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The Stark Reality of Educational Costs in India

Context

- Education is a constitutionally guaranteed right in India. Article 21A ensures **free and compulsory education** for children aged six to 14, while the NEP 2020 extends this vision to cover ages three to 18.
- Despite these commitments, schooling continues to impose a **substantial financial burden** on families, as shown by recent national data.
- Therefore, it is important to analyse enrolment patterns, educational expenditure, and the growth of private coaching to assess the widening gap between constitutional promises and the reality faced by households.

Enrolment Patterns: The Growing Shift to Private Schools

- Government schools still enrol **55.9%** of students nationally, yet private unaided schools account for a significant **31.9%** of enrolments.
- This shift is far more prominent in urban areas, where **51.4%** of students attend private institutions compared to **24.3%** in rural regions.
- The gender gap remains small, with **34% of boys** and **29.5% of girls** enrolled in private schools.
- Across all levels of schooling, urban private enrolment is consistently higher, reaching **62.9% at the pre-primary** stage and declining to **42.3% at higher secondary**.
- Compared with previous NSS data, private school enrolment has risen across both rural and urban India, particularly at the primary and middle levels.
- This upward trend reflects increasing parental preference for private institutions, driven by perceptions of better quality.

Educational Expenditure: The Financial Burden on Households

- Despite official guarantees of free education, many government school students still incur costs. **25.3% of rural** and **34.7% of urban** government school students report paying course fees.
- In private schools, the figure is almost universal, with around **98%** of students paying fees.
- The fee gap between government and private schools is stark. In rural government schools, annual fees range from **₹823 to ₹7,308**, while in rural private schools they range from **₹17,988 to ₹33,567**.
- Urban households face even higher private school fees, from **₹26,188** at pre-primary to **₹49,075** at higher secondary.

- When converted into monthly terms, private schooling represents a heavy burden: rural families spend **₹1,499-₹2,797** per month, while urban families spend **₹2,182-₹4,089**.
- These costs align with the monthly consumption of **the poorest 5% to the third income decile**, indicating that private schooling consumes a disproportionate share of household budgets.
- This challenges the notion that basic education in India is effectively free.

Private Coaching: An Additional Layer of Inequality

- Private coaching has become widespread, with **25.5% of rural** and **30.7% of urban** students relying on it.
- The proportion rises sharply at higher levels of education, reaching **36.7% in rural** and **40.2% in urban secondary** schooling.
- Coaching costs add another burden. Urban students spend an average of **₹13,026** annually on tuition, almost double the rural average of **₹7,066**. At the higher secondary stage, expenditures rise to **₹22,394 in urban** and **₹13,803 in rural**.
- The demand for coaching is driven by **higher household income, better parental education, and urban residence**.
- It is particularly common among students in private schools, where teachers are often **underpaid and underqualified**, compelling families to seek external academic support.
- Coaching has also become a **symbol of academic prestige**, deepening inequalities between socio-economic groups.

Implications for Equity and the Public Education System

- The rise in private schooling and coaching has significant implications for educational equity.
- **Families with limited means** face difficult choices, often stretching their finances to provide what they perceive as better educational opportunities.
- Declining enrolment in government schools further weakens these institutions by reducing demand and resource support.
- Private coaching amplifies learning disparities. Students from wealthier households gain academic advantages that poorer students cannot afford, widening long-term socio-economic gaps.
- Strengthening public school quality is therefore critical to reducing reliance on both private schools and tutoring.

The Path Forward: Strengthening Publicly Funded Schools

- Achieving the NEP 2020 vision of universal and equitable education requires a **revitalised public education system**.
- Improved infrastructure, better-trained teachers, and strengthened classroom processes can help rebuild public confidence.
- High-quality government schools would reduce the need for costly private schooling and limit dependence on coaching.
- Research links **school quality directly to reduced reliance on private tuition**, indicating that systemic improvements in government schools can create more equal learning conditions for all students.

- Investment in teacher development, foundational learning, and early education is essential for inclusive progress.

Conclusion

- Schooling in India remains **financially demanding**, despite constitutional guarantees of free education.
- Rising private school enrolment, high fees, and the normalisation of private coaching impose heavy burdens on households and reinforce educational inequality.
- Strengthening public schools is essential to ensuring that education remains a **right rather than a privilege**, and to creating a system that is both equitable and accessible for all children.

The Stark Reality of Educational Costs in India FAQs

Q1. What does Article 21A guarantee to children in India?

Ans. Article 21A guarantees free and compulsory education to children aged six to 14 years.

Q2. Which type of schools have higher enrolment in urban areas?

Ans. Private schools have higher enrolment in urban areas.

Q3. Why do many students rely on private coaching?

Ans. Many students rely on private coaching because school quality is uneven and teachers, especially in private schools, may be underqualified or underpaid.

Q4. What financial burden do private schools impose on families?

Ans. Private schools impose high annual fees that often match or exceed the monthly consumption budgets of low-income households.

Q5. What is one major way to reduce educational inequality in India?

Ans. One major way to reduce educational inequality in India is to strengthen the quality of government schools.

