# **EDITORIAL**

### BOND OF TRUST

ndia and Afghanistan share a time-tested relationship rooted in civilizational, historical, and cultural ties. Despite the political instability that has gripped Afghanistan in recent years, particularly after the Taliban takeover in 2021, India continues to uphold its commitment to the Afghan people. As both nations look toward a more peaceful and stable future, the India-Afghanistan partnership stands as a beacon of hope, cooperation, and regional stabili-

Historically, India has played a constructive and supportive role in Afghanistan's development. From building the Afghan Parliament and the Zaranj-Delaram highway to constructing dams, hospitals, and schools, India has invested over \$3 billion in development aid-making it one of the largest regional donors to Afghanistan. These projects have not only improved infrastructure but also fostered goodwill among the Afghan

In the fields of education and healthcare, India has remained a generous partner. Thousands of Afghan students have studied in Indian universities under scholarship programs, and medical visas for Afghan patients have long been facilitated. These soft power initiatives have helped build grassroots connections between the people of both countries, creating an enduring sense of trust and camaraderie.

Even after the return of the Taliban regime, India has chosen a people-first approach. Despite limited diplomatic engagement with the de facto rulers, India has continued to provide humanitarian assistance, including food, medicine, and vaccines. This move reflects India's long-standing foreign policy principle of non-interference in internal matters and support for the welfare of ordinary citizens, regardless of

Geopolitically, India recognizes Afghanistan as a key pillar for regional connectivity and security. Initiatives like the Chabahar Port in Iran, intended to provide Afghanistan access to sea trade while bypassing Pakistan, underline India's commitment to inclusive regional growth. The dream of linking Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan remains alive, and India continues to advocate for a stable, inclusive and peaceful Afghanistan.

Culturally, the bond between the two nations goes beyond politics and diplomacy. From Bollywood films to classical Indian music, Indian culture is deeply admired in Afghanistan. Likewise, Afghan culture-through its cuisine, music, and art-has left a strong imprint on India's pluralistic society. This cultural resonance continues to bind the two nations even when official relations face challenges.

Moving forward, India must continue to engage with Afghanistan in pragmatic and people-centric ways. While political realities on the ground demand cautious diplomacy, Afghanistan's future should not be abandoned. By supporting educational initiatives, women's rights, and inclusive development, India can help sow the seeds for long-term peace and progress in the region.

The India-Afghanistan relationship is more than just strategic; it is human at its core.

# Degrees and Distress: Ancient Lessons for Modern Learning

PROF. SHYAM NARAYAN LAL

institutions-esteemed universities. sprawling engineering campuses, and vibrant liberal arts colleges-there exists an invisible crisis that is quietly taking a toll on our students. This crisis is not about infrastructure or pedagogy alone. It is about something more intimate and more urgent: the mental health of our students. As academic competition intensifies and societal pressures deepen, young learners across the country are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress. The numbers are telling, but the stories behind them are even more distressing.

In the corridors of India's higher education

According to a 2023 survey conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), nearly three out of four Indian college students reported experiencing moderate to severe stress, largely driven by academic burden, uncertainty about the future, and familial expectations. The pandemic worsened this already fragile ecosystem. Online learning, social isolation, and economic disruptions created a perfect storm, leaving students feeling disconnected, fatigued, and overwhelmed. In fact, during the peak of the pandemic, over 62% of students surveyed in Indian universities admitted they were unable to manage stress effectively in the virtual learning environment. The long-term implications of this collective psychological distress cannot be ignored.

Importantly, not all students are affected equally. Female students often face a unique set of challenges-juggling academic ambition with entrenched gender norms and societal expectations. A significant 65% of them report stress-related disorders, compared to 52% of their male counterparts. Similarly, first-generation learners and those from marginalized communities struggle with financial hardship, lack of social capital, and institutional alienation. For these students, college is not just a place of learning-it is also a site of social navigation, cultural negotiation, and emotional vulnerability.

