HRD, 19.49 lakh additional teachers posts were sanctioned and out of this, 15.59 lakh posts had been filled by the states and the UTs during 2015-2016.

To enhance enrolment, retention and attendance in school as well as improving nutritional levels among children the Mid-Day-Meal scheme is another important and popular component to universalise the basic education. The National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in schools covers all children studying in Class I-VIII in government and government aided and local body schools.

However, despite number of measures taken to improve the access, infrastructure and to universalize quality elementary education, the preference of parents for government schools for their wards is falling down. It reflects from the increased number of private schools and increased number and percentage of enrolment in private schools in the collected data.

CMS has conducted many studies to understand the perception and preference of parents belonging to lower income groups for the schools for their wards. In one such study conducted few years back in Delhi, it was found that people have not lost trust in the government-run schools. Parents of school going children expressed the views that the situation in government schools is not as bad as is often projected and they also felt that government run schools have improved and they are hopeful that they will improve in near future too.

Here, question arises, then why parents send their children to private schools even when private schools are comparatively very expensive and are unable to ensure quality of education. It seems that parents are usually in a dilemma and get confused by a few better performing private schools.

Popularity and acceptance of English as a language of communication and for better prospective in life is one of the main reasons for preference of private schools by the parents. The general perception is that the children can learn good English only in private schools. Generally, whether it is high, medium, or small budget private school, the medium of instruction is claimed to be English. As English language plays an important role in pursuing higher education like; medical, engineering, law, business, hence, the importance and demand for the same is increasing day by day. On other hand, in the most of the government schools the medium of instruction is in local language except in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland where medium of instruction is in English. Some states like Delhi, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have taken the lead to offer English medium as an option in state level government schools. Private schools have gained reputation of teaching better English comparatively to English taught in government schools. The findings of a study conducted by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in 2012 on the issue of 'Teaching of English at Primary Level in Government Schools' also suggests that there is fault at many levels including the method followed for teaching in classroom. It may be mentioned here that English is introduced as a subject in class I in many states, whereas in few other states it is introduced in class III or class V level. While the early introduction of English is in response to people's aspirations, experts feel that the language must be introduced at a relatively later stage and the mother tongue must be the medium of learning at primary level. This mismatch with the general preference and trend!

As English language plays an important role in pursuing higher education like; medical, engineering, law, business hence, the importance and demand for the same is increasing day by day.

It seems that the state and central government couldn't convey the messages among masses that government schools are better equipped to provide the quality education. The infrastructural improvement and other positive changes in government schools are not reflected in the popularity and preference for the government schools.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that all the private schools are providing better learning of English as a language and quality education because their medium of instruction is English. A study conducted by a researcher of Michigan State University has found that private school students in India do not outperform their counterparts in public schools.

Surprisingly, despite the improvement in government schools' infrastructure as well as easy accessibility to schools and different incentives like free books and other learning materials, incentives to girls and OBCs, SCs and STs, government schools are not the first preference among general public. It seems that the state and central government couldn't convey the messages among masses that government schools are better equipped to provide the quality education. The infrastructural improvement and other positive changes in government schools are not reflected in the popularity and preference for the government schools. Other important reasons for non-preference can be inadequate monitoring and accountability not only on part of teaching staff but at all levels right from top officials in the education departments, who are supposed to ensure logistics and regular supply of TLMs. Engaging teachers for other

government works also needs to be curtailed. Only infrastructural improvement and providing incentives can't change the perception about government schools. Data on achievements needs to be highlighted. For instance, percentage of candidates with government school background qualifying in civil services, engineering and medical professions need to be communicated for reposing of faith among parents in government schools.

There is no doubt that there is an urgent need to modernise the government schools to meet the expectations of parents and the students. The policy makers, academia will have to find innovative ways to make the government schools more attractive and better functioning to increase the enrolment of the students. In addition, research institutes, media and civil society groups should continue to play the role of watchdogs to evaluate their performance as well as in highlighting the positive changes occurring in these schools.

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Draft National Education Policy 2019

Committee Report Summary

The Committee for Draft National Education Policy (Chair: Dr. K. Kasturirangan) submitted its report on May 31, 2019. The Committee was constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in June 2017. The report proposes an education policy, which seeks to address the challenges of: (i) access, (ii) equity, (iii) quality, (iv) affordability, and (v) accountability faced by the current education system.

- The draft Policy provides for reforms at all levels of education from school to higher education. It seeks to increase the focus on early childhood care, reform the current exam system, strengthen teacher training, and restructure the education regulatory framework. It also seeks to set up a National Education Commission, increase public investment in education, strengthen the use of technology and increase focus on vocational and adult education, among others. Key observations and recommendations of the draft Policy include:

School Education

- **Early Childhood Care and Education:** In addition to problems of access, the Committee observed several quality related deficiencies in the existing early childhood learning programmes. These include: (i) curriculum that doesn't meet the developmental needs of children, (ii) lack of qualified and trained teachers,

and (iii) substandard pedagogy. Currently, most early childhood education is delivered through anganwadis and private-preschools. However, there has been less focus on the educational aspects of early childhood. Hence, the draft Policy recommends developing a two-part curriculum for early childhood care and education. This will consist of: (i) guidelines for up to three-year-old children (for parents and teachers), and (ii) educational framework for three to eight-year-old children. This would be implemented by improving and expanding the anganwadi system and co-locating anganwadis with primary schools.

