

EDITORIAL

Empower youth through education

The standard of government Schools and Colleges is not up to mark whereas students in private institutes enjoy learning modern and up-to-date syllabi. A unified system must be adopted so capable students can get admission to reputed Universities for higher education. Coordination between private and government institutes must be built and high-standard syllabi must be taught in all institutes preparing students for future challenges. Education realizes people, their responsibilities as citizens so they work for the prosperity of their country. Government should pay attention to educational reforms and strictly implement them for raising education standards. The adoption of an online education system and using the latest technology in the education sector can strengthen the system. For developing countries, empowering youth through education is necessary for a brighter future. Every field of study is important and if students get a chance to learn it by choice they can excel in their field. Both profession and passion meet giving birth to a successful life and thus aiding in the progress of a country. A wide range of subjects should be offered by institutes rather than just sticking to old combinations such as medical sciences, engineering, business, etc. there are more fields for students to explore. Teachers should see the interest of students and discuss it with parents so both can encourage the child to get along with his chosen subject. Parents want their child to either choose a medical or engineering field. Computer sciences are also trending but that is necessary no matter in what field you are. Not all students have the same thinking. Every child has his perspective and state of mind which should be respected. Those who are on the wrong path should be guided by logic. Forcing them could be brutal, children should be molded politely. Exposure and motivation can be imparted through seminars and workshops conducted in the institutes by professionals. Government should aid institutes to arrange such knowledgeable activities for students' awareness. It helps to develop skills in the students and clear the vision regarding various professions they can get into. Students get to know the trajectory to follow for achieving their goals in the desired field. The practical application lacks in our educational system. It emphasizes more on sticking to the syllabus than experimenting to reveal something new. However, innovations are made through experimentation and by clearing concepts which are absent here. Students should be allowed to learn through practice. The educational sector is divided into private and government institutes.

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A showdown of arch-rivals

BY
KALYANI SHANKAR

This electoral battle is shaping up to be a multi-party contest, primarily between the ruling BJP-led NDA and the INDIA bloc

Who will win the 2024 Lok Sabha polls? The election scene has become clear after the Chief Election Commissioner announced the poll schedule last week. They will begin next month and end on June 4, when the results will be announced.

It will be a multi-party contest, with the ruling BJP-led NDA alliance and the opposition coalition of the INDIA bloc being the primary contenders. Meanwhile, alliances are being built and major parties have announced the candidates. Party hopping and secret deals are also going on. Prime Minister Modi aims to perform a hat trick. Currently, it is a one-horse race, with the BJP dominating and the opposition parties trailing behind.

The Opposition INDIA coalition comprises 26 parties. They have formed a pre-poll alliance to challenge the BJP. It aims to field a single opposition candidate against the BJP in the upcoming elections. The Opposition suf-

fered two consecutive defeats in 2014 and 2019, significantly damaging its image. It needs to connect with voters, including millennials.

Congress, leading the Opposition, is a 138-year secular party that used to represent marginalised groups like SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims. It has been weakened since the eighties, with the rise of regional satraps and today, it is a mere shadow of its former strength. It lacks leadership.

After the 2014 and 2019 defeats, Congress now claims it is committed to social justice and empowering India's poor, oppressed, Dalits, farmers, youth and women with its five guarantees: Yuva Nyay, Bhagidaari Nyay, Naari Nyay, Kisan Nyay and Shramik Nyay.

The Opposition mainly aims to challenge Modi by consolidating anti-BJP votes and offering incentives. This strategy worked for Congress in recent Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana Assembly polls, which Congress won. Congress hopes to gain from the BJP's anti-incumbency buffering sops and freebies. They also highlight Rahul Gandhi's recent Bharat Jodo Yatra, which was meant to connect with the people. To succeed, Congress must raise bread-and-butter issues such as inflation, joblessness and social discord to

engage with young voters who play a decisive role in elections. They must show an alternate strategy to appeal to them.

Simultaneously, some powerful chief ministers of state-level parties dominate their states, making it a tough fight for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in these areas.

2019, the BJP and its allies secured only 45 per cent of the votes. The remaining 55 per cent were up for grabs for the INDIA bloc. Although no national leader matches Modi's popularity, some influential regional leaders can sway voters in their respective regions. This is particularly true for West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The biggest challenge for the coalition is to project a single leader against Modi. Unfortunately, there is an ego clash among the coalition partners, which makes it difficult to agree on someone.

Secondly, the BJP boasts a strong organisation with immense financial and political power.

The Opposition doesn't seem to have a solid and compelling storyline, except for its commitment to safeguarding the Constitution and democratic values. However, voters are more concerned about basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. For instance, Sonia Gandhi's Aam Admi slogan in 2004 res-



onated well with the masses. Low-income people generally live paycheck to paycheck and may not relate to abstract political concepts.

The Congress Party is still clinging to its glorious past and failing to acknowledge the current scene. As the second-largest Party, Congress automatically expects to lead the coalition. It has been losing its leaders to the BJP and a steady flow of these leaders demoralises the Party. The Opposition needs a solid counter to the BJP's propaganda and religious narrative. The BJP has grown since 1980; today, it is the biggest Party in India. It has a strong organisation with unlimited money power.

The Party seeks votes in the name of the Prime Minister.