Yet, despite the mounting data and the lived experiences of students, institutional response remains limited. While a handful of elite institutions have established counselling centres and wellness programs, the vast majority of colleges -especially in rural and semi-urban areas-lack even the most basic mental health infrastructure. Where coun-

English, inaccessible to many students for whom regional languages are a more comfortable medium. Moreover, the stigma around mental health, deeply rooted in social attitudes, discourages students from seeking help. Clearly, conventional, Western-oriented mental health models need to be adapted to the Indian context.

This is where India's own intellectual and cultural traditions offer immense promise. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS)-an evolving repository of spiritual, philosophical, and psychological insights-offers a treasure trove of tools for inner well-being. Long before psychology emerged as a modern science. Indian texts and traditions had already articulated sophisticated methods of emotional regulation, self-awareness, and stress reduction.

Take the practice of Yoga and Pranayama, for instance. Far from being mere physical exercises, these are deeply therapeutic systems rooted in the principle of harmony between the body and the mind. Research has shown that regular practice of yogic breathing and mindfulness reduces cortisol levels, improves attention span, and fosters emotion-

Similarly, the ancient principle of Sanyamself-restraint or emotional discipline-as found in the Yoga S?tras of Patañjali, offers an alternative to impulsivity and anxiety. By cultivating Sanyam, students learn not to be overwhelmed by success or failure, but to maintain equanimity in the face of both. The Bhagayad G?t? often referred to as a manual for life management, teaches: "Elevate yourself by your own self; do not degrade yourself." This is not religious instruction; it is psychological insight articulated in timeless

A thoughtful glance at the ancient Gurukul system reveals timeless insights for contemporary higher education. Far from being archaic, the Gurukul tradition embodied a deeply humane pedagogy-one that nurtured the emotional, moral, and spiritual growth of students alongside academic learning. Shishvas lived with their guru not merely to acquire knowledge, but to internalize values, discipline, and life skills through shared living and mentorship. Education was not transactional; it was relational, experiential, and anchored in care and dialogue.

Unlike today's competitive and impersonal academic environments, the Gurukul honoured each student's unique pace and potential. Teachers closely observed and guided students holistically-as thinkers, emotional beings, and ethical agents-adapting methods with compassion and insight. This bond. grounded in shraddh? (faith) and mutual respect, made early identification and resolution of stress natural.

The curriculum, too, was balanced-merging intellectual rigour with practices like Vyayam (physical exercise), Dhy?na (meditation), and Sev? (community service), while integrating music, storytelling, and the arts as vital tools of emotional expression. It was a model that valued rhythm, silence, and inner balancequalities often missing in today's education.

What makes the Gurukul model strikingly relevant is its emphasis on personalised mentorship, integrated learning, and ethical reflection-principles well-suited to address the stressors in modern HEIs. Reimagining this system today means empowering faculty not only as subject experts but also as mentors, trained in emotional intelligence, cultural empathy, and the art of upadesha-gentle, wisdom-led guidance.

Institutionally, several interventions are both possible and necessary. First, the establishment of multilingual, culturally sensitive counselling services should be made mandatory in all HEIs. Trained psychologists who understand caste, gender, and class-based nuances can provide far more effective support. Second, universities should consider reworking their assessment structures. The reliance on high-stakes, end-semester examinations often fuels anxiety. A move towards continuous internal assessments, flexible grading, and project-based learning can significantly alleviate this pressure.

Third, dedicated Centres for Happiness orAnandam: The Centre for Happiness-such as the pioneering one established at IIM Jammu-can be developed as institutional hubs to cultivate holistic well-being. These centres go beyond occasional workshops by offering structured and research-informed programs in yoga, meditation, nature therapy, expressive arts, and reflective dialogue. At IIM Jammu, Anandam has evolved into a vibrant ecosystem of innovation in the field of student well-being, introducing a spectrum of initiatives that combine traditional wisdom

with contemporary needs. Its portfolio includes digital detoxification sessions designed to address screen fatigue, modules on "inner engineering" that foster self-awareness and resilience, and even light-hearted yet impactful activities like Zumba sessions that use movement and rhythm to build community spirit and reduce stress. Together, such centres embody a comprehensive approach-anchoring happiness not as an extracurricular luxury but as an essential dimension of academic and personal growth.

