

“Private schools will prosper; government schools will improve”

Says Jerry Rao, entrepreneur, poet, liberal, and a columnist for the Indian Express as he argues in favour of 'school vouchers'.

Dear Dr Singh: While making your first budget speech as finance minister you quoted Victor Hugo's phrase, "an idea whose time has come"; you believed that India was indeed such an idea. You should feel good that the Indian tigress who was born in the early nineties has lived up to her promise. But she is still a cub. The tigress growing into adulthood must have strength in all her limbs and muscles; so too should every part of India grow into prosperity. You who have been the proponent of "inclusive growth" know this better than anyone else. We cannot rest until we have eliminated the moral obscenity involved in the fact that a quarter of our people go to bed hungry every night or that one-third of our fellow citizens cannot read or write. The term you are about to embark upon is your true and major rendezvous with history. It will define your legacy. No government in a five-year term can succeed in doing too many things and a government with a vision for its citizens cannot afford to get bogged down by details. It is on the broad canvas that your attention and energies need to be focused. I commend to you just three items all of which have been discussed and debated endlessly by committees and commissions. They now need your "liberating" touch!

One, education. An insufficiently literate and under-trained people cannot be an asset for any country. We need to take steps in this field like those you initiated in the early nineties with industry. Thirty-three approvals are required for a citizen to start a school.

Fifty per cent of government school teachers do not turn up for work while sending their own children to private schools. Nay-sayers will argue that education is a state subject and that you cannot do much about it. You have been able to use the JNNURM to force reform in urban affairs (for example, abolition of the Urban Land Ceiling Act) by simply making it financially attractive for states. Why not tell the states that the Centre will make available funds to them if they issue vouchers to poor students which they can use to pay for education in

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private or government schools? You can create a body like SEBI (a success of yours in the financial sector) to regulate the schools with a transparent process. By giving the poor parents and children of India education vouchers and hence giving them a choice, you would be doing nothing more than what you and I have done for our children and what politicians of all hues have done for their children! Private schools will prosper; government schools will improve. What you do for schools, you can extend to colleges and vocational institutions. None of this is new; it is in keeping with what the National Knowledge Commission (appointed by you) has recommended. This one step will result in a "truly educated" India in less than two decades.

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That's it sir. I am not asking for tax sops for my particular industry or some tinkering with reservation lists to help my neighbour. Three items only, all big picture, items unlikely to excite the stock market in the short term or to get TV channels particularly interested in. Even if you don't succeed fully, but only partially, in the history of our country you will enter a select pantheon: one can think of Sher Shah, Raja Raja Chola, Akbar, Krishnadeva, Shivaji, Ranjit Singh and Nehru, and possibly Curzon — no one else comes to mind. This is one objective worth fighting for, I submit — not because you seek glory, but because you pursue the dharma of a just, wise and sagacious ruler.



Jaitirth Rao is an ambassador for the School Choice Campaign. This is an excerpt of an article that appeared in the Indian Express on May 20, 2009. Read the full story

on <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/three-more-reforms-dr-singh/462576>.

FACTSHEET

Average Number of Classrooms

All Private Schools – 7.2

All Government Schools – 3.67

Andhra Pradesh (Most skewed proportion)

All Private Schools – 9.5

All Government Schools – 2.9

Kerala (Relatively equal proportion)

All Private Schools – 12

All Government Schools – 11

% of private share to local schools

Highest - Meghalaya – 62.15%

Lowest – Bihar – 1.82%

All States – 19.50%

Source: DISE Flash Statistics, Published in 2009 by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (Declared by the Government of India under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956) and the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Q&A

Are there any private budget schools in rural India?

28% of the population of rural India has access to fee-charging private primary schools in the same village (Muralitharan and Kremer). 18.8% of children aged 6 - 14 in rural India attend fee-charging private schools (ASER). Muralitharan and Kremer found that villages with high teacher absence in the government schools are significantly more likely to have private schools, and that this result is robust to being aggregated at the district and state levels. They also found a robust negative relationship between per capita income and the prevalence of private schools at both the district and state-levels, confirming that it is areas with poor government schools as opposed to richer areas that are more likely to have private schools. The challenge for policy is therefore to think about ways in which the superior efficiency, flexibility, and accountability of the private sector can be leveraged for better educational outcomes for all children. A scholarship/voucher system is a promising way of doing so.

SCHOOL CHOICE CAMPAIGN NATIONAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

My Vote, My Choice!



School Choice Mascots in Jaipur

The School Choice Campaign conducted a parallel, issues-based campaign in the lead up to the 2009 Lok Sabha elections simultaneously in Jharkhand, Orissa, Rajasthan and Delhi, to create political awareness on the disparities in educational opportunities. Around 200 sitting Members of Parliament from the aforementioned states were sent targeted information pertaining to the educational status of their constituency along with customized School Choice solutions to address specific problems.

The campaign encouraged voters to demand the 'Right to Education of Choice' from their respective candidates. As part of this campaign, School Choice mascots (in colorful school uniforms) interacted with voters at election rallies, political meetings and public places. They carried two props, a hand and a pencil with the slogans "If we can choose our governments...." "...why can't we choose our schools?"

JHARKHAND: Jharkhand School Choice Alliance successfully conducted the campaign in Ranchi and Khunti districts from 8 to 21 April.

RAJASTHAN: In Rajasthan, the campaign was conducted in Jaipur from 22 April to 5 May.

ORISSA: In Orissa the campaign was conducted in the local dialect Oriya in Bhubaneswar from 12 to 21 April.