- **The Right to Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act):** Currently, the RTE Act provides for free and compulsory education to all children from the age of six to 14 years. The draft Policy recommends extending the ambit of the RTE Act to include early childhood education and secondary school education. This would extend the coverage of the Act to all children between the ages of three to 18 years.
- In addition, the draft Policy recommends that the recent amendments to the RTE Act on continuous and comprehensive evaluation and the no detention policy must be reviewed. It states that there should be no detention of children till class eight. Instead, schools must ensure that children are achieving age-appropriate learning levels.

The draft Policy recommends extending the ambit of the RTE Act to include early childhood education and secondary school education. This would extend the coverage of the Act to all children between the ages of three to 18 years.

- **Curriculum framework:** The current structure of school education must be restructured on the basis of the development needs of students. This would consist of a 5-3-3-4 design comprising: (i) five years of foundational stage (three years of pre-primary school and classes one and two), (ii) three years of preparatory stage (classes three to five), (iii) three years of middle stage (classes six to eight), and (iv) four years of secondary stage (classes nine to 12).
- The Committee noted that the current education system solely focuses on rote learning of facts and procedures. Hence, it recommends that the curriculum load in each subject should be reduced to its essential core content. This would make space for holistic, discussion and analysis-based learning.
- **School exam reforms:** The Committee noted that the current board examinations: (i) force students to concentrate only on a few subjects, (ii) do not test learning in a formative manner, and (iii) cause stress among students. To track students' progress throughout their school experience, the draft Policy proposes State Census Examinations in classes three, five and eight. Further, it recommends restructuring the board examinations to test only core concepts, skills and higher order capacities. These board examinations will be on a range of subjects. The students can choose their subjects, and the semester when they want to take these board exams. The in-school final examinations may be replaced by these board examinations.
- **School infrastructure:** The Committee noted that establishing primary schools in every habitation across the country has helped increase access to education. However, it has led to the development of very small schools (having low number of students). The small size of schools makes it operationally complex to deploy teachers and critical physical resources. Therefore, the draft Policy recommends that multiple public schools should be brought together to form a school complex. A complex will consist of one secondary school (classes nine to twelve) and all the public schools in its neighbourhood that offer education from pre-primary till class eight.
- The school complexes will also include anganwadis, vocational education facilities, and an adult education centre. Each school complex will be a semi-autonomous unit providing integrated education across all stages from early childhood to secondary education. This will ensure that resources such as infrastructure and trained teachers can be efficiently shared across a school complex.
- **Teacher management:** The Committee noted that there has been a steep rise in teacher shortage, lack of professionally qualified teachers, and deployment of teachers for non-educational purposes. The draft Policy recommends that teachers should be deployed with a particular school complex for at least five to seven years. Further, teachers will not be allowed to participate in any non-teaching activities (such as cooking mid-day meals or participating in vaccination campaigns) during school hours that could affect their teaching capacities.
- For teacher training, the existing B.Ed. programme will be replaced by a four-year integrated B.Ed. programme that combines high-quality content, pedagogy, and practical training. An integrated continuous professional development will also be developed for all subjects. Teachers will be required to complete a minimum of 50 hours of continuous professional development training every year.
- **Regulation of schools:** The draft Policy recommends separating the regulation of schools from aspects such

as policymaking, school operations, and academic development. It suggests creating an independent State School Regulatory Authority for each state that will prescribe basic uniform standards for public and private schools. The Department of Education of the State will formulate policy and conduct monitoring and supervision.

Higher Education

- According to the All India Survey on Higher Education, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in India has increased from 20.8% in 2011-12 to 25.8% in 2017-18.

	Primary (Class 1-5)	Upper Primary (Class 6-8)	Upper Secondary (Class 9-12)	Higher Education
India	101.4	89.3	62.5	23
China	103.9	100.4	88.8	39.4
USA	99.5	101.9	93.2	86.7
Germany	103.3	101.6	104.6	65.5

Source: Educational Statistics at Glance (2016), MHRD; PRS.

- The Committee identified lack of access as a major reason behind low intake of higher education in the country. It aims to increase GER to 50% by 2035 from the current level of about 25.8%. Key recommendations in this regard include:
 - **Regulatory structure and accreditation:** The Committee noted that the current higher education system has multiple regulators with overlapping mandates. This reduces the autonomy of higher educational institutions and creates an environment of dependency and centralised decision making. Therefore, it proposes setting up the

National Higher Education Regulatory Authority (NHERA). This independent authority would replace the existing individual regulators in higher education, including professional and vocational education. This implies that the role of all professional councils such as AICTE and the Bar Council of India would be limited to setting standards for professional practice. The role of the University Grants Commission (UGC) will be limited to providing grants to higher educational institutions.

- Currently, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is an accreditation body under the UGC. The draft Policy recommends separating NAAC from the UGC into an independent and autonomous body. In its new role, NAAC will function as the top level accreditor, and will issue licenses to different accreditation institutions, who will assess higher educational institutions once every five to seven years. All existing higher education institutions should be accredited by 2030.

