

57% of the 694 government primary schools in Goa have less than five students, while 42 of them have zero. This was revealed by Goa's Education Minister, Pramod Sawant, who is also Education Minister, or Education-destroying Minister? the Chief Minister, in the ongoing Assembly session. You would think that having the Chief Minister in charge of education would mean that education gets importance and extra attention. And you would be right - education is apparently getting special attention, so special that government-run mass education has managed to hit rock bottom, with more and more government schools closing every year, while elite educational opportunities are flourishing in Goa like never before. Such is the Brahmanical success story of Goa's education ministry.

Poor enrollment in government schools is always blamed on parents, and this time too, that was the education minister's explanation - that parents are pulling their children out of government primary schools and sending them elsewhere. Only 4044 students are enrolled in the free government primary schools, while there are 10,096 enrolled in government-aided privately-managed schools, and a further 3622 in completely private and very expensive schools.

What the education minister did not mention is the lack of basic facilities at government schools, for example that a whopping 111 of them lack the basic facility of a playground. Many government schools all across Goa suffer every monsoon from leaking roofs, quite a few also have dilapidated buildings, stinking toilets, and a shortage of teachers - some even have just one teacher for the whole school. The government's response to less teachers and less student enrollment is to 'amalgamate schools', i.e. join schools together, which essentially means that some primary school students will lose their local school and will have to travel greater distances to the amalgamated one.

On top of this, government schools in Goa do not offer English as the medium of instruction - which, as everyone knows, is something that makes a big difference to the future of the child. Nor do they offer Romi Konkani (Konkani in the Roman script) as the medium of instruction, even though this script has been in use in Goa for centuries and is widely used by Catholic Goans. In this very assembly session, facing a demand from MLAs for the recognition of Romi Konkani as an official language of Goa, Sawant said that there is no plan to amend the Official Language Act. The justification for schools is that the medium of instruction (MOI) has to be the so-called mother tongue, which, according to our government, is only Konkani in the Devnagari script, or Marathi, even though they know that not all Goans are comfortable in these languages, and also that almost all Goan parents would like their children to study in English for the opportunities that this provides in their future. The hypocrisy, vindictive exclusion, and blatant casteism that lie behind this choice of MOI become clear when you realise that this ban on English as MOI is not for all students studying in Goa. Private schools,

i.e expensive and posh schools, are free to use English as their MOI. What this means is that rich students, who are mostly of the dominant castes, are allowed to study in English, while the poor, who are usually from vulnerable and discriminated-against communities, are not.

Doesn't all of this reek of a policy to destroy mass education in the state? You allow the physical infrastructure to crumble, you do not provide for basic education facilities like enough teachers, clean toilets, and playgrounds, and you prevent children from learning in the language that would provide them the best opportunities. Who would want to remain in such schools?

And before anybody says that this condition is because these schools are government-run, let us remember that the government also runs the posh Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV), which we have in Goa too, which cater to the children of elite government employees, and which can never be imagined with the problems mentioned above. In fact, education activists in the country have demanded that the KVs be the standard for government education across the country. But how can the government give the same facilities it gives children of its officer class to children of the poor, when this would completely overturn the rules of Brahmanism?

The irony is that this same Education Minister is always boasting about how his government is turning Goa into a 'knowledge hub'. Here is what it means - every kind of elite education opportunity in Goa, while government-run primary education lies in the doldrums. The most elite schools in the country which have set up branches in Goa under Sawant's watch - to cater primarily to the rich families from Delhi and Mumbai who are now 'based' in Goa - have no problem finding space for their so-called international-quality facilities, but 24 government schools don't even have their own premises. Every kind of tertiary-level education opportunity is springing up in Goa, from prestigious technology institutes (both public like IIT and NIT, and private like BITS Pilani), multiple law and management colleges (again both public and private), to new film institutes, agriculture colleges, veterinary colleges, and all kinds of universities, you name it. But the fact that enrollment is dropping in government primary schools is not a problem. Sawant has been determined, for years now, to find an 'appropriate' site for the IIT - even though he comes up against strong opposition from the local populace every time, with them refusing to give up the acres and acres of land for all the lavish facilities that these government-run 'premier' institutes are famous for. Despite this, he hasn't given up, and recently declared that the current choice is Rivona village. But he can't find even small playgrounds for government-run primary schools.

This is the meaning of Brahmanical education system in a nutshell. Those who have the background to buy quality primary school education (with English as MOI) in Goa are also spoilt for choice in terms of what they can do later, right up to the tertiary level and beyond.

Those at the other end of the spectrum are meanwhile provided all the conditions to force them to drop out of education altogether. Education Minister, or Education-destroying Minister?

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