Mr Chetan Chauhan receiving memorandum demanding school choice from children of Shishu Mangal School

In the course of the campaign, smaller political parties such as the Jaago Party and the Bharat Punanirman Dal voiced support for the School Choice Campaign. Among the national parties, BJP's East Delhi candidate Mr Chetan Chauhan was very receptive and promised to work for education of choice for the underprivileged.

"School Choice is a very good idea. The poor and underprivileged children should enjoy equal rights when

it comes to choosing the best schools for themselves. I support this idea and initiative and no matter what the outcome of the elections, I will work towards getting quality education of choice for the underserved community," said Mr Chauhan. The representative of Congress' New Delhi candidate Mr Ajay Maken received the memorandum demanding school choice and expressed his support for the idea. The campaign received widespread media coverage in 14 leading national and regional dailies.

'Ticket to Learn': SCC Advocacy Film

'Ticket to Learn', a SCC production is an advocacy film based on street theatre. Outreach through performing arts is a PR project we started in 2008 to integrate performing arts, especially street theatre, into our awareness and advocacy design and execution. After the successful completion of our outreach program in Rajasthan and Orissa, which saw 315 street theatre shows between July and December 2008, we decided to integrate elements of the plays in our SCC advocacy film 'Ticket to Learn'. Directed by award winning filmmaker Nandan Saxena, the film showcases the life of Rahul, one of the Delhi Voucher Project beneficiaries and his life after having received an education voucher. The film also shows an overview of the government run voucher project 'Pahal' in Uttarakhand and incorporates views of noted figure and author of the book India Unbound Mr Gurcharan Das amongst others. The film will be distributed widely to the media, civil society bodies, political party heads, government officials, NGOs/INGOs working on education, schools, parents, and the youth.

"Vouchers for the Marginalised" on Rainbow FM 102.6 MHz

SCC and One World South Asia (OWSA) co-produced 'Vouchers for the Marginalised and the Underprivileged', a 30-minute dialogue on what would be the best way to educate the urban deprived, physically challenged and socially ostracised children on FM Rainbow 102.6 MHz on 27 May. The program, which is a part of OWSA's *Ek Duniya Anek Awaaz* series, featured Dr Vinita, Director, Sasakawa India Leprosy Foundation & Baladevan R, National Campaign Director, School Choice Campaign.

The recording of the program is available at <http://schoolchoice.in/jtfa2009innovativePR/myvote/Mediacoverage/Radio/SCC> and OWSA production on *Rainbow FM 102.6.mp3*.

SCC on BBC One World Radio

This program which aired on the BBC One World Radio on Friday, 17 April 2009 showcased the School Choice Campaign and the achievements of budget private schools in providing schooling to a large section of the population that wants affordable school education. The program featured Baladevan R, National Campaign Director, SCC and the Principal and students of Shishu Mangal School in East Delhi.



Baladevan R, National Campaign Director, SCC with Dr Vinita, Director, SILF at the studio

New Initiatives

Delhi Girls Voucher Programme

The findings of the assessment of the Delhi Voucher Project have prompted us to take the voucher idea further and launch another project; this time exclusively for the girl child. Delhi Girls Voucher Programme (DGVP) is a culmination of the efforts of the SCC to reach out to more poor parents and children. The project will fund 400 girls from seven wards in North East Delhi, which has a high incidence

of economically backward and migrant population for a period of 5 years and cover their education costs up to the fifth grade. Girls from poor families who are studying in the second grade in state-run schools will be eligible for the programme and will receive vouchers worth up to Rs 4,000 (\$85) per annum.

The launch of the project will commence in June with awareness creation among the potential beneficiaries through community meetings and street theatre, collection of application forms, selection of beneficiaries through public lottery and the awards ceremony in mid July.

The DGVP will establish a voucher model for urban areas in India which the policy makers can replicate in their own regions or scale up similar projects. At the same time it will also demonstrate that School Choice can be an affirmative action technique for low income and disadvantaged groups to achieve their educational aspirations.

Education Dialogue Series at India Habitat Centre

SCC will organize a monthly Education Dialogue Series called 'STUDENT FIRST! Dialogue Series on Quality Education for All' on issues pertaining to education with an objective to review the existing programs and ideate on ingenious solutions to provide quality education to children all over India. The dialogue will be in the form of an interactive and informative panel and open floor discussions: presentations by guest speakers, debates on hot issues, viewpoints from key stakeholders and industry leaders and sharing of successful experiences and interventions. The first dialogue is scheduled for Wednesday, 8 July.

For information on how you can participate in the program, email Baishali at baishali@ccs.in.



Girls from backward families will be the focus of the new voucher project



Write to us

Your last issue focused on the findings of the Delhi Voucher Pilot, and I was delighted to

see the improvement in the learning achievements of the students who took advantage of the vouchers. However, I have my reservations on the overall success of the voucher programme. In areas where there are not many private schools, the voucher scheme might not work. For example, the state where I come from, Kerala, there are students who trudge through forests and take elephant rides just to reach the nearest government school. A voucher would be of no use to them, because they don't have a choice. I don't dispute the success of the voucher system, just that more innovations are needed on the road to reform. A 'one size fits all' approach would probably not work in the case of India where there are inaccessible terrains where no private entity would go and establish schools. -

Biju Verghese, Thiruvananthapuram

Make a Difference



Support the School Choice Campaign

All successful campaigns depend on good people and execution. We welcome ideas, participation, and financial assistance from all well wishers to give millions of children in India a quality education of their Choice.

For details on how you can support and join us, log onto www.schoolchoice.in or email at joinus@schoolchoice.in

For volunteering opportunities log onto www.schoolchoice.in/joinus/volunteer.php or email us At vol@ccs.in

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