- **Establishment of new higher educational institutions:** Currently, higher educational institutions can only be set up by Parliament or state legislatures. The draft Policy proposes that these institutions could be allowed to be set up through a Higher Education Institution Charter from NHERA. This Charter will be awarded on the basis of transparent assessment of certain specified criteria. All such newly constituted higher educational institutions must receive accreditation as mandated by NHERA within five years of being established.

The Committee noted that the current higher education system has multiple regulators with overlapping mandates. This reduces the autonomy of higher educational institutions and creates an environment of dependency and centralised decision making.

- **Restructuring of higher education institutions:** Higher education institutions will be restructured into three types: (i) research universities focusing equally on research and teaching; (ii) teaching universities focusing primarily on teaching; and (iii) colleges focusing only on teaching at undergraduate levels. All such institutions will gradually move towards full autonomy - academic, administrative, and financial.
- **Establishing a National Research Foundation:** The Committee observed that the total investment on research and innovation in India has declined from 0.84% of GDP in 2008 to 0.69% in 2014. India also lags behind many nations in number of researchers (per lakh population), patents and publications.

Table 2: Investment on Research and Innovation

	Spending on research and innovation (% GDP)	Researchers (per lakh population)	Total Patent Applications
India	0.7	15	45,057
China	2.1	111	13,38,503
USA	2.8	423	6,05,571
Israel	4.3	825	6,419

Source: Economic Survey of India 2017-18; PRS

- The draft Policy recommends establishing a National Research Foundation, an autonomous body, for funding, mentoring and building the capacity for quality research in India. The Foundation will consist of four major divisions: sciences, technology, social sciences, and arts and humanities, with the provision to add additional divisions. The Foundation will be provided with an annual grant of Rs 20,000 crore (0.1% of GDP).
- **Moving towards a liberal approach:** The draft Policy recommends making undergraduate programmes inter-disciplinary by redesigning their

curriculum to include: (a) a common core curriculum and (b) one/two area(s) of specialisation. Students will be required to choose an area of specialisation as 'major', and an optional area as 'minor'. Four-year undergraduate programmes in Liberal Arts will be introduced and multiple exit options with appropriate certification will be made available to students. Further, within the next five years, five Indian Institute of Liberal Arts must be setup as model multi-disciplinary liberal arts institutions.

- **Professional development of faculty:** The Committee observed that poor service conditions and heavy teaching loads at higher education institutions have resulted in low faculty motivation. Further, lack of autonomy and no clear career progression system are also major impediments to faculty motivation. The draft Policy recommends development of a Continuous Professional Development programme and introduction of a permanent employment (tenure) track system for faculty in all higher education institutions by 2030. Further, a desirable student:teacher ratio of not more than 30:1 must be ensured.
- **Optimal learning environment:** The Committee observed that the curricula remain rigid, narrow, and archaic. Moreover, the faculty often lacks the autonomy to design curricula, which negatively impacts pedagogy. It recommends that all higher education institutions must have complete autonomy on curricular, pedagogical and resource-related matters.

Education Governance

- The Committee observed that there is a need to revisit the existing system of governance in education, and bring in synergy and coordination among the different ministries, departments and agencies. In this context, it recommends:

- Creation of a National Education Commission or Rashtriya Shiksha Aayog, as an apex body for education, to be headed by the Prime Minister. This body will be responsible for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the vision of education in the country on a continuous and sustained basis. It will oversee the implementation and functioning of several bodies including the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the proposed National Higher Education Regulatory Authority, and National Research Foundation.
- The Ministry of Human Resources and Development must be renamed as the Ministry of Education in order to bring focus back on education.

Financing Education

- The Draft Policy reaffirmed the commitment of spending 6% of GDP as public investment in education. Note that the first National Education Policy (NEP) 1968 had recommended public expenditure in education must be 6% of GDP, which was reiterated by the second NEP in 1986. In 2017-18, public expenditure on education in India was 2.7% of GDP.

Country	Investment in 2017 (as % of GDP)
India	2.7
USA	5
UK	5.5
Brazil	6

- The draft Policy seeks to double the public investment in education from the current 10% of total public expenditure to 20% in the next 10 years. Of the additional 10% expenditure, 5% will be utilised for universities and colleges (higher education), 2% will be utilised

for additional teacher costs or resources in school education and 1.4% will be utilised for early childhood care and education.

- The Committee also observed operational problems and leakages in disbursement of funds. For instance, it observed that District Institutes of Education and Training have about 45% vacancies which have led to their allocations not being used or being used ineffectively. It recommends optimal and timely utilisation of funds through the institutional development plans.

Technology in Education

- The Committee observed that technology plays an important role in: (a) improving the classroom process of teaching, learning and evaluation, (b) aiding in preparation of teachers and continuous professional development of teachers, (c) improving access to education in remote areas and for disadvantaged groups, and (d) improving the overall planning, administration and management of the entire education system. It recommends focused electrification of all educational institutions as electricity is a pre-requisite for all technology-based interventions. Further, it recommends:

- **National Mission on Education through information and communication technology:** The Mission will encompass virtual laboratories that provide remote access to laboratories in various disciplines. A National Education Technology Forum will also be setup under the Mission, as an autonomous body, to facilitate decision making on the induction, deployment and use of technology. This Forum will provide evidence-based advice to central and state-governments on technology-based interventions.
- **National Repository on Educational Data:** A National Repository will be setup to maintain all records

related to institutions, teachers, and students in digital form. Further, a single online digital repository will be created where copyright-free educational resources will be made available in multiple languages.

