

# Transforming education: An essential milestone on the Vishwaguru Expressway

by Srinivas Emani

The 21st century is hailed to be the Asian century. The world has been looking towards Asia to lead them through this new millennium. While the rise of China is already propelling this prophecy towards its fruition, how much of an Asian century it would turn out to be will also depend on how India, the world's largest democracy, rises to this occasion. After all, one in three Asians are Indians.

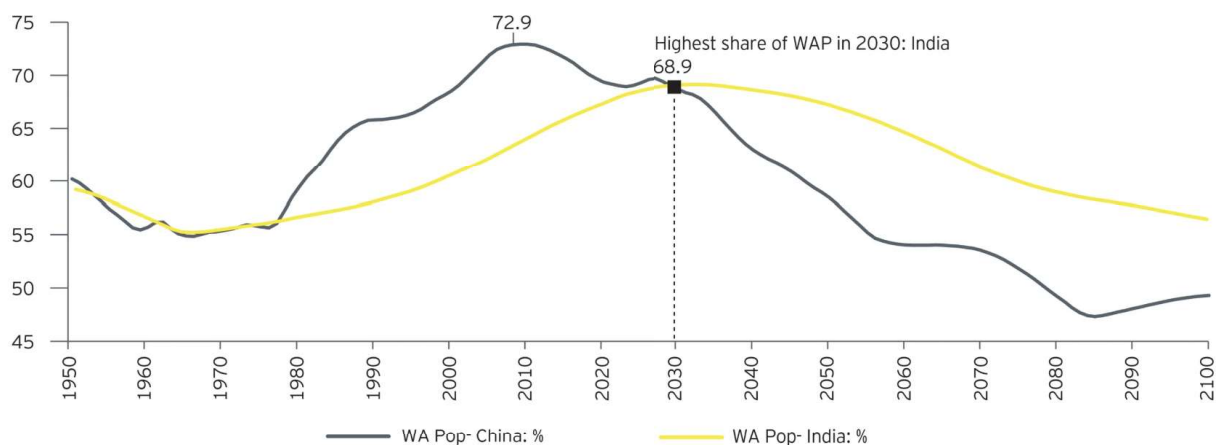
The Indian growth juggernaut that rolled into motion with the LPG reforms of 1991 has transformed the country beyond recognition. The optimists, however, say this is just the beginning. *Picture abhi baaki hai* (The story isn't over yet), as the dialogue of a famous Hindi film would go. Some would argue that the juggernaut will not stop until India reaches its rightful place of Vishwaguru (teacher to the world) in the world order. While the aspirations are commendable, the proof of the pudding would be in the eating. As India bets on its demographic dividend to make the transformation, it becomes imperative that we study the preparedness of this dividend to take on this mantle.

It would be fair to say that access to world-class education coupled with the ability to speak the Queen's English has played a pivotal role in the post-1991 growth story. The illustrious IITs and IIMs have not just been temples of learning but have also been the preparatory grounds to sharpen one's skills by cooperating and competing with the world's finest minds. These and many other such premiere institutes across different fields have been very successful, albeit in the limited scope of students they can accommodate. The bigger question, however, is whether the Indian education landscape is prepared to help India truly leverage the demographic dividend. To what extent is this high-quality education accessible to all? After all, the difference between a demographic dividend and demographic liability is the population's preparedness.

The government's own Economic Survey pegged that about half the graduates in the country are still not employable. While that does look bleak, let us dig a little deeper.

## A worker boom

India's working age population to total population ratio will be the highest of any large economy



Source (basic data): UN Population statistics 2022; WAP stands for working age population

How are the future graduates, who are currently in schools faring?

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER,2023) found that 25% of students between 14 and 18 years of age struggle to read Grade-2 text fluently. Given such harsh reality checks, it should not require a consulting project by an MNC to establish that we have a problem at hand to solve, one that we have known for a long time yet have not been able to solve. While the astronomical growth of the EdTech industry did raise hopes of a revolution in education, the unceremonious downfall of some of its brightest stars has shattered a dream too many.

As we stand at these known crossroads, staring at a responsibility as big as the opportunity, what should be the path ahead for us?

### **Bringing back the joy in learning**

The disproportionate importance given to entrance examinations for the most prestigious universities is the direct consequence of the quintessential supply and demand problem. Far from making learning joyous, we have created factories that manufacture exam preparedness and not learning. Factories that suck out the joy of learning. While we continue to set up newer institutes, we should also revisit how we decide the criteria for admission to such institutes. We need to look beyond examinations and push for holistic learning environments. Only a holistic evaluation for admission of our premiere institutes would make for a holistic learning environment in schools.

### **Leveraging AI and the Digital Revolution**

While the EdTech revolution is still far from delivering on its promise, it does not take away from its transformative potential. With the invention of newer technologies that are making many jobs and skills obsolete, the writing on the wall is clear: AI and Technology will continue to be a part of our lives and are here to stay. They also provide a pathway to bring joy back to learning.

### **Integration of Indic Education System**

Over the last decade, protectionism has been on the rise across the globe. It has also led to the rise of nationalism or patriotism. One of the outcomes of these changes is the debate on the (de)merits of the Macaulay Education System. The voices that ask for more **Bharatiyata** (Indianness) in the Indian education system, keep getting louder each day. While the argument needs to be evaluated without political colour, what is undeniable is that Yoga, Pranayama, and Ayurveda, among others offer solutions to some 21st-century problems. If the purpose of education is to improve the quality of life, would it not be logical to integrate them into our education system?

While we have a quarter of a century to keep up the promise we have made to ourselves to transform India into a developed nation, what I do know is that no **Amritkaal** (golden era) will arrive unless we transform our education system. The time is ticking.



## **Srinivas Emani**

***Ex - LEAD School, Teach for India***

***Engineer by qualification, educator by choice.  
Worked with thousands of students and teachers  
to provide quality education.***