These are not add-ons but essential pillars of holistic learning. The digital interventions like mobile applications with guided meditations, regional language CBT modules, and motivational content drawn from Indian texts can bridge the access gap, especially for students in remote areas. Offline capabilities should be prioritized to address the digital

It is also important that awareness campaigns to destignatize mental health and promote help-seeking behaviour must be woven into institutional culture. Student clubs, peer mentoring groups, and orientation programs can all contribute to building emotionally literate campuses.

It is time we recognize that well-being is not a luxury but a prerequisite for effective learning. When students are mentally healthy, they are more productive, innovative, and collaborative. They contribute more meaningfully to their communities and are better prepared for the uncertainties of life beyond

In its quest to become a knowledge superpower. India must not overlook the psychological health of its young learners. We have the data, we have the institutional frameworks, and we have a civilizational inheritance that prizes harmony, resilience, and inner peace. The answers we seek are not always in the West. They are embedded in the very traditions we have long forgotten.

the G?t? reminds "Karmanyevadhikarastem?phale?hukad?can a"-we are entitled to action, but not to its fruits. Perhaps this wisdom, understood not as resignation but as freedom from paralyzing anxiety, is what Indian students need most today. Not just to survive education, but to thrive through it.

> (The writer is Chairperson, Anadam IIM Jammu)

# Inside the Four Walls: A Day in a Classroom

### More than lessons and exams, a classroom captures laughter, discipline, curiosity, and quiet shaping of young lives

#### **■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF**

he classroom has always been described as the beating heart of education. Within its four walls, futures are shaped in ways that often go unnoticed. To the casual eye, it might seem ordinary-desks arranged in neat rows, a blackboard, the sound of chalk against slate, the hum of children settling down-but to those who live it every day, a classroom holds magic that extends far beyond textbooks.

The day begins with a slow trickle of students. Some arrive with sleepy eyes, still adjusting to the early morning, while others bounce in with the eagerness of youth. There are whispered conversations, hurried revisions for surprise tests, and quick stories shared before the teacher walks in. As soon as the bell rings, the chatter melts into silence. The classroom transforms instantly into a space of learning, discipline, and discovery.

Morning lessons bring energy. For younger children, it may start with rhymes and stories; for older students, it may be mathematics, literature. or science. Some write diligently, capturing every word on the blackboard. Others drift into daydreams, eyes fixed on the window outside, yet still absorbing more than they realize. There is rhythm to it all-the questions, the answers, the brief pauses of silence as students wrestle with new ideas. The classroom breathes with its own pulse, and every lesson, whether fully understood or only half grasped, adds something lasting to young minds.

By mid-morning, curiosity begins to blossom. Group discussions, debates, and experiments draw students out of their shells. A quiet boy might suddenly shine with a brilliant response. A mischievous student, known for disruptions, may



surprise everyone with a creative spark. These moments remind us that education is not only about following syllabi but also about discovering talents hidden in plain sight. The classroom becomes not just a space of learning but a stage where personalities unfold and where students begin to recognize their own strengths and weak-

Then comes the much-awaited lunch break. The serious air of learning dissolves into laughter and sharing. Books are pushed aside, desks turn into dining tables, and the aroma of homemade meals fills the room. Food is exchanged, jokes are cracked, and friendships deepen. This half-hour is more than just refueling; it is the heartbeat of the

classroom community, where bonds are formed that often last a lifetime. The lunch break reminds students that education is not only about lessons but also about learning to live with others. to share, and to find joy in companionship.

