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Pedagogy Is the New Surname: What a Gurgaon Birthday Party Teaches About Indian Education

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SOCIAL ISSUES**GS1****GS2****ESSAY**

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Pedagogy Is the New Surname: What a Gurgaon Birthday Party Teaches About Indian Education

 Hindustan Times

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GS1

GS2

ESSAY



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"A satirist admits choosing an IB school not for pedagogy but because the most accomplished person on his social radar did. If school choice among the elite is imitation dressed as evaluation, what does that imply for how education policy should treat signalling as against learning?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

Hindustan Times

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Satire is admissible evidence in GS1 society answers, and this piece is unusually load-bearing: it documents **education as positional good**, **elite exit from national boards**, and the **two-elite structure** of new Indian wealth, each a named phenomenon in the sociology of **stratification**. It is also first-rate essay raw material, and the rare source whose author confesses his own motive, which is what makes the data trustworthy.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The confession. Asthana's five-year-old attends a Gurgaon international school. Why IB over CBSE or ICSE? He can deliver "a well-rehearsed five-minute monologue to proselytise CBSE simpletons", but in reality he "just followed what the most accomplished guy on my social radar did." Parents, he notes, look to other parents for decision-making clues, not to grandparents "forever plotting for you to have the (n+1)th kid."

The migration of the marker. Schools were always class markers; the marker moved. First the **famous boarding schools, Doon, Mayo, Lawrence Sanawar**, whose boarding function was partly a security product; then, “once law and order improved and kidnappings for ransom fell to a tolerable count,” the rich shifted to day schools and “needed a new class marker. So, they learnt a new word: **pedagogy**.” His definition belongs in the annals: “Pedagogy is the method of effective teaching and learning, and is also used to **justify a school fee that makes you download a Chinese loan app**.”

The pipeline and its weather. The international board “does prepare the base for a kid to try for an Ivy League degree abroad”, and IB schools “proudly display the insignias of universities they have exported their students to, **like a private engineering college displays IT companies that recruited from their campus**.” The smudge: an American administration that would have you “pay us the tuition fee in dollars, and then go back to your country to earn in rupees”, with parents hoping “Trumpian policies will be buried at a Mar-a-lago golf course” before their nursery kids reach puberty.

THE ANALYSIS

The two elites at the bouncy castle. The birthday party at the “new age play-area”, designated bouncing zones, helps supervising children, parents networking over beer, seats two cohorts Asthana separates with a taxonomist’s care:

	WEALTH VIA EDUCATION	EDUCATION VIA WEALTH
Who	Consulting partners, algorithmic traders, first-generation entrepreneurs, investment bankers	Traditional business families: real estate, wholesale, “elaichi businesses”
Marker	“A suited profile-picture on LinkedIn”	The owner-employee binary : an MNC senior vice-president is still, to them, staff
Tell	Prosperity recent: “they still remember to click pics of the legroom when they fly business class”	Contempt for salaried achievement, “very good at masking” it

The peace treaty of covert display. No common conversational ground, so the moment jargon makes one side feel less, “they switch to some covert display of wealth”: “**Oh, you stayed at Interlaken? Nice, we went to St Moritz**.” The mothers run a parallel sorting: working women horrified at a 3 pm Tuesday play-date summons; groups self-assembling “by judging the rest by their hand-bags.”

The margins of the frame. Asthana’s camera catches what the party is built not to see: “**Blank-faced helpers from eastern India are feeding cake to their designated kid**.” One clause, and the entire service economy underneath elite childhood, migrant, feminised, invisible at the celebration it staffs, is on the record. In a GS1 answer on labour and class, that sentence is citable.

Why this is sociology, not just comedy. Three named phenomena, each examinable. **Positional goods**: education valued for rank, not content, where one family’s gain requires another’s relative loss, which is why fees can rise without learning rising. **Reference-group imitation**: choice under uncertainty made by

copying the highest-status acquaintance, Asthana's own confessed method, which propagates elite behaviour downward as aspiration. **Elite exit:** the departure of the most demanding families from CBSE and state systems, which quietly removes the constituency most capable of forcing public quality, Hirschman's exit defeating voice.