Vocational Education

- The Committee observed that less than 5% of the workforce in the age-group of 19-24 receives vocational education in India. This is in contrast to 52% in the USA, 75% in Germany and 96% in South Korea. It recommends integrating vocational educational programmes in all educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities) in a phased manner over a period of 10 years. Note that this is an upward revision from the National Policy on Skills Development and Entrepreneurship (2015) which aimed at offering vocational education in 25% of educational institutions. Key recommendations in this regard include:
- **Vocational courses:** All school students must receive vocational education in at least one vocation in grades nine to 12. The proposed school complexes must build expertise in curriculum delivery that is aligned to the competency levels under the existing National Skills Qualifications Framework.
- The proposed Higher Education Institutions must also offer vocational courses that are integrated into the undergraduate education programmes. The draft Policy targets to offer vocational education to up to 50% of the total enrolment in higher education institutions by 2025, up from the present

level of enrolment of well below 10% in these institutions.

- **National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education:** The Committee will be set up to work out the steps that need to be taken towards achieving the above goals. A separate fund will be setup for the integration of vocational education into educational institutions. The Committee will work out the modalities for the disbursement of these funds.

Adult Education

- As per Census 2011, India still had over 3.26 crore youth non-literates (15-24 years of age) and a total of 26.5 crore adult non-literates (15 years and above). In this regard, the draft Policy recommends:
- Establishing an autonomous Central Institute of Adult Education, as a constituent unit of NCERT, which will develop a National Curriculum Framework for adult education. The Framework will cover five broad areas: foundational literacy and numeracy, critical life skills vocational skills development, basic education, and continuing education.
- Adult Education Centres will be included within the proposed school complexes. Relevant courses for youth and adults will be made available at the National Institute of Open Schooling. A cadre of adult education instructors and managers, as well as a team of one-on-one tutors will be created through a newly-established National Adult Tutors Programme.

The draft Policy targets to offer vocational education to up to 50% of the total enrolment in higher education institutions by 2025, up from the present level of enrolment of well below 10% in these institutions.

To provide flexibility in the choice of language, students who wish to change one or more of their three languages may do so in grade six or grade seven, subjected to the condition that they are still able to demonstrate proficiency in three languages in their modular board examinations.

Education and Indian Languages

- The Committee observed that a large number of students are falling behind since classes in schools are being conducted in a language that they do not understand. Therefore, it recommended that the medium of instruction must either be the home language/mother tongue/local language till grade five, and preferable till grade eight, wherever possible.
- Introduced by the first National Education Policy, the three-language formula stated that state governments should adopt and implement study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking states, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the non-Hindi speaking states. The draft Policy recommended that this three language formula be continued and flexibility in the implementation of the formula should be provided.
- The Committee remarked that the implementation of the formula needs to be strengthened, particularly in Hindi-

speaking states. Further, schools in Hindi speaking areas should also teach Indian languages from other parts of India for the purpose of national integration. To provide flexibility in the choice of language, students who wish to change one or more of their three languages may do so in grade six or grade seven, subjected to the condition that they are still able to demonstrate proficiency in three languages in their modular board examinations.

- To promote Indian languages, a National Institute for Pali, Persian and Prakrit will be set up. All higher education institutes must recruit high quality faculty for at least three Indian languages, in addition to the local Indian language. Further, the mandate of the Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology will be expanded to include all fields and disciplines to strengthen vocabulary in Indian languages.

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Fixing the education system

Madhav Chavan

Government can demonstrate its willingness to deal with the learning crisis by adopting the draft new education policy

Education, it may be said, is no rocket science. But, it has taken an astrophysicist and former head of the ISRO, as the head of a committee, to produce a refreshingly new draft education policy. Of course, there will be debates, and controversies. But, having worked for over two decades to improve the foundational skills of children, it is good to see a policy document that recognises the “severe learning crisis” and emphasises in no uncertain terms that it has to be dealt with.

To quote from page 64 of this rather elaborate document “..our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school and beyond by 2025”.

“The rest of the Policy will be largely irrelevant for such a large portion of our students if this most basic learning (reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is not first achieved.” The document says, “If action is not taken soon, over the next few years the country could lose 10 crore or more students — the size of a large country — from the learning system and to illiteracy.” Grim, as the warning is, the government will underscore the severity of the crisis and show its willingness to deal with it by adopting the policy.

An important part of this policy is its thrust on early childhood education. Policy documents over the past decades

have listed all the familiar reasons why early childhood education is important to build a foundation. But the draft policy lists concrete steps to overcome issues of



universal access to quality early childhood education beyond the ICDS network. It says, “...the availability of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education for all 3-6 year olds will be included as an integral part of the RTE Act”.