Source: **The Hindu**

The Madras High Court Must Break Its Silence

Context

- High Court judge appointments are first recommended by the Collegium — the Chief Justice of the High Court and its two senior-most judges.
- The recommendation goes to the State government, which may raise objections or request clarifications.
- However, once the Collegium reiterates its recommendation or provides the required clarifications, the State government is obliged to accept the decision.
- In this context, this article highlights the growing constitutional concerns surrounding the Madras High Court Collegium's recent recommendations, focusing on procedural irregularities, the exclusion of a senior judge, and the urgent need for transparency and systemic reform.

Clarification Sought on Composition of the Madras High Court Collegium

- The Madras High Court Collegium recommended six district judges for elevation in November 2025.
- While the State government raised no objections regarding the candidates' merit, it sought clarification on a procedural issue — the constitution of the Collegium itself.
- **The Case of Justice Nisha Banu**
 - Justice J. Nisha Banu, elevated in 2016, is the second most senior judge of the Madras High Court and thus a rightful Collegium member.
 - However, a Supreme Court Collegium recommendation dated October 14, 2025 ordered her transfer to the Kerala High Court and placed her ninth in seniority there.
 - Despite this transfer order, she has **not joined** the Kerala High Court and continues to serve at Madras, making her de facto a Collegium judge.

State Government's Concern: Why Was She Excluded

- The State questioned why Justice Nisha Banu was excluded from the Collegium consultations and why Justice M.S. Ramesh, the next senior judge, was included instead.
- It sought clarification on:
 - The legal authority behind this substitution
 - Whether any Supreme Court directive or constitutional principle justified bypassing a senior judge
 - Whether the Collegium assumed that Justice Nisha Banu was no longer part of the Madras High Court
- The Collegium did not address these concerns and instead proceeded to recommend nine more advocates for additional vacancies.

Constitutional and Procedural Implications

- The Memorandum of Procedure clearly states that the Chief Justice and the two seniormost judges of the High Court must form the Collegium for recommending appointments.
- Ignoring a senior judge raises questions about constitutional validity, institutional integrity, and adherence to established norms.
- **Core Issue**
 - Whether intentionally or by oversight, the **non-inclusion** of Justice Nisha Banu in the Madras High Court Collegium contradicts the prescribed procedure.
 - The State government is therefore entitled to a clarification, as transparency and adherence to constitutional norms lie at the heart of judicial appointments.

When Procedural Lapses Threaten Constitutional Legitimacy

- Procedural norms in judicial appointments are not trivial technicalities but the very basis of the Collegium's constitutional legitimacy.
- Since the Collegium system is built entirely on **judicial precedent**, it must strictly follow established procedures to maintain credibility.

- Excluding a judge who continues to hold administrative authority, without recorded reasons, and replacing them with another judge lacking jurisdictional basis, undermines the validity of the Collegium's decisions.
- An improperly constituted Collegium risks rendering its recommendations **void**, creating a constitutional crisis rooted in uncertainty over who is authorised to decide.
- These concerns intensify long-standing criticisms of the Collegium system — including opacity, alleged nepotism, inadequate representation, political influence, and limited accountability.

Need for Transparency and Clarification

- The Madras High Court Collegium must explain, in law and procedure, why Justice Nisha Banu was excluded and Justice M.S. Ramesh included.
- Silence threatens structural judicial integrity and fuels speculation about motive.
- A judge's ideological or personal background cannot justify deviation from constitutional norms.
- Impartiality, consultation, and adherence to justice must guide judicial decisions. Any departure from this principle weakens public trust.

Call for Supreme Court-Led Collegium Reforms

- The situation highlights the need for long-pending reforms:
 - Clear rules on Collegium composition
 - Published reasons for decisions
 - Mandatory disclosures to enhance transparency
- The Supreme Court must revisit the system to prevent ambiguity and inconsistency.

Core Issue: Legality of the Appointment Process

- The controversy is not about the capability of the six district judges or nine advocates recommended.
- The question is whether their elevation followed **Article 217** and the Memorandum of Procedure, which requires recommendations from the Chief Justice and the two seniormost High Court judges.
- If the Collegium's constitution itself is questionable, then its recommendations also lose validity.
- This creates a **constitutional conflict** between the judiciary and the State government — a crisis that can only be resolved through transparency, adherence to procedure, and systemic reform.

The Madras High Court Must Break Its Silence FAQs

Q1. Why did the State government seek clarification from the Madras High Court Collegium?

Ans. The State sought clarification on why the senior-most eligible judge, Justice Nisha Banu, was excluded from the Collegium despite still serving at the Madras High Court.

Q2. What makes Justice Nisha Banu's exclusion constitutionally significant?

Ans. Her exclusion contradicts mandatory procedure requiring the Chief Justice and two seniormost judges to form the Collegium, raising questions about legality and institutional integrity.

Q3. How does an improperly constituted Collegium affect judicial appointments?

Ans. If the Collegium is wrongly constituted, its recommendations risk invalidation, creating uncertainty over authority and triggering a potential constitutional conflict with the State government.

Q4. What broader issues about the Collegium system does this situation highlight?

Ans. It exposes systemic problems—opacity, lack of accountability, alleged favouritism, and inadequate representation—strengthening calls for transparent criteria, published reasons, and structural reforms.

Q5. Why is Supreme Court intervention considered necessary?

Ans. Only the Supreme Court can reform Collegium rules, ensure consistent procedures, mandate disclosures, and clarify composition norms to prevent recurring disputes in judicial appointments.

Source: TH

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