The policy reading. None of this is fixed by **exhortation**. Parents inside an arms race behave rationally; the race, not the runners, is the target. The lever is supply-side credibility: mainstream schooling good enough that remaining in it stops signalling either poverty or unseriousness. Until then, pedagogy remains, in Asthana's coinage, the new surname.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

The International Baccalaureate is a Geneva-headquartered foundation offering programmes from primary to pre-university.

India's mainstream national boards are CBSE and CISCE, the latter conducting ICSE and ISC examinations.

Doon School, Mayo College and Lawrence School Sanawar are the classic Indian elite boarding institutions.

A positional good is one whose value depends on rank relative to others, so aggregate upgrading cancels out.

Hirschman's framework: exit and voice are the two responses to institutional decline; elite exit weakens voice.

Reference-group theory explains choice by imitation of higher-status groups rather than direct evaluation.

NEP 2020 aims at curricular parity and proposes PARAKH as a national assessment centre across boards.

Post-purchase rationalisation is the tendency to justify a choice after making it, Asthana's closing device.

*Do not cite this column as evidence that **IB pedagogy is bad**, or that CBSE is superior; the author explicitly refuses that debate. The evidence it supplies is about **choice-formation**, imitation, signalling, rationalisation, not curricular quality. Confusing the two turns good sociology into a bad opinion.*

THE DEBATE

In defence of the parents. Under uncertainty, copying the most successful person you know is a rational heuristic; IB genuinely serves foreign-admission goals; and sneering at climbers is the oldest privilege of the already-arrived. Satire that mocks aspiration risks being the settled elite's border patrol.

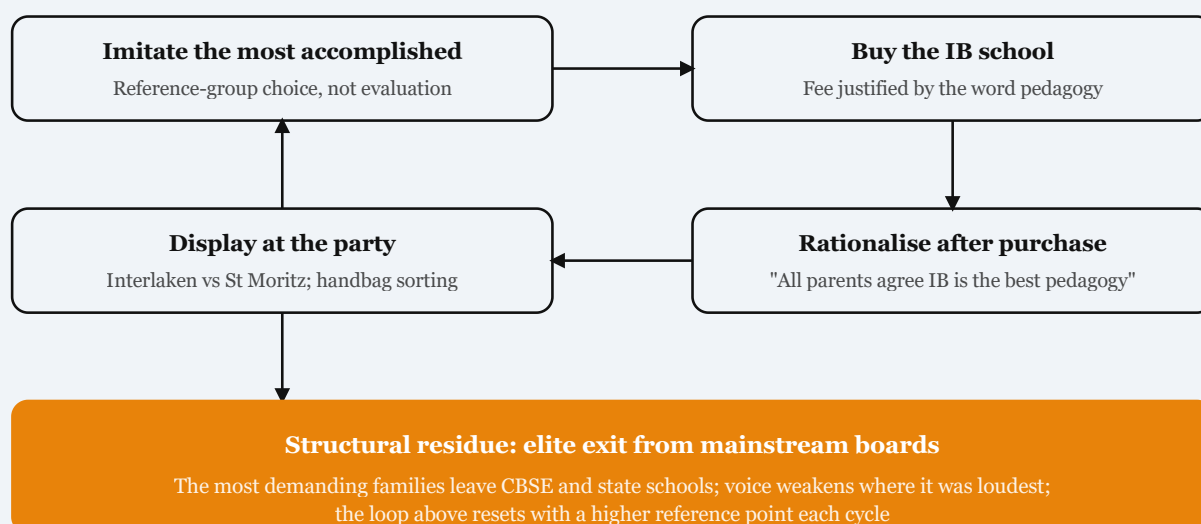
In defence of the satire. The piece mocks nobody poor; its targets are fee inflation justified by vocabulary, evaluation that never happens, and a party culture where children are handed to helpers so parents can network. Naming the game is the **precondition** of any exit from it.