The BJP has a better chance of winning this time. The BJP's lucky mascot is Modi. His supporters consider him a doer due to the implementation of various measures. These include the Triple Talaq, CAA, revocation of Article 356 in Jammu and Kashmir and the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The BJP highlights its achievements in the last decade and various welfare initiatives to attract voters. The continuity has helped Modi achieve his agenda. Modi has gained international recognition over the past ten years and ensured India's position at the high table, which excites his supporters.

On the negative side, the Opposition claims that the Modi Government has been

targeting Opposition leaders and harassing them with Government probe agencies. The BJP poaches on other parties, lawmakers, and leaders. It has absorbed many second-rung leaders who chose to find better prospects in the safe-ran Party.

With both sides raising their pitch, the 2024 elections will see a no-holds-bar negative campaign, as this will decide the future of the Opposition and the aggressive BJP. Modi's secret to success is a divided opposition. As long as this continues, Modi will continue to win. The Opposition must chant the mantra of unity to win or even improve.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

Hidden toll of higher education

BY
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The competitive trajectory for students begins even before admission and persists through campus placement, detracting them from the holistic experience of higher education

On the campuses of higher education institutions across India, students navigate a complex struggle between academics, campus culture, extracurricular activities, hostel life, student-teacher relations, friendships and intimate relationships. These complex struggles may lead to various mental health challenges for them. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data suggests that student suicides increased by 70% from 2011 to 2021. News reports have highlighted that approximately 35,000 students in India have lost their lives to suicides during 2019-21 with 2023 recording the highest number of student suicides nationwide. These numbers underscore a concerning social trend. The numbers are alarming and

indicate a rising social epidemic.

Within highly competitive environments, academic achievement often becomes the primary measure of success, leaving little opportunity for self-reflection or community involvement. Students find themselves focused on individual survival within this demanding framework, which frequently contributes to mental health challenges. The competitive trajectory for students begins even before admission to educational institutions and persists through the campus placement process, potentially detracting from the holistic experience of higher education for many individuals.

Detachment, Disillusionment

The education system in India was conceived post-independence to nurture nation-building ideals. This was a collective dream. However, the appalling data mentioned above indicates that students are unfortunately driven to self-harm due to increasing alienation and dehumanisation, as they may find themselves estranged from their surroundings and communities. This alienation arises when individuals perceive their academic pursuits as disconnected from the broader societal context, leading to a sense of detachment and disillusionment.

In this hyper-competitive milieu, cooperation and compassion wither, supplanted by a relentless pursuit of individual excellence. Assignments, grades, internships, volunteering, debates, speeches and extracurricular activities done only to showcase in their CVs dominate the student psyche, eclipsing broader societal concerns.

The pursuit of high-paying careers becomes the singular obsession, irrespective of the everyday issues of society they live in. For numerous students, the weight of familial aspirations adds to the stress of academic achievement. Balancing societal expectations and personal identity maintenance creates internal conflicts, as students navigate diverse demands from family, community and self.

Internal, External Tensions

Within this framework of higher education, students from diverse social backgrounds and experiences grapple with different internal and external tensions, exacerbated by their career aspirations, lifestyles and interactions. Differences among students can be reflected through their different cultural capitals, perpetuating privileges and backwardness. Consequently, these individuals may

find themselves embroiled in systemic practices that perpetuate inequalities and hinder the development of a progressive social and scientific outlook. Even then, the illusion of meritocracy reigns supreme, fostering a belief that academic success is the ultimate — a narrative which has always fostered an antagonistic approach towards concerted affirmative action.

Students in elite higher education institutions are exposed to global trends and opportunities through various campus initiatives, including international student exchange programmes. These programmes aim to foster a culture of diversity and cross-cultural understanding among students. However, while these experiences expose these students (mostly a homogenous crowd) to global diversity, they may sometimes overlook regional diversities, disparities and social realities such as poverty, labour issues, climate change, gender disparities and political unrest.

Feelings of Isolation

In the pursuit of individual achievement, students often experience feelings of isolation and loneliness, perceiving themselves as competing against everyone, irrespective of their privileges or disadvantages. This individualistic focus can detach students

from broader societal concerns, including collective traumas and struggles. Suicides in educational settings shouldn't be seen solely as individual actions but as a reflection of broader social issues. Many students feel overwhelmed by the myriad challenges they face alone, lacking avenues for support or shared experiences.

As a result, they may succumb to various forms of addiction and dysfunctional behaviours. This cultural context within the education system has tragically resulted in a concerning rise in student suicides, prompting interventions such as the ban on ceiling fans in hostels.

However, addressing the root causes of student vulnerability requires a more comprehensive approach beyond mere physical measures. Viewing these suicides through a sociological lens, as French sociologist Durkheim posited, reveals them not as isolated incidents, but rather as social phenomena requiring systemic change.

Institutions must recognise the social dimensions of student distress and the pattern behind the cases of suicides and implement reforms that address the underlying structural issues contributing to their vulnerability.

To nurture a generation capable of confronting the myriad

challenges facing India, higher education institutions must transcend the narrow confines of academic excellence and job-seeking approach. It is crucial to foster qualities like empathy, critical thinking and social responsibility. Students should not only excel academically but also become conscientious citizens irrespective of their socio-economic background. Institutional practices can help in establishing this kind of learning culture.

Unfortunately, the current scenario is different. Albert Einstein had said, "The education of the individual, in addition to promoting his own innate abilities, should attempt to develop in him a sense of responsibility for his fellow men in place of the glorification of power and success in our present society." Only then can we unlock the full potential of India's brightest minds and build communities founded on progress and justice, thereby serving the larger interest of the nation.

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