Further, the policy proposes to restructure the 10+2 education structure into a 5+3+3+4 structure so that the five years from ages three to seven or till the end of Std 2 are seen as one “foundational stage”. This is a welcome recommendation. The next two stages, of three years each, are “preparatory” and “upper primary”, first ensure the acquisition of foundational skills and then their development. These stages are not only consistent with the development of children, but they are also useful to meet the overall goal of ensuring basic learning outcomes stage-by-stage. Such stage-wise restructuring to achieve learning outcomes will be important if the government extends the RTE Act to children between the ages 3 and 18 as the policy proposes.

The policy recommends community and volunteer participation in collaboration with schools to overcome the current crisis. Schools generally work in isolation

The draft policy lists concrete steps to overcome issues of universal access to quality early childhood education beyond the ICDS network. It says, “...the availability of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education for all 3-6 year olds will be included as an integral part of the RTE Act”.

The data on the learning crisis in higher educational levels is not well-defined. There is a need to understand the crisis in secondary and higher education beyond the percentage of dropouts, the gross enrollment rates or the failure rates in examinations.

from the community they serve. Not making parents and the larger community partners in the child's learning process aggravates the learning crisis, at least in the early years. Although, setting up of school management committees is mandated by the RTE Act, they are not expected to become a part of the teaching-learning process. This policy seems to encourage voluntary action. The document also talks about encouraging philanthropic initiatives to help mobilise resources. Together, these two create an interesting picture.

The chapters on early childhood education and elementary school education appear to be more concrete than the chapters on the next levels of schooling or higher education. Perhaps this is because desired outcomes for early stages of education are easier to pin down than those for the next levels of education.

The data on the learning crisis in higher educational levels is not well-defined. There is a need to understand the crisis in secondary and higher education beyond the percentage of dropouts, the gross enrollment rates or the failure rates in examinations. Examination and assessment reforms are referred to, but clearly, more on-ground experimentation is needed before these can be concretised.

Integration of vocational training and a general emphasis on "learning to learn", along with lowering the burden by cutting out some parts of the curriculum, while focusing on the core, have been discussed for some years now. I am not sure we have enough experience to execute such initiatives. Though time is fast running out, we need to undertake a honest evaluation before initiating far-reaching changes. I recall reading the National

Curricular Framework 2005 document, with similar enthusiasm, more than a decade ago. But, after a point you start wondering how much of this is really going to be feasible?

The context set in the early parts of the document is that India will be or aspires to be the third-largest economy in the world by 2030. "To do this, we will need a knowledge society based on a robust education system, with all the requisite attributes and characteristics in the context of changes in knowledge demands, technologies, and the way in which society lives and works".

This need for a knowledge society has been often articulated over the last two decades but we have not been able to deal with the learning crisis. Do we have the will, the financial resources, and the pool of human resources to deal with it now?

There is an addendum to the policy called "Make it Happen". It outlines the issue of financing in detail. In short, the projection is that the expenditure of the government on education, which is at 10 per cent of all public expenditure today, will need to be doubled. The "learning crisis" is very deep. The education system — public and private — has been deteriorating rapidly and has affected the quality of our human resources. If this trend is not reversed, the dysfunctional system will become more and more expensive but will not deliver the goods. It will require a huge commitment and conviction to make it happen.

*(The Writer is co-founder of pratham.
Views are personal
The article was published in Indian
Express on June 5, 2019)*

Poll Surveys Vitiates Democratic Fundamentals

Dr N Bhaskara Rao

Ever increasing expenditure on election campaigns and increased number of poll surveys are eroding the very fundamentals of free, fair and inclusive claims of our electoral system. And yet we are hardly making efforts to reverse the trend, as if we do not even recognise the symptoms of decline in democratic roots.

I owe an apology to the Nation for making Poll Surveys an “instrument” though they were initiated more as an academic exercise, and for being a fountain head for pollsters in the country over the decades. It is now 45 years since Poll Surveys have become news media’s staple. During this period, we had seen some 10 Lok Sabha polls, over 100 Assembly polls. In 2018 round of Assembly Polls, nearly Rs 100 crores was involved in conducting field surveys. Now in this round of 2019 Lok Sabha poll, I estimate nearly Rs 500 crore spent for all kind of surveys, including by parties for candidate selection and by candidates for wooing votes. This time, Political parties and news media have taken to poll surveys a year earlier the schedule was notified on Sunday March 10.

What have we gained from the Poll Surveys? Can anyone give one benefit that poll surveys have caused to voters or to our politics or to governance or in bettering people’s representation or in increasing transparency in the electoral process? We cannot even say that we are electing better candidates today than 25

years ago! Have our parties become more reflective of concerns of people and more representative since taking to poll surveys? Has our electorate become wiser and more selective in their voting?



Who then have benefited from poll surveys? For sure the news media particularly news channels and, of course, the pollsters and poll agencies are the beneficiaries. But primarily in monetary terms. Have they bettered their credibility? Have news channels expanded viewership base beyond TRP claims. But pollsters, as psychologists have become privileged and pampered ones of political leaders.

