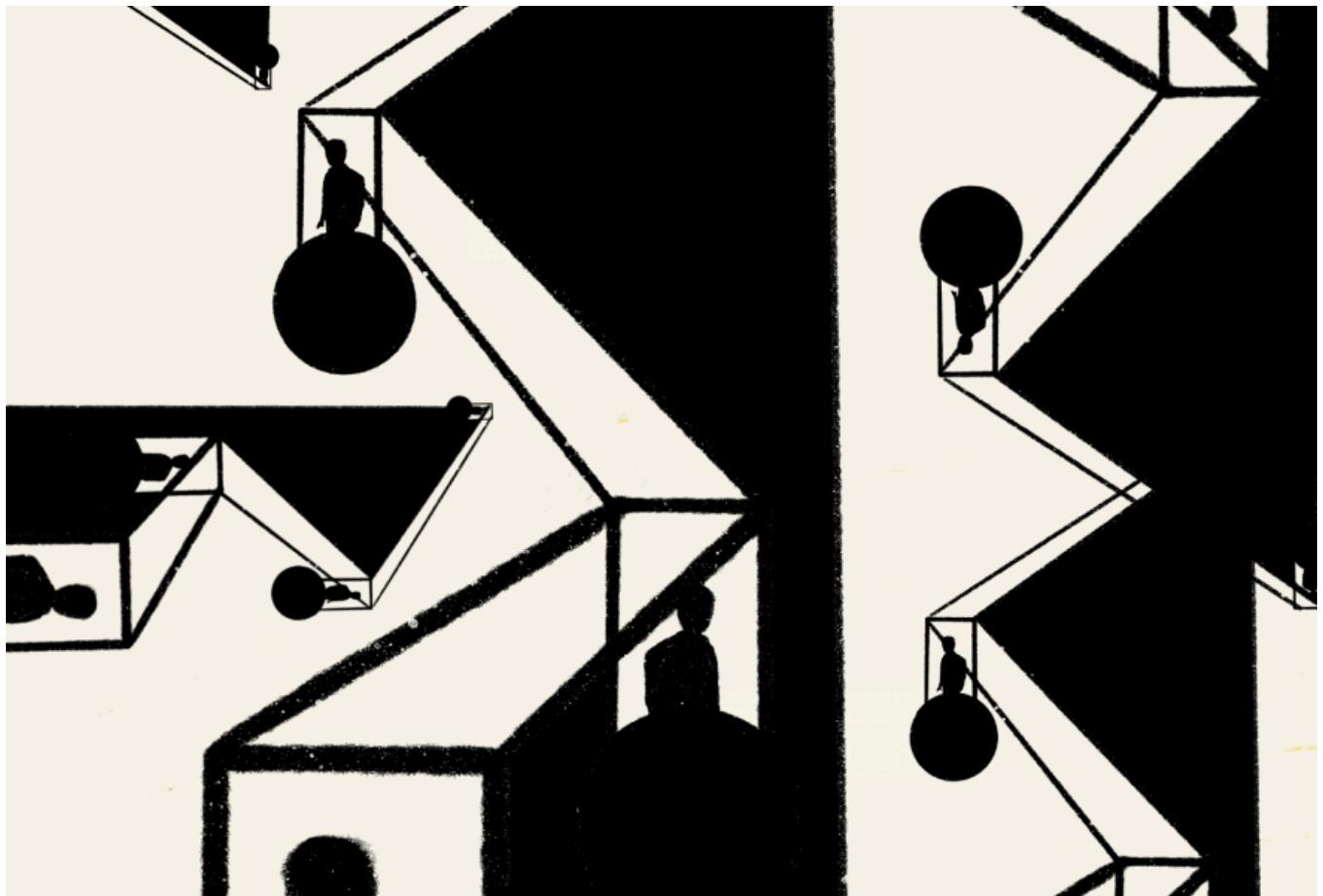


While India Debates Alphabets, Its Youth Learn the Language of Unemployment

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May 22, 2025



For a country as vast, diverse, and complex as India, unity has never meant uniformity. The very idea of India rests not on a single language, culture, or tradition, but on the coexistence of many.

Yet today, there is an unsettling push towards homogenisation, a narrowing of what it means to be “truly Indian.” This drive is evident not only in governance but also in the deeper shaping of society, language, education, culture and collective memory.

Education system

Despite soaring youth unemployment in India, governance is more focussed on cultural homogenisation.

The PLFS report of September 2024 shows that unemployment amongst graduates is 13%, while overall unemployed youth in India has risen to 10.2% in 2023-24. Recruiters complain that our graduates lack skills which are in high demand. This necessitates concentrated focus on making these graduates industry-ready, rather than encumbering them with an education system which is becoming redundant with each day.

