

Daily Editorial Analysis 1 August 2025

August 1, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com

Nudges From the Court, Silence from the Commission

Context

- The **Supreme Court of India** has recently raised urgent and uncomfortable questions regarding the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in Bihar, initiated by the Election Commission of India (ECI).
- While the **ECI claims this is a routine technical update**, the process and its **potential consequences suggest a deeper, more troubling shift**, one that risks undermining the democratic foundation of India's electoral system.

The Problematic Aspect of Special Intensive Revision (SIR)

• From Inclusion to Exclusion

- Traditionally, **India's electoral system has operated on the presumption of inclusion**. Citizens were presumed eligible to vote unless proven otherwise.
- However, **the Bihar SIR represents a stark reversal** of this principle.
- Now, **every voter must prove citizenship through fresh documentation**, including rare documents like birth certificates and passports, within an unreasonably short one-month window. Failure to comply risks disenfranchisement.
- The **stated goal of accuracy conceals a deeper ideological transformation**.
- This **policy marks a shift from administrative facilitation to bureaucratic obstruction**, where access to the franchise is no longer a guaranteed right but a privilege contingent on documentation.
- For millions of marginalised Indians, **the poor, the illiterate, those living in remote or disaster-prone areas, meeting such demands is nearly impossible**.
- **Aadhaar cards and ration cards, commonly held by the poor, are not accepted**. In Bihar alone, over 6.5 million people may be disenfranchised.

• A Betrayal of Constitutional Promises

- India's founding vision, as articulated by B.R. Ambedkar and implemented by the first Chief Election Commissioner Sukumar Sen, was bold and revolutionary: **universal adult suffrage regardless of caste, gender, literacy, or wealth**.

- Despite massive logistical challenges and a largely illiterate population, **India's first elections were inclusive and empowering.**
- **Today's ECI, under the leadership of its 26th Chief Election Commissioner**, Gyanesh Kumar, appears to have **abandoned this legacy.**
- By demanding documents that most Indians lack, **it raises the bar for participation. What was once a right has become an obstacle course.**

Historical Parallels: Legal Facades, Political Motives

- The disenfranchisement underway in India **echoes the Jim Crow era in the United States**, where **African-Americans were systematically denied the vote** through literacy tests, poll taxes, and bureaucratic roadblocks.
- Though cloaked in legality, **these mechanisms served to suppress vulnerable communities.**
- India has robust constitutional and legal protections: Supreme Court judgments like **Rahim Ali vs State of Assam (2024)** and **Lal Babu Hussein vs Electoral Registration Officer (1995)** underscore the **illegality of arbitrary disenfranchisement.**
- Yet, **bureaucratic processes today often ignore the spirit of these rulings.** The ECI insists on technical compliance, while ignoring the social, logistical, and ethical ramifications.

Broader Implication of SIR: A Constitutional Crisis in Slow Motion

- What is happening is not simply administrative malpractice and it appears to be the **creeping onset of a quiet Emergency.**
- No tanks roll through the streets, **but millions are silently removed from voter rolls.**
- **The state, through omission and commission, is making the right to vote conditional**, not on citizenship per se, but on an ability to navigate complex documentation and deadlines.
- This **erosion of democratic rights calls for resistance from all quarters**, the judiciary, civil society, and the general public.
- The **Supreme Court's pointed questioning of the ECI is a step in the right direction**, but subtle nudges are no longer enough.
- **Assertive judicial intervention is needed to protect the core values** of the Constitution.

The Way Ahead: Reclaiming the Republic

- Historian Ornit Shani reminds us that **India's commitment to universal franchise was not an administrative convenience**, but an audacious moral and political decision.
- That **achievement must not be undone under the guise of vigilance** or technical rigor because elections are not competitive exams.
- The **vote is not a license granted by a bureaucrat.** It is a declaration of belonging, that every citizen, regardless of background, is an equal participant in the republic.
- The **shift from presumed inclusion to presumptive exclusion fundamentally alters the nature of that belonging.**

- In a country as diverse and unequal as India, **democratic participation is one of the few instruments of empowerment available to the marginalised.**
- If the right to vote becomes conditional on inaccessible documents, **it becomes a privilege for the documented elite, the urban, salaried, tech-savvy class,** while the poor and displaced are locked out.

Conclusion

- At its core, **this is not just about voter lists.** It is about power: who has it, who gets to claim it, and who is excluded from it.
- **If disenfranchisement continues unchecked, India risks becoming a democracy in name only,** where only the counted are heard, and the uncounted are forgotten.
- The **ECI must be reminded of its constitutional duty:** to facilitate, not frustrate, the democratic process.
- The **Supreme Court must act decisively, not just cautiously** and citizens must reclaim the right to vote as a birthright, not a privilege proven through paperwork.

Nudges From the Court, Silence from the Commission FAQs

Q1. What is the main concern with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar?

Ans. The main concern is that it requires fresh proof of citizenship, which could disenfranchise millions who lack rare documents.

Q2. How does the current policy differ from India's founding vision of voting rights?

Ans. The current policy shifts from presumed inclusion to presumptive exclusion, undermining the principle of universal adult franchise.

Q3. Why are Aadhaar and ration cards not sufficient for voter verification in Bihar's SIR?

Ans. Aadhaar and ration cards are not accepted, despite being widely held by the poor, making the documentation requirement unfair and exclusionary.

Q4. What historical parallel is drawn to highlight the risk of disenfranchisement?

Ans. There appears to be a parallel with the Jim Crow era in the U.S., where legal tools were used to suppress Black voters.

