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Poll Integrity and Self-Sabotage, Parties and the ECI

Context

- In India, discrepancies such as duplication, ineligible entries, and ghost voters have long raised concerns about electoral integrity.
- These issues not only open doors to fraud, impersonation and multiple voting, but also corrode public trust in the democratic process.
- While much of the criticism is directed at the Election Commission of India (ECI), political parties themselves share responsibility for enabling this institutional decline.
- A deeper analysis reveals how the ECI's waning credibility, coupled with the weakening of political parties at the grassroots level, threatens the very foundations of representative democracy.

The Erosion of the Election Commission's Credibility and Changing Nature of Political Parties

- The Erosion of the Election Commission's Credibility
 - The ECI, entrusted with maintaining clean electoral rolls, has increasingly faced criticism for opacity and inefficiency.
 - Instead of addressing irregularities, the Commission has attempted to restrict inspection and oversight, thereby deepening suspicion about its impartiality.
 - This is a sharp fall from grace when compared to the 1990s, under T.N. Seshan, when the ECI emerged as a formidable guardian of electoral integrity.
 - At that time, the Commission implemented stringent reforms, from monitoring election expenditure to introducing the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), and surveys consistently ranked it as one of India's most credible institutions.
 - Today, however, its legacy is under question, its authority weakened, and its integrity doubted.
- Changing Nature of Political Parties
 - While the ECI has been alleged to lose credibility, political parties have also contributed to democratic decay by reshaping themselves into highly centralised electoral machines.

- **Traditional campaign methods, door-to-door visits**, community meetings, and street-corner gatherings, **have given way to digital strategies such as social media outreach**, phone banking, and AI-driven chatbots.
- These **techniques create the illusion of personal connection** but bypass the slow, trust-building work of local party organisations.
- Moreover, **political parties increasingly rely on professional consultants** who design strategies, craft messaging, and even influence candidate selection.
- This **reliance sidelines local workers**, reducing them to mere providers of raw data for analytical models.

The Role of Local Organisations and Booth-Level Agents

- Electoral integrity **depends on close collaboration between the ECI and political parties** at the local level.
- The **Commission's manual outlines provisions for consultation during voter roll revisions**, with political parties expected to scrutinise draft lists and flag discrepancies.
- To formalise this, **the ECI introduced Booth Level Agents (BLAs)**, party representatives tasked with assisting booth-level officers in ensuring accuracy.
- **BLAs are meant to scrutinise draft rolls**, submit corrections, and act as the crucial link between voters, parties, and the ECI.
- On paper, **this system is robust, with safeguards such as limits on bulk applications** and requirements for cross-verification.
- In practice, however, **recent controversies, such as irregularities in the Mahadevapura constituency of Karnataka**, raise pressing questions. Were BLAs complicit in manipulating the system? Were they negligent in their responsibilities?
- **Or is there institutional bias favouring incumbents?** The controversy underscores the dangers of weakened local organisations: when parties abandon vigilance, systemic failures slip through unchecked.

The Way Forward: Reviving Political Parties' Local Role

- The **current crisis presents an opportunity for political renewal**. If parties revitalise their dormant local units, they can not only improve electoral roll oversight but also restore their democratic relevance.
- Early signs of such revival are evident in Kerala, where **parties are now scrutinising draft rolls more diligently for errors** such as duplicate entries and multiple voter IDs.
- This **suggests a growing recognition that democracy depends on active engagement** beyond election-day campaigns.
- History offers a cautionary tale. **In the post-Independence period, weak Congress party units allied with local elites to subvert land reforms**, undermining democratic promises of agrarian justice.
- Similarly, **today's neglect of local structures risks distorting democracy itself**. Without vigilant grassroots organisations, parties may not merely lose elections, they may lose the very arena of fair competition.

Conclusion

- **India possesses a well-designed framework for safeguarding electoral integrity.** Yet no system can withstand neglect or manipulation.
- When **the ECI hides behind opacity rather than accountability, it erodes the trust** necessary for a functioning democracy.
- When **political parties prioritise technology and consultants over grassroots networks, they weaken their ability** to act as democratic counterweights.
- **Electoral roll controversies thus serve as a wake-up call:** democracy cannot survive on institutional structures alone.