Afternoons bring a different mood-slower, more reflective. Fatigue shows, but teachers know how to hold attention. History lessons turn into stories, science becomes a hands-on experiment, or sometimes, the class enjoys a guest lecture. A sudden quiz or a teacher's anecdote can transform a dull hour into an unforgettable one. These moments break the monotony and create memories that outlive the school years. It is often in the afternoon that students discover how knowledge

connects with real life, as teachers link lessons to society, current events, or personal experiences.

Not all moments are joyful, of course. The classroom also witnesses tension: the nervous silence before a test, the sting of unfinished homework. or the weight of a teacher's stern voice. But even these difficult moments play their part. They teach discipline, responsibility, and resilience. Students gradually learn that life, much like the classroom, is about balancing joy with effort and freedom with responsibility. In fact, the challenges inside a classroom mirror the larger challenges of the world outside.

As the final bell approaches, energy returns. Students glance at the clock, waiting for freedom, yet reluctant to let go of the chatter, the jokes, and the companionship of the day. Teachers wrap up sign homework, or share parting words of encouragement. Sometimes they let the class end with laughter, reminding students that education is as much about warmth as it is about knowledge. These closing moments leave a lingering impression, shaping how students feel about school itself.

When the last bell finally rings, the classroom empties quickly, leaving behind an echo of the day-laughter, questions, scribbles on the blackboard, and the faint marks of chalk dust. For students, the classroom lives on in memory until tomorrow. For teachers, the work continues, as they prepare lessons, grade assignments, and quietly reflect on how best to inspire the next morning. The cycle of teaching and learning never truly ends.

A day in a classroom may seem routine, but it is far more than that. It is a microcosm of life itselffilled with struggles and triumphs, failures and

encouragement, laughter and discipline. Within these walls, children learn not only equations and grammar but also cooperation, empathy, and the courage to dream. These are lessons no textbook can list, yet they are the ones that truly shape human beings

Looking back, many adults realize that some of their most powerful memories are tied to classrooms. The chalk-stained boards the nervous excitement of being called to answer a question. the collective sigh of relief after a tough test, or the joy of a teacher's praise-all of these form the mosaic of school life. A classroom is not merely a space for academic instruction; it is a crucible where personalities are shaped, resilience is built, and friendships are forged.

Even in an age where technology and online earning are rapidly gaining group tional classroom still holds a magic of its own. The physical presence of peers, the human connection with teachers, and the shared atmosphere of a learning space cannot be replaced by screens and headphones. A classroom teaches not only the syllabus but also empathy, cooperation, patience, and respect. These lessons, though unlisted in textbooks, are the ones that stay with students for a lifetime.

Thus, a day in a classroom is more than just a routine. It is a living story, written anew each morning and concluded each afternoon, only to begin again the next day. Every chalk line drawn. every question asked, and every laugh shared contributes to the making of individuals and the shaping of society. Within those four walls, futures are quietly being written, one lesson, one friendship, and one day at a time.

(The author is a senior analyst)

#### Buildathon 2025-A landmark national innovation event Viksit Bharat

### **ER. PRABHAT KISHORE**

'n today's rapidly evolving world, innovation stands as a key catalyst to transform Bharat into a developed and self-reliant country. The ability to innovate empowers our vouth to address complex challenges. drive sustainable development and elevate India's position globally as a hub of creativity and technological advancement, ultimately contributing to the spirit and making of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.

In line with this vision, a nationwide innovation competition named "Viksit Bharat Buildathon 2025" has been organized by the Ministry of Education, GOI in collaboration with the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), NITI Aavog and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). It aims to inspire creative thinking for national development, promote selfreliance and sustainable development, engage school in synchronized innovation, and position Bharat as a global innovation hub through a potential world record.

The initiative is envisaged as a key instrument for advancing the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Samagra Shiksha,

especially in promoting innovation, experiential learning and problemsolving among school students.

The NEP 2020 provides a strong foundation for this innovation-driven approach, emphasizing that "education must move towards less content. and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt and absorb new materials in novel and changing fields." Furthermore, NEP 2020 promotes experiential learning, including practical learning and encourages activities involving the integration of contemporary subjects to develop critical 21stcentury skills in students.