Poll Surveys could be blamed for many accumulated ills in our electoral politics. Thanks to poll surveys, election costs have been on constant increase and *free bees* are seeing no limits. Poll surveys have made level playing even more difficult for entry of new talent. And, have made polls and political parties more manipulative in the name of strategy. Poll surveys could even be accused for deepening divides between people, regions and communities in the country. It is too obvious that surveys have spread “note for vote” phenomena and scaled the trend. Surveys have promoted public relations and image building phenomena out of proportion to ground realities. All this has caused

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There is no evidence of such a large field research force engaged in poll surveys contributing to research potential of the country or our public policies becoming citizen centric.

distrust of people in electoral process and outcome. As a result, voter today does not view elections as a serious means for better governance, or to get representative government or getting corruption free public services. Poll surveys have swayed bandwagoning, not logical decision making. With using of some poll survey teams for snooping on voters or for canvassing, they are no longer viewed as independent or objective. Exceptions may be two or three.

A Poll survey cannot be said as a solo scandal. It involves a caucus of three – a research agency, a politician or party and a news media. Together they treat voters as gullible without revealing full details and identities and any conflict of interest aspects involved in poll surveys. Poll surveys have spread false notions, like that sample size is more critical as if more the size, the more reliable survey findings are. Poll surveys are deceptive. One need not do a field survey to come up with such vague trends as they often are of late. Our electoral system can never become truly free and fair the way poll surveys are covered in news media. Free and fair polls are as important as free media is. They are two sides of same coin. In the past some poll surveys were close to result more by chance, not because of any particular methodology of the pollster.

Do poll surveys influence voting? Based on field surveys on shift in voting preference, I have indicated more than two decades ago that poll surveys do influence voting marginally or otherwise. But then the way TV channels take up to coverage based on poll surveys, one cannot say their influence is same today. But there are instances of news media coverage of surveys swing cadres and potential candidates from one party to another.

Recently a former campaign chief of President Trump had accused the President for asking him to manage or manipulate poll surveys more than once during the 2016 presidential election campaign in that country. Earlier in 2010, I quoted in my book, **“Poll Surveys in Media” (NBT)**, what George Gallup’s close associate said two decades ago about role of poll surveys in vitiating democracy. My book described how poll surveys were being commissioned and managed and analysed in India. News media are as much a party as the political parties are for the way poll surveys are reported and hyped. This may be because control of news media today is slipping to political leaders, directly or indirectly.

Has poll surveys led to internalise systemic research in governance in the country? There is no evidence of such a large field research force engaged in poll surveys contributing to research potential of the country or our public policies becoming citizen centric. I could say that more research and analysis had gone into our public policies and governance. Independent research has declined in our public discourse and public policies. But motivated and supportive social and political research has been on rise.

I did not speak out on Poll Surveys for some years. I thought I should break my silence now. My book on Poll Surveys in 2010, was reprinted by National Book Trust in 2012 with a hope that there will be a public debate on poll surveys and better sense prevails. But there is no evidence of that and we continue with deceptivity, despite high stakes.

(Dr N Bhaskara Rao is a pioneer in applied Social Research in India of 50 year standing including in conducting electoral studies.)

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2019 Election Expenditure Report

The 2019 general (Parliamentary) election in India emerges to be the most expensive election ever, anywhere. Even more, this election to Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) will go down as a bitterly fought vicious campaign.

The poll process was stretched over almost 75 days, with polling held in seven phases. In fact, an intense poll campaign started a few weeks before the formal notification. Never before the candidates, leaders and parties, and even the news media, were so much in violation of “model code” of the Election Commission of India (ECI). They all fought the election as if it had to be fought “at any cost”. During the campaign, the campaigners and the news media often referred about the money being spent or distributed to lure voters. Throughout the campaign period, news channels showed vividly and repeatedly of confiscation of cash, gold, silver, liquor, etc. in transit. The value of these was more than twice of what was confiscated during the 2014 poll. The first of a series of advertisements in daily newspapers that ECI had run with a banner was “my vote is not for sale” and “any such sale is betrayal of democracy and also a punishable offence with imprisonment”. That advertisement was however not followed up with any actions to demonstrate the claim of ECI.

In 2019, the number of voters increased to 902 million and the number of polling booths to over a million. However, overall voter turnout has only increased marginally. The number of SC and ST seats remain the same. The number of seats contested by women was also almost same, except in West Bengal and Odisha where the party in power took initiative of selecting more women candidates. The number of candidates per seat on an average remained around 15. A number of them were dummy or for bargain or in to register protest. Also, in 2019 the number of millionaire candidates continued to be prominent, as was the case of those with

criminal background. Their names and number was reported prominently in the news media. Compared to earlier CMS field studies, a high percentage of voters had acknowledged or confirmed themselves receiving cash for their vote directly and about many other voters receiving the same. For the first time it is confirmed that “bank transfer” of money on the eve of poll has become a new route to lure voters in the name of one or more schemes.

Between the polls held in 2014 and 2019, elections to state assemblies were held at least twice. In 2018 six Assemblies went to polls, including Karnataka, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The poll expenditure in these states signalled that the upcoming Lok Sabha poll in 2019 is going to be vigorous, vicious and a money guzzler. Leaders of opposing parties accused each other of money they were receiving or spending in the elections. For example, TDP was alleged to have spent Rs. 10,000 crores. YSR party was alleged to have received Rs. 1000 crore from TRS party and Rs. 500 crores from BJP. Instances were more of key party functionaries referring to the amount spent by own party, how much voters were paid and how much all parties together had spent. All this was in news media for public consumption.