Q5. What is the essay's central message about the right to vote?

Ans. Voting is a right of citizenship guaranteed by the Constitution, not something that should depend on difficult paperwork.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education

Context

- The **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** marks a paradigm shift in India's educational landscape, particularly in the domain of **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**.
- For decades, early education in India has been marred by disparities, primarily due to the limited reach of the public sector.
- By institutionalising ECCE within government schools, the NEP has initiated a structural transformation towards **greater equity and quality** in foundational learning.

The Ambitious Vision of NEP 2020: Addressing Historical Inequities

- Historically, **government schools enrolled children only from Class 1**, leaving children aged 3–6 in the care of **Anganwadi centres**, which, although critical for early nutrition and care, lacked a formal educational focus.
- In contrast, private schools long offered **structured nursery education**, creating a **gap in preparedness** and perpetuating early disadvantages for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- The NEP seeks to **bridge this gap** by integrating preschool classes (Balvatika 1, 2, and 3) into government schools, a move that not only promises **universalisation of ECCE by 2030** but also aims to **level the playing field**.

Structural Shifts in ECCE: Expansion, Migration, and Reorientation

• Expansion of ECCE Infrastructure

- The first shift is the **planned expansion** of the ECCE infrastructure.
- The stagnation of ECCE services around the 14 lakh Anganwadi centres is now giving way to a **growing network of preschool classes in public schools**.
- With the Ministry of Education channeling resources through the **Samagra Shiksha scheme**, many States and Union Territories have begun setting up preschool classes.
- However, **utilisation is uneven**, with some states lagging in initiating or fully implementing these provisions.
- This expansion demands **robust planning for recruitment, training, and deployment** of skilled ECCE educators.
- Without a competent and well-supported workforce, the expansion risks becoming a superficial change.

• Migration from Anganwadis to Schools

- The second shift pertains to a **growing preference among parents for preschool education in government schools** over Anganwadis.
- This trend, already evident in regions like **Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu**, is largely driven by the perception that **schools offer superior learning environments**.
- Consequently, 4–6-year-old children are migrating from Anganwadis to schools, **threatening the relevance of Anganwadis** for this age group.
- To remain relevant, the Anganwadi system must **reimagine its role** within the ECCE framework.

- Initiatives such as the Ministry of Women and Child Development's **Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi** underscore a renewed emphasis on **integrating education with care and nutrition**.
- However, the real challenge lies in **ground-level execution**, ensuring that Anganwadi workers are not only trained but also **adequately supported** to deliver age-appropriate educational activities.
- Simultaneously, schools must **resist the temptation to schoolify preschool education**, instead centring it around **play-based, holistic learning** rather than rote reading and writing.

• Reorientation Towards the 0-3 Age Group

- Perhaps the most transformative shift is the potential **reorientation of the Anganwadi system to focus on the 0-3-year age group** through structured **home visits**.
- Research from both Indian and global contexts, including the **Perry Preschool Project** and a **Yale-Pratham study in Odisha**, highlights the **profound developmental impact** of early interventions in the first three years of life.
- Yet, **implementation gaps remain**, largely because Anganwadi workers are overburdened and often prioritise children who are physically present (3-6 years) over those requiring home-based care.
- If government schools begin taking full responsibility for 3-6 year-olds, this opens up **a critical opportunity** for Anganwadis to **refocus their mission**.
- By reallocating resources and responsibilities, Anganwadi workers could dedicate time to **home-based interventions for infants and toddlers**, and to supporting **pregnant and lactating mothers**, thereby strengthening the developmental foundations laid in the first 1,000 days of life.
- This potential **division of labor** between schools and Anganwadis, though ambitious, could radically improve India's ECCE outcomes if pursued with clarity and commitment.

Conclusion

- The NEP 2020 lays a **visionary and equity-driven blueprint** for transforming early childhood education in India.
- However, this transformation is far from automatic. Each structural shift, **expansion, migration, and reorientation**, brings its own set of challenges related to infrastructure, training, parental perceptions, and policy coherence.
- The **success of this reimagined ECCE ecosystem** will ultimately depend on the **inter-sectoral collaboration** between education, health, and nutrition departments, the **empowerment of frontline workers**, and **responsive governance** at the state and district levels.
- If implemented with thoughtfulness and equity at its core, the NEP's ECCE reforms could not only **reduce foundational disparities** but also lay the groundwork for a **healthier, more capable, and more just India**.

Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education FAQs

Q1. What major issue in early childhood education does the NEP 2020 aim to address?

Ans. NEP 2020 aims to reduce inequity by introducing preschool classes in government schools, bridging the gap between private nursery education and public Anganwadi-based care.

Q2. What are the three major structural shifts in ECCE introduced by NEP 2020?

Ans. The three shifts are expansion of ECCE infrastructure in government schools, migration of children from Anganwadis to schools and reorientation of Anganwadis to focus on 0–3-year-olds through home visits.

Q3. Why are parents preferring government preschool classes over Anganwadis?

Ans. Parents perceive schools as offering better educational opportunities compared to Anganwadis, prompting a shift in enrolment.

Q4. What is the risk of “schoolification” in preschool education?

Ans. The risk is that schools might overly focus on formal reading and writing, neglecting play-based, holistic development essential for early learners.

Q5. How can Anganwadi centres play a transformative role under the NEP framework?

Ans. By focusing on the care and development of 0–3-year-olds and pregnant/lactating mothers through home visits, Anganwadis can strengthen early childhood outcomes significantly.

Source: The Hindu

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/daily-editorial-analysis-1-august-2025/>

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