The Buildathon will strengthen the innovation culture among students and align their creative energies with India's developmental priorities. It will also set the stage for the upcoming 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) announced by the Ministry of Education in the Union Budget.

Through this effort, students will conceive, design, and develop prototypes (STEM and Non-STEM) under four focus themes of national importance: (1) Atmanirbhar Bharat-for Building self-reliant systems, devices, and solutions. (2) Swadeshi-for Promoting indigenous ideas, knowledge systems, and innovation, (3) Vocal for Local-for Promoting local products, crafts, and resources, and (4) Samriddh Bharat-for Creating pathways to prosperity and sustainable development.

The Objectives of the Buildathon are :-(i) To inspire 1 Crore students to think creatively and build solutions for national development, (ii) To create a culture of innovation based on experiential learning, (iii) To promote the values of self-reliance, indigenous innovation based on local felt need and sustainable development, (iv) To engage schools across Bharat in a synchronized, hands-on innovation actively for common goals, (v) To Project Bharat as the global capital for innovation through a world record, and (vi) To provide a national and global platform to celebrate student innovators and young problem-

A team of 5 to 7 students will participate in the Buildathon and submit entries in the form of videos. There will be no limit on the number of teams from a school.All the team of students will be supported by teachers. higher institutions, corporates, and others to build their projects at the school level.

Students will have a window from 23rd September to 11th October 2025 to register on the Viksit Bharat Buildathon portal https://vbb.mic.gov.in/ ).This will be followed by a preparatory period for schools, from 6th October to 13th October 2025, wherein teachers, men-

tors and corporates will guide student teams through the registration and submission the process on portal. Students will then submit their initial ideas and prototypes on the portal.

Thelive Synchronised Innovation Event will be held on 13rd October 2025. Hon'ble Prime Minister will inaugurate the Viksit Bharat Buildathon at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, in presence of 400 school students and dignitaries. The event on 13th September 2025 will be streamed on news and media channels, YouTube, and webinar platforms (Zoom/Webex).

Following the event, students will submit their final entries (photos and videos of their innovation activities)

on the Portal from 13thOctober to 31stOctober 2025. The Idea will be in two forms. The first will be as written document, in which the student teams will note down problem and its local tested solutions. The second will be as Prototype, in which the student teams will make physical product with local available resources along with written description.

A panel of experts appointed by the Ministry of Education will then evaluate the submissions over a two-month period, from 1stNovember 31stDecember 2025. The Buildathon will conclude in January 2026 with the announcement of the results and the felicitation of top 1,000 + winners. There will be 10 winners at national level, 100 winners at state level and 1000 winners at district level, for which an award pool of Rs 1 Crore has been fixed. Top schools will be adopted by corporate partners to foster innovation through mentorship, resources, and long-term support.

The Outcomes expected from Buildathon are - (i) Engagement of students in the world's largest live innovation activity, (ii) Development of lakhs of grassroots prototypes aligned with national priorities, (iii)

Projecting Innovation Capital. Empowerment of schools from aspirational and underprivileged areas through national and global spotlight, (v) Enhanced mentor-student partnerships to connect schools with incubators, higher education institutions, and corporates, (vi) Setting momentum for the establishment of 50,000 new ATLs across Bharat.

The Viksit Bharat Buildathon 2025 will be a historic innovation movement, mobilizing lakhs of students in one synchronized activity across Bharat and the world. Focused on Vocal for Local, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Swadeshi, and Samriddh Bharat, the initiative will nurture innovation, celebrate creativity, and reinforce India's march towards Viksit Bharat @ 2047.

The Buildathon provides a unique opportunity for young individuals to identify real world challenges and devise sustainable solutions through collaboration and technology. It will not only showcase India's young innovators, but will also create a global record-setting platform for innovation, self-reliance, and national pride.

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