Poll Integrity and Self-Sabotage, Parties and the ECI FAQs

Q1. Why are discrepancies in electoral rolls a threat to democracy?

Ans. Discrepancies such as ghost voters and duplicate entries enable fraud and weaken public trust in elections, which undermines representative democracy.

Q2. How has the credibility of the Election Commission of India changed over time?

Ans. The ECI was once seen as highly credible, especially during T.N. Seshan's tenure in the 1990s, but today it faces criticism for opacity and eroded trust.

Q3. What impact has technology had on political parties' functioning?

Ans. Technology has made campaigning more efficient but weakened local party organisations by replacing grassroots work with centralised, consultant-driven strategies.

Q4. What role do Booth Level Agents (BLAs) play in elections?

Ans. BLAs are party representatives responsible for scrutinising draft electoral rolls, assisting with corrections, and acting as a link between voters, parties, and the ECI.

Q5. What opportunity does the current electoral roll controversy present?

Ans. It offers political parties a chance to revitalise their local units, strengthen democratic engagement, and restore electoral credibility.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Justice is Not About 'Teaching Someone a Lesson'

Context

- The **recent judgment of the Chhattisgarh High Court in a custodial death** case exposes **troubling fissures in India's legal approach** to police violence and caste oppression.
- While the facts are deeply disturbing, a Dalit man dying in custody after a medical report found no injuries, only for the post-mortem to reveal 26 wounds, **the reasoning of the court is perhaps more concerning.**

- In downgrading a conviction from murder to culpable homicide, **the High Court suggested that the police officers had intended merely to teach a lesson** to the victim.
- This **phrase, seemingly minor, carries profound implications** for the rule of law, constitutional morality, and the protection of vulnerable communities.

Violence Cannot Be Rationalised as Deterrence

- The phrase teaching a lesson **signals more than an explanation of intent**, it normalises custodial brutality as a form of discipline.
- The **Constitution of India envisions the state as an institution bound by procedures, rights, and proportionality**, not one that sanctions violence as correction.
- To frame custodial assault as misguided discipline is to **blur the line between legal authority and authoritarian force**.
- **Courts, as guardians of constitutional morality, cannot afford to rationalise state violence** under the guise of deterrence.
- **Judicial language shapes reasoning, and reasoning shapes practice**: when a constitutional court entertains the possibility of violence as correction, it sends a dangerous signal to police officers that excesses may be excusable zeal rather than criminal acts.

The Caste Dimension of Custodial Deaths

- Equally significant is the **erasure of caste from the narrative**. The victim in this case was a Dalit man, assaulted by upper-caste officers.
- Yet **both the trial and appellate courts dismissed the applicability of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**, on grounds that there was no direct evidence of caste-based motivation.
- This **narrow reading ignores how caste power operates** in structural, implicit ways.
- To require explicit slurs or overt declarations of caste animus is to **deny the lived experience of caste-based violence, particularly in rural policing** where Dalits and Adivasis are disproportionately subjected to brutality.
- By setting the bar for proving caste intent unrealistically high, **courts risk hollowing out the SC/ST Act and failing the very communities it was designed to protect**.

Judicial Precedent and Persistent Impunity

- Custodial violence is not a new or isolated phenomenon.
- The **Supreme Court has repeatedly issued guidelines**, from the landmark **K. Basu case** onwards, mandating safeguards against torture and abuse in custody.
- Yet **deaths in custody remain alarmingly frequent**, disproportionately targeting the poor and marginalised.
- **Compliance with judicial safeguards remains patchy, and accountability mechanisms are weak**, often compromised by the fact that investigations are led by the same institutions implicated in abuse.

- Against this backdrop, **the High Court's language is especially damaging: rather than confronting systemic rot, it risks legitimising it** by portraying violence as purposeful, if excessive, discipline.