The other development which contributed for increased poll expenditure in 2019 include the Government initiated changes. These include introduction of electoral bonds to facilitate contribution of corporates for poll funding in anonymity, removal of ceiling on corporate contribution (up to 7.5 percent of three-year average profits), allowing contribution of foreign corporate in India for campaigns, etc.

The Supreme Court in September 2018 ordered that candidates in 2019 should publicly declare their criminal background, if any, by advertising in

Can we save India from being put in "flawed democracy" category of countries, without addressing ever increasing poll expenditure and the implications?

newspapers and channels "in bold letters" and thrice after filing nomination. The expense of those advertisements have to be within the allowed ceiling (that only a few candidates complied so far despite the Supreme Court reminding the ECI, is another issue).

Income tax raids after ECI notification on houses of associates and the ones connected with some political leaders, candidates and extensive media coverage of the same on the kind of money involved, had further stimulated a psyche of poll time expectation of lures by voters. Checking aircrafts of key players, including the PM and CMs presumably for cash (as widely reported) while on campaign, had further added to the psyche syndrome. ECI has continued to take initiatives every election time.

These initiatives include 1) a ceiling on candidate's expenditure after notification and file a statement to ECI within 75 days, irrespective of won or lost, 2) all expenditure should be by bank and by a specific account, 3) candidates are directed to account every expense and indicated weekly, in fact the range of costs for different heads of campaign expenditure are indicated, 4) for enforcing the same the ECI has elaborate system of surveillance and tracking at district level, local observers and assistant monitors were deployed, locally and even expected to do shadow accounting.

How is all this information is being used and what action taken for violations and excesses was not clear even for the earlier elections. In 2019 it further strengthened its apparatus, including by appointing more expenditure observers from income tax and revenue departments. It confiscated twice more cash, gold, liquor, than in 2014. But there is no evidence that those initiatives made much difference on the expenditure on poll campaigns.

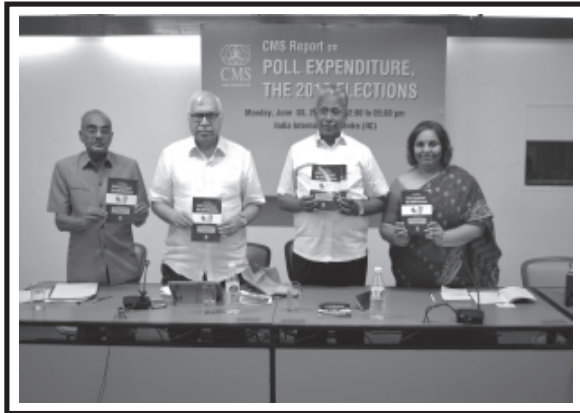
Overall, as per seizure report by ECI on May 19, 2019, nearly Rs. 1300 crore worth drugs/narcotics were confiscated in addition to cash (Rs 839 crore), liquor (worth Rs 294 crore), gold/silver (valued around Rs 986 crore) and other freebies/items worth Rs 58 crores; in total cash/items over Rs. 3500 crores were siezed. After a huge cash seizures in Tamil Nadu ECI had canceled 2016 elections in two assembly constitutencies and in one assembly in 2017. Again now in 2019, one Lok Sabha seat has been cancelled. Neither seems to have made any difference on the amount of cash distributed in Tamil Nadu elections.

For a different reason also the 2019 Lok Sabha poll was a watershed election. This was how major source of poll funding is now corporate and in the name of transparency, anonymity is promoted in that process. "Crowd funding" where citizen and community contributes for campaigns is no longer a sought after source. Is this good for vibrancy of democracy or not, one could wonder? Can we save India from being put in "flawed democracy" category of countries, without addressing ever increasing poll expenditure and the implications?

As a former senior bureaucrat wrote recently in *The Hindu* (April 16, 2019) "electoral malpractice has appeared in new forms. Voter bribery and manipulation through the media has been the technique of unethical influencing voters in place of voter intimidation and booth capturing. Booth capturing is an identifiable event taking place at a particular time and place. But the new technique is difficult to trace to specific parties and candidates". It is against this background, the relevance of self-initiated efforts like this exercise by CMS becomes important.

An Estimated Rs 60,000 Crore Spent in 2019 Lok Sabha Elections: CMS Report

The report released today by the Centre for Media Studies has estimated these elections as the most expensive elections held ever; BJP spent about 45% of the total expenditure.



With an estimated Rs 60,000 crore front-end expenditure, the recently concluded 2019 Lok Sabha elections is the most expensive elections held ever, according to a report by Centre for Media Studies (CMS), a premier research organisation.

The report estimated that Rs 700 per vote was spent and on an average, nearly Rs 100 crore per Lok Sabha constituency was spent in these elections.

The methodology for estimation was based on a PEE approach (Perceptions, Experiences and Estimation) of enquiry, a method evolved by CMS for estimating corruption in India over years. Key sources for the estimation included campaign activities by parties and candidates, voters' observation in select constituencies, secondary data on demographic divides, field study and media coverage among others.

While CMS had estimated Rs 30,000 crore as poll expenditure in the 2014 elections, the figure has doubled this time, making Indian elections as the costliest elections ever in the world.

