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Need To Implement Constitutional Imperatives

Political parties vied with each other to take centre stage on constitution day — an idea from the Modi government to celebrate the adoption of the Indian Constitution by its constituent assembly on 26 November 1949. Around 415 million Indians, who haven't been to an educational institution, must have been wondering what the celebration was all about. As a nation we have little to be proud of when it comes to education.



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Advertisement **By Gopal Jain**

Political parties vied with each other to take centre stage on constitution day — an idea from the Modi government to celebrate the adoption of the Indian Constitution by its constituent assembly on 26 November 1949. Around 415 million Indians, who haven't been to an educational institution, must have been wondering what the celebration was all about. As a nation we have little to be proud of when it comes to education.

Emancipation from the caste system — India's apartheid — was a central idea of Ambedkar's constitution for the new Indian republic. But in education, India's elite have conspired over the past 65 years to deny emancipation from education darkness. There are still too many Indians without access to education or quality education. Most of those who suffer are poor and/or from the so-called backward castes.

State control over education and denial of natural space to the private sector. The state practises a high-level of hostility to private sector participation in an ancillary sector that sells services and products to the core sector of the state. The private sector participation is by invitation and not by right. Making it illegal to attract crooks. The profile of most education in India is this theory.

The world watches in amazement as the Indian state further hones its hold over the state in education. Preschool enrolment ratios are amongst the lowest in the world. We have stopped participating in PISA studies. The last time we participated was in 2006. Our college enrolment ratios are sub par and two out of five college students in colleges. No wonder we are the world's second-largest importer of education.

India's problems aren't unique but its ostrich like stand on the private sector in education is. Nations across the spectrum irrespective of economic status have embraced the private sector. Our next door neighbour Pakistan has been hailed as the new role model and the role of the private sector in education. Nations from the developed world have embraced the private sector to improve educational outcomes and reach. This embrace of the private sector is being driven by customer choices. In India, it's estimated that

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- » Education
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of this strategy of encumbrance. The private sector's role is limited to the education has been treated as a stealth. They say, when profit in the education sector in India confirms

tor despite a near total failure. Educational standards are so poor that we are languishing at the bottom of the global education table due to poor educational standards.

creasingly out of place in the private sector. The Punjab government based education reform has pushed the private sector to improve educational outcomes.

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between 30-40 per cent of children use private sector schools for education. This number is growing and despite state hostility to the private sector this number will cross 50 per cent by 2025. It is now accepted that the private sector is more efficient in the use of capital and more innovative compared to the state. Also it helps attract investment capital which augments resource availability — a key issue in countries like India. Ambedkar’s India would adopt the following measures to help spread education to Indians from all castes and religions and break the monopoly of India’s elite on modern education

- * Create a framework which sees education as an interplay of funding, delivery and regulation
- * Funding should be the responsibility of the state — it’s the obligation of the state to pay for every Indian’s school education. This should be supplemented by an education loan programme which enables students to pay for skilling and higher education
- * Regulation should be the prerogative of the social sector — licensing bodies should be replaced by accreditation bodies that rate schools and colleges
- * Delivery should be done through the private sector which is more efficient and innovative. This will also help in segregating those who can or cannot pay. The ones who cannot should get vouchers from the state. State participation should be restricted to research institutions.
- * For profit private sector education should be allowed across the spectrum including core education. Consumers are capable of making choices and the state should resist imposing the same
- * Global capital, talent and education operators should be allowed complete and unhindered access
- * Reform RTE — make it outcome focused, eliminate the inspector raj, make it private sector and consumer friendly. In its present form RTE is a Marxist framework aimed at preserving the mediocre public sector schooling at the expense of consumers and the private sector
- * Dismantle the license raj in education — remove all barriers to capacity creating across the spectrum — from K-12 to higher education. Shift focus to accreditation and standards

Successful parallels for reform in education exist in India. Healthcare is an example where a similar framework is visibly at work. Delivery is increasingly in the private sector, funding is with the state and regulation with quasi-governmental social organisations. The results are clearly visible. The Indian healthcare sector is delivering healthcare solutions to an increasingly larger cross section of Indians at a fraction of the cost incurred by the state. India’s represents the world’s largest education opportunity. Allowing free enterprise and embracing the private sector will help attract talent and capital from across India and the world. The biggest beneficiaries would be the poor and the backward classes. Their emancipation is critical to India’s success. Without this meritocracy in education we cannot achieve sabka vikas. Without this educational revolution, we cannot realise our potential as a nation and create the impact we desire for.

India’s young entrepreneurs can create the world’s most valuable education companies. Why are we denying them this opportunity? Currently the opportunity is being usurped by the state and aristocrats from the private sector. It’s time to let meritocracy flourish.

Through its history India has flattered to deceive. Manu’s caste legacy has ensured that India has performed below potential. Education was denied to women and the so called lower castes. We have functioned like a 100 HP vehicle delivering 10 HP of performance. In the India of Ambedkar’s constitution, we should bury Manu’s legacy in education to help us achieve our trust with destiny.

The author, Gopal Jain, is co-founder and managing partner at Gaja Capital, and chairman of Gaja Gives, which supports social organisations. Views expressed here are personal.

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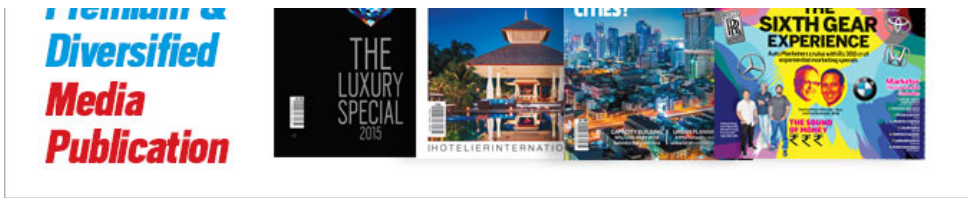
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