The Path of Judicial Integrity

- If the judiciary is to act as the bulwark of constitutional democracy, **it must reject any narrative that confers moral legitimacy upon custodial violence.**
- **Police officers are not vigilantes empowered to correct behaviour through force;** they are public servants bound by law.
- To **endorse the idea of teaching a lesson is to substitute fear for justice** and coercion for due process.
- **True deterrence arises not from bruises inflicted in the shadows of police stations** but from proportionate punishment within the legal system.
- For structural reform, **courts must insist that custodial violence is always criminal, never disciplinary.**
- The **SC/ST Act must be interpreted expansively to capture the systemic and caste-coded nature** of violence against Dalits and Adivasis.
- **Independent oversight mechanisms must be empowered to investigate custodial abuse,** ensuring that accountability does not rest with compromised institutions.
- Most importantly, **judicial discourse itself must reflect zero tolerance for the rationalisation of state brutality.**

Conclusion

- The **Constitution of India is built on the principles of dignity, equality, and rule of law.** These values cannot coexist with a legal system that tolerates or rationalises custodial violence under the guise of discipline.
- The **High Court's invocation of teaching a lesson risks undermining decades of constitutional jurisprudence** and emboldening future violators.
- **What is required is not rhetorical sympathy but structural transformation,** stronger enforcement of safeguards, robust application of protective laws, and a judicial voice that affirms that no citizen, least of all the most marginalised, should have their rights trampled in the name of correction.
- **To accept anything less is to inch toward authoritarianism,** where justice is written not in rights, but in bruises.

Justice is Not About 'Teaching Someone a Lesson' FAQs

Q1. What did the Chhattisgarh High Court say about the police officers' intent in the custodial death case?

Ans. The High Court observed that the police officers had intended "to teach a lesson" to the victim for misbehaving in public.

Q2. Why is the phrase "teaching a lesson" problematic in judicial reasoning?

Ans. It is problematic because it normalises custodial violence as discipline rather than recognising it as a criminal

act.

Q3. How did the courts treat the applicability of the SC/ST Act in this case?

Ans. The courts dismissed the Act's applicability, demanding explicit proof of caste-based motivation and ignoring structural caste power.

Q4. What has the Supreme Court emphasised in earlier judgments on custodial violence?

Ans. The Supreme Court has stressed procedural safeguards, transparency in detention, and strict limits on police use of force.

Q5. What should the judiciary do to uphold constitutional values in such cases?

Ans. The judiciary should treat custodial violence as criminal, apply the SC/ST Act robustly, and avoid language that legitimises state brutality.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Overhauling India's Vocational Education and Training (VET) System - A Pathway to Viksit Bharat

Context:

- The Prime Minister's **Independence Day address** (August 15) highlighted reforms for demand-driven growth, recalibration of GST, and the **need to boost productivity through education and skill development**.
- India faces challenges of **low-skilled workforce**, despite a large demographic advantage, **making vocational education critical for employability and productivity**.

India's Current VET Landscape:

- **Institutional strength:** Over 14,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 25 lakh sanctioned seats.
- **Low utilisation:** Actual enrolment was only around 12 lakh in 2022, implying just 48% seat utilisation.
- **Low employment outcomes:**
 - In 2018, the employment rate among ITI graduates was **63%**.
 - Countries with robust VET systems such as Germany, Singapore, and Canada reported employment rates ranging between 80 and 90%.
 - These statistics point to a VET system that is both **ineffective and unattractive for the Indian youth**.
- **Formally trained workforce:** Just 4% in India, compared to much higher figures abroad.

Challenges in India's VET System:

- **Late integration in education system:**
 - **VET in India** introduced **post high-school education**.