"The BJP spent about 20% in 1998 against about 45% in 2019 out of the total

poll expenditure estimate...In 2009, the Congress' share was 40% of total expenditure, against 15 to 20% in 2019," the report stated.

CMS found that the leaders of the opposing parties were accusing each other of receiving anonymous grants which were spent in the elections. For example, "Telugu Desam Party was alleged to have spent Rs 10,000 crore. YSR Congress Party was alleged to have received Rs 1,000 crore from Telangana Rashtra Samithi and Rs 500 crore from BJP. There were several instances of key party functionaries referring to the amount spent by own party, how much voters were paid and how much all parties together had spent. All this was in news media for public consumption," stated the report.

The report was released today, June 2, at the India International Centre (IIC), New Delhi, during a round table discussion on 'Electoral Reforms Required for Curtailing Rising Costs of Elections in Our Country'. Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India S Y Quraishi, former IPS officer D R Kaarthikeyan and CMS founder N Bhaskar Rao were among the participants in the discussion. Quraishi, in his tenure as CEC had established an 'expenditure monitoring department' in the election commission. Commenting on the report, he said, "Money power has assumed new dimensions in these elections," and added that the electoral bonds system brought in by the BJP government are an "unmitigated disaster" as far as poll expenditure is concerned.

As per the report, around Rs 12,000-15000 crore was distributed to the voters directly, Rs 20,000- 25,000 crore was spent on publicity, Rs 5,000-6,000 crore on logistics, Rs 10,000-12,000 crore on formal expenditure and Rs 3,000-6,000 crore was spent for miscellaneous purposes.

(Source: Newsclick)

Supreme Court issues contempt notice to RBI in RTI case

The Supreme Court has issued notice to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on a contempt petition which alleged that the central bank did not provide information sought about the inspection reports of some banks and on the alleged irregularities in the case of Sahara Group of Companies under the transparency law.

A bench headed by Justice Nageshwar Rao issued the notice on a petition filed

by a Mumbai resident who contended that the RBI had refused to part with the sought information despite.

“The RBI ought to act with transparency and not hide information that might embarrass individual banks. It is duty bound to comply with the provisions of the RTI Act and disclose the information sought,” the apex court had observed in that case.

The Economics Times, (January 25, 2019)

429 tigers killed by poachers since 2008, reveals RTI reply

As many as 429 tigers have been poached and killed since 2008 across the country, with the maximum of 71 in Madhya Pradesh during the period, revealed data obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Year-wise, the maximum killings took place in 2011 when 80 tigers were poached, while the minimum of 17 occurred in 2015, according to the data from the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), under the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

The WCCB is a statutory body formed to combat organised wildlife crime in the country. In 2018, 22 tigers were killed, down from 25 in 2017 and 48 in 2016, it stated in a written response.

Noida-based lawyer Ranjan Tomar had sought state-wise data from the bureau on the number of tigers killed by poachers since 2008.

The maximum killings of 71 tigers have been reported from MP, followed by 46 each in Maharashtra and Karnataka, 42 each in Assam and Chhattisgarh and 35 in Uttarakhand during the period, according to the data.

Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh reported 25 such killings each, 19 in Kerala, followed by 12 in West Bengal, 11 each in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, it stated.

Six tiger killings by poachers were reported in Delhi — two each in 2011 and 2012, one each in 2013 and 2014, and one in 2008, it added.

Notably, there are 14 states and Union Territories — Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Goa, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Lakshadweep, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Puducherry, Punjab, Sikkim and Tripura — from where no such killings

have been reported since 2008, according to the data.

“The number of tiger killings has come down in recent years, as shown in the data, which is good news for wildlife conservationists and enthusiasts. However, the concern still looms large over such killings and poaching continuing,” Tomar said. “It is essential to save wildlife if we want to protect the environment. Animals like elephants and tigers are critical to human survival.

because of their position in the natural food chain and losing them could endanger our existence,” the 30-year-old social activist told PTI.

Tomar had also sought details of the tiger census of 2008 and 2018 but the bureau said no such data was maintained by it. There was also no information with the department on the amount of tiger skin or body parts recovered from poachers during the period.

The Economics Times, (January 16, 2019)

EVM is 'information' under Right to Information Act, rule Central Information Commission

Directs Election Commission to respond to appellant who had sought one.

An Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) is “information” under the Right to Information Act, the Central Information Commission has ruled.

The Commission was hearing the appeal of an RTI applicant who had asked the Election Commission for an EVM but was denied.

Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) Sudhir Bhargava ruled that “the EVM which is available with the respondent [ECI] in a material form and also as samples is an information under the RTI Act.”

EVMs have been in the spotlight recently as several Opposition leaders have raised doubts about the credibility of the machines. They have also demanded that the ECI cross-check 50% of results

with voter-verifiable paper audit trails (VVPAT) in the upcoming Lok Sabha poll.

Mr. Bhargava noted that the definition of information under Section 2(f) of the RTI Act includes “any material in any form, including records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form...”

The CIC upheld applicant Razaak K. Haidar’s contention that the terms “models” and “samples” should apply to an EVM.

ECI Under-Secretary Soumyajit Ghosh admitted that “models/samples of EVM are available with the ECI, but the same are only kept for training purpose by the ECI, and not saleable to the general public.”

The Hindu, (February 24, 2019)



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