



India's Education Catastrophe: The Inevitable Harvest of the Capitalist-Secular System

Nationwide student protests against the BJP government reflect the cascading failure of India's examination machinery. The National Testing Agency cancelled the 2026 NEET-UG medical entrance exam — affecting 2.27 million candidates — after a leaked paper reportedly changed hands for up to ₹5 million. This was not the first such leak; over the years the tally runs into the hundreds. Following this collapse, over 21 students died by suicide, with no official accountability. It follows the 2024 NEET scandal, which exposed organised rackets across states without a single conviction. Protests, including a hunger strike at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, have now forced the issue into the headlines.

These are not isolated administrative lapses but the predictable outcome of the system's structure. India's education architecture traces to Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Indian Education, designed to produce a narrow English-educated class serving colonial administration while leaving the vernacular and rural masses a residual system. What changed after 1947 was the flag over the institutions, not the underlying logic of who the system serves — capitalism and secular democracy inherited that scaffolding and adapted it to market logic.

The Material Reality

Government spending on education stands at roughly 2.7% of GDP — well below the 6% the Kothari Commission recommended six decades ago. The parliament was informed that 89,000–94,000 government schools closed between 2014-15 and 2024-25; over 65,000 now run with fewer than 10 students, and more than 5,000 report zero enrolment. These closures are concentrated in rural, tribal and conflict-affected areas — precisely where the population can least afford private alternatives, and the vacuum has been created on purpose by the retreat of the state. In the same decade, nearly 43,000 new private schools opened, a deliberate transfer of provision from state to market.

Quality has collapsed alongside access. ASER 2024 found only 23.4% of Class 3 children in government schools can read a Class 2-level text, and only 33.7% can perform basic subtraction — two-thirds of ten-year-olds in the public system lack foundational numeracy. NFHS-6 data show 29% of children under five are stunted and 19% wasted, impairing cognitive development before school even begins.

Education in India is no longer a public good; it is a booming, lucrative industry. Into this vacuum has rushed a for-profit private sector. A single private MBBS seat now costs approximately ₹1 crore, an amount inaccessible to the vast majority of households. Household spending in non-government schools runs nearly nine times higher than in government ones. Outstanding education loans exceeded ₹1.08 lakh crore in 2024, with foreign study comprising a disproportionate share, as families mortgage ancestral land to fund degrees — often from Western universities that actively recruit Indian students as a revenue stream. The examination system itself has become a site of organised corruption, with networks manipulating exam-centre computers, selling “question papers,” and coaching cartels operating alongside elements of the testing bureaucracy.

The Systemic Cause: Capitalism and Secularism

This is a microcosm of a deeply flawed capitalist system in which a child's right to learn is turned into a commodity. Under capitalism, provision flows according to ability to pay, not need: a labourer's child is a cost yielding no return, while a capitalist's child is a market. Underfunding public education while enabling private expansion is therefore entirely rational for capital — it converts a state obligation into a private investment. The same logic drives the examination rackets: where a credential determines economic mobility, the credential becomes a good bought and sold with organised crime filling the gap.

In a secular democracy where men are the sovereign legislators, the result is a system beyond reform: it lacks transcendent accountability and institutionalises rule by the corrupt and incompetent. Analysis of the 2024 general elections found 46% of elected MPs had declared

criminal cases, 31% facing serious charges including murder, rape and kidnapping; nearly half the Council of Ministers carried similar proceedings. Over a quarter of parliamentarians have only school-level education or less, some classified as barely literate. This is the body that sets education policy and budgets for over 1.4 billion people. An electoral mechanism driven by capital expenditure running into thousands of crores, muscle power and communal exploitation does not select the capable — it elevates those best able to purchase or coerce votes. The result is a ruling elite that treats governance as a spoils system: policy, including education policy, oscillates according to the interests of the powerful and not according to any fixed principle of justice, reducing human life and dignity to a power calculus with no binding obligation on the ruler to feed, shelter, or educate the subject. The state's secularism severs governance from any unchanging criterion of right and wrong, and its democracy delivers power to those most adept at manipulation.

The Only Alternative

Indeed, it is a tragedy that children of India have committed suicide having been denied the chance of education in medicine, so they can contribute to healthcare. In Shariah, education, along with healthcare, are amongst the services that the state must provide. Hizb ut Tahrir has stated in its adopted book “Economic System in Islam,” that “Amongst the services for which the State has to hire employees in order to provide for the people are education and medicine. In regard to education this is the case, due to the Unanimous Consensus of the Companions (ra) (Ijma'a as-Sahaba) on giving provision to the teachers by a particular amount as a wage for them from the Bait ul-Mal. Also, because the Prophet (saw) assigned the ransom of the captives (of Mushriks) as being to teach ten Muslim children, while this ransom was of the booties which is property belonging to all the Muslims. In regard to medicine, this is because the Prophet (saw) was given a doctor as a gift to him, whom he assigned to the Muslims as a whole. The fact that the Messenger (saw) received the gift and did not dispose of it, nor take it, but rather assigned it for the Muslims, is a Shariah evidence that this gift belongs to the Muslims, as a whole, and not for him only. Since, the Prophet (saw) had received a gift and he put it for all the Muslims, this evidences it is one of the matters that belong to the Muslim public. Therefore, giving provisions to the doctors and teachers is from the Bait ul-Mal. Nonetheless, the individual himself is allowed to hire a doctor and hire a teacher. However, the State is obliged to make medicine and education available for all citizens, with no difference between the Muslim and the Dhimmī or between the rich and the poor. This is because these are like the Adhan and the judiciary which is of the matters whose benefit extends beyond the person oneself, and the people need them; so they are of the public services which have to be made available for all citizens, and the Bait ul- Mal has to secure them.”

Throughout the centuries of Shariah ruling governance, the Muslim World was the location of the best schools, universities, hospitals and teaching hospitals. The Muslim capitals were the favoured destination for both students and patients from around the world. Restoring education as a guaranteed right requires replacing the capitalist-secular order with a system that subordinates governance to the Shari'ah. Under the Khilafah Rashidah (rightly guided Caliphate), education at every level — from the primary stages of literacy to the highest specialisations — is funded entirely by the state, and no private entity is permitted to profit from the population's basic educational needs.

The protests sweeping India show that a secular capitalist state, by its very architecture, cannot deliver education as a universal right — it can only manage its commodification, mitigating symptoms while deepening the underlying disease. The Islamic alternative is not a refinement of this order but its abolition, and the establishment of a state that carries the obligation of knowledge as a trust for which it will be questioned on the Day of Judgment. This is not rhetoric — it is the only structural solution that corresponds to the scale of the failure now on display.

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