- This has not only shortened the period available for hands-on training before the youth enter the job market, but also does not allow for orientation towards employable skills.
- **Lack of academic progression**
- No defined pathways from VET to higher education in India. No credit transfers between systems.
- **Poor perception and quality issues:**
 - **Outdated, industry-misaligned curricula** in India.
 - **Over one-third of ITI instructor posts are vacant** due to limited training capacity at National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs).
 - **Weak quality monitoring**, with irregular ITI grading and no feedback systems.
- **Weak public-private partnerships (PPPs):**
 - **In India**, the engagement of employers in the private sector is limited, ITIs depend heavily on government funding, MSMEs (which drive local job creation) have low engagement with ITIs due to capacity constraints.
 - **Sector Skill Councils**, which play a key role in integrating training with industry needs, lack state-level presence in India.

Learning from International Best Practices:

- **Integration in education system:** In **Germany**, VET is integrated at the upper secondary level through a **dual system**, combining school education with paid apprenticeships.
- **Academic progression:** **Singapore** ensures progression from VET to universities, offering VET either as technical education (at the post-secondary level) or via polytechnics (at the tertiary level) through dual vocational tracks.
- **Perception and quality:**
 - **Singapore** has industry-led curriculum design, high instructor quality, regular audits and a mechanism that seeks constant feedback from employers and trainees.
 - **Singapore** also has a **Skill Future Programme**, where the government offers subsidies to upskill throughout one's career.
- **Public-private partnerships (PPPs):** In **Germany, Singapore, and Canada**, governments fund VET institutions, while employers pay for apprenticeships, share training costs, and also help design curricula.

Reforms Needed in India:

- **Early integration of VET:** Implement National Education Policy (**NEP**) 2020 recommendations for VET at school level.
- **Pathways to higher education:** Fast-track **National Credit Framework** for academic progression and credit transfers.
- **Improve quality and relevance:**
 - Align training with local industry demand.
 - Expand NSTIs, recruit instructors, strengthen ITI grading.
 - Collect trainee feedback for continuous improvement.
- **Strengthen PPPs:**

- Scale up **Private Training Partner**
- Involve MSMEs, CSR funding for skilling.
- **Increase funding:**
 - India spends 3% of the education budget on VET vs. 10–13% in Germany or Singapore or Canada.
 - Need **performance-linked public funding** and **revenue autonomy** for ITIs.

Recent Government Schemes:

- **Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme:**
 - ELI Part A offers up to Rs 15,000 for first-time EPFO-registered workers.
 - Part B gives employers Rs 3,000 a month for every new hire.
 - Both ELI schemes **push formalisation** of jobs but have **no skilling components**.
- **PM Internship Scheme:**
 - It aims to provide one-year placements to youth in top companies, but lacks pathways to permanent jobs.
- **ITI Upgradation Scheme:**
 - It focuses on modernising 1,000 government ITIs in partnership with industry, but not necessarily the quality of training.

Way Forward:

- Current initiatives are **piecemeal and insufficient**.
- **Need systemic overhaul to:**
 - Make VET attractive and effective.
 - Link it with formal employment and upward mobility.
- **Transforming VET** into a pathway to quality jobs, which is vital for realising Viksit Bharat.

Conclusion:

- **A future-ready India must transform its vocational education system** into a dynamic, industry-linked, and aspirational pathway that equips youth with globally competitive skills.
- Such an overhaul will not only **enhance employability and productivity** but also act as a **cornerstone** for achieving the vision of **Viksit Bharat @2047**.

Overhauling India's Vocational Education and Training (VET) System FAQs

Q1. What are the key challenges of India's VET system?

Ans. Late integration, no academic pathways, outdated courses, instructor shortage, poor quality checks, weak industry linkages.

Q2. How can international VET models guide India?

Ans. Germany's dual system, Singapore's lifelong skilling, and Canada's PPP model highlight early integration, quality, and employer involvement.

Q3. Why are public-private partnerships important for VET?

Ans. They ensure industry-relevant training, cost-sharing, and curriculum design—currently weak in India.

Q4. Are recent government schemes sufficient to address skilling gaps?

Ans. No, they focus on jobs and infrastructure but lack quality skilling and career progression.

Q5. What reforms are needed to make VET a job pathway?

Ans. Early schooling integration, credit transfers, industry-aligned curricula, MSME participation, and higher funding.

Source: IE

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