A striking manifestation of this trend is unfolding within our classrooms. Instead of encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills, students are offered multiple languages which only adds in making them unemployable for the market.

This is not to say that language is not necessary.

Basic training in one language, be it any vernacular language or Hindi, along with English, should be enough. Students should be taught financial literacy, a skill that teaches them how to take financial decisions, budgeting, investing, credit-debit, etc. Courses like this are completely missing from the school curriculums. The rudimentary AI textbook taught in the Central Board of Secondary Education is nothing but an eyewash, teaching students MS Excel.

Many recruiters have complained that it is hard to find people trained in project management skills. Students should be taught similar things from the early years in these types of managerial skills. Making them adept in multiple languages opens very few and mostly clerical opportunities for them in future.

This prioritisation of certain skills and languages in education is not just about employability, it reflects a broader trend of centralisation in policymaking. Curriculum reforms, language policies, and flagship programs all serve a uniform national vision that seeks to streamline diverse regional identities into a singular narrative. This is by trying to manage, homogenise and at times even erase the differences amongst us rather than recognise it as a defining feature of the Indian experience.

At a moment when India faces unprecedented challenges like jobs crisis, an alarming skills gap and a crumbling public education system, our energies are being spent debating issues that, while emotive, do little to solve the real problems. Instead of investing national effort into preparing the youth for an increasingly complex and competitive world, we are losing precious time battling over scripts and tongues.

Reality check

Between the real needs of the people and the priorities being pushed from above, a dangerous gap is widening. As the government aggressively promotes Hindi as a “national language” and seeks to culturally unify a staggeringly diverse nation, an urgent crisis festers quietly beneath the surface: a generation of young Indians is slipping through the cracks of an educational and skilling collapse.

The numbers are stark. Even among the Indian states, only about 33.7% of Class 3 students scaled up to solving basic two-digit subtraction with the rural youth aged 14 to 18, only 43.3% could correctly solve a simple three-digit by one-digit division problem – a skill typically expected by Class 3 or 4.

Higher education has no consolation whatsoever. Although India’s Gross Enrolment Ratio has risen from 23.7% in 2014-15 to 28.4 % in 2021-22, it has a larger-level cloud problem. Economically weaker sections of mainly Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes,

Scheduled Tribes, and minority communities are now entering colleges in numbers greater than earlier but only from the access point of view.

This does not transform into any quality resource-getting skills. More than 1 crore graduates are produced in India every year, but companies have refrained from hiring them. According to a [report](#) from TeamLease for 2023, only 45% of 2024 graduates were employable for any formal sector job and lacked basic numeracy and digital skills far below the global standards.

Infrastructure, too, paints a bleak picture. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in small towns and districts often lack functioning electricity, internet connectivity, or even basic workshop equipment. Furthermore, soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking are undervalued in many university programmes. For instance, project management skills have the lowest employability rate among top in-demand non-technical skills, with only 23% of graduates deemed employable in this area.

Also read: [Govt's Push Towards Skilling: Big Funding, Poor Outcomes](#)

Consolation or eyewash?

The PM Internship scheme announced by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the 2025 Union Budget aims to provide one crore youth hands-on experience in 500 top companies. They started a pilot project this year with 1.25 lakh youth from low-income families. This is undoubtedly a helpful step. However, the catch is that these young adults between 21 and 24 years old coming from low-income households had a below standard schooling experience.

ASER 2024 reports that only 23.4% of class 3 students can read a class 2 text. It is absolutely foolhardy to think that these children will grow up to fit the eligibility of any fortune 500 company when they reach their adulthood. Even if they are, what kind of positions or work will be assigned to them?

At a time when millions of young Indians are desperate for real opportunities, what they instead find is a system struggling to equip them for the future. The focus on image-building, cultural dominance, and political consolidation has steadily taken precedence over addressing these urgent structural gaps. Rather than strengthening the hands of young Indians with skills, critical thinking, and employability, the system seems increasingly preoccupied with enforcing a singular idea of what it means to be Indian.

It is undeniable that having the same party in power at both the Union government and several states makes it easier to push through major agendas, implement policies swiftly, and maintain political coordination. However, this very convenience comes at a grave cost: it sidelines the essential principles of autonomy, diversity, and democratic balance that forms the core of India's identity.

A common refrain today is that India's youth population is its biggest asset. Yet, in the race for cultural supremacy, we risk sacrificing an entire generation's future on the altar of pride turning out dividend to distress.

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