The synthesis for an answer. Both readings agree on the mechanism and differ on blame, which is precisely why the mechanism, signalling arms race plus elite exit, is the safe, scoring core, with blame left to the reader.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

When a personal essay makes a structural claim, extract the **mechanism** and discard the **anecdotes'** **particulars**: bouncy castles and St Moritz decorate the argument; imitation, positional competition and exit constitute it. Then test the mechanism against one dataset or policy you know, fee trajectories, board-switching numbers, NEP 2020's parity ambitions, and you have converted a Sunday column into Mains evidence, which is the entire skill of using popular writing in an exam.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



The loop at the top is individually rational at every arrow. The orange box is what it deposits, cycle after cycle, on the education system everyone else uses.

TAKEAWAY BOX

Pedagogy is the new surname.

IB as Geneva-based board versus CBSE and CISCE; Doon, Mayo, Sanawar as the old markers; positional goods; Hirschman's exit and voice; reference-group imitation; post-purchase rationalisation; NEP 2020's parity and PARAKH.

Extract the mechanism, imitation, signalling arms race, elite exit, and argue the supply-side response: mainstream schooling credible enough that staying stops signalling failure. Use the helper-at-the-party line for the labour dimension of elite childhood.

"The evaluation follows the purchase." A sentence that describes school choice, and much else in modern consumption.

Source: Pedagogy Is the New Surname: What a Gurgaon Birthday Party Teaches About Indian Education —
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● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in the Hindustan Times, Abhishek Asthana turns his own school choice into evidence: he picked an IB school because the most accomplished man on his social radar did, and around that confession builds a field study of education as status display, where pedagogy is a learned word justifying fees, boarding-school surnames have yielded to curriculum brands, and the birthday party at a rubberised play area is where two elites, one that bought wealth with education and one buying education with wealth, meet and measure each other.



SUPPORTING

- The class marker has migrated: from famous boarding schools in an era of poor law and order to day-school curricula once kidnappings fell, so the brand moved from the school's name to the board's acronym, and pedagogy became, in Asthana's line, the method of effective teaching also used to justify a fee that makes you download a loan app.
- The IB pipeline is aspirational engineering: schools display the insignias of foreign universities they have exported students to exactly as private engineering colleges display recruiter logos, though the picture is smudged by an American administration that wants the fee paid in dollars and the salary earned in rupees back home.
- The party sociology is precise: consulting partners, algorithmic traders and first-generation entrepreneurs who acquired wealth via education on one side, real-estate and wholesale families acquiring education via wealth on the other, harmony maintained by covert competition, Interlaken answered with St Moritz, and mothers sorting each other by handbag.



COUNTER

The counter-reading defends the parents: in a credential-saturated economy, imitating the most successful person you know is rational under uncertainty, IB genuinely does prepare for foreign admissions, and mocking aspiration is itself a class position, the settled elite laughing at the climbing one.



WAY FORWARD

Asthana's satire implies the sober agenda: when the elite exits entirely into international boards, public and CBSE schooling loses its most demanding constituents, so policy should

read elite exit as a signalling arms race it cannot ban but can dampen, by making state and CBSE schools good enough that exit stops being the default display of seriousness.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Elite school choice in India increasingly functions as a class marker rather than a pedagogical decision. Examine the sociology of this shift and its consequences for equality of opportunity and for the public education system. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Abhishek Asthana's Hindustan Times column begins with a confession most policy writing never risks: he sent his five-year-old to a Gurgaon IB school not after evaluating pedagogy but because the most accomplished man on his social radar had done so. The satire that follows is better sociology of Indian elite education than most seminar papers, precisely because the author includes himself in the specimen jar.

BODY

Three observations organise the piece. First, the migration of the marker.

Schools have always signalled class in India, but the signal has moved: from the famous boarding schools, Doon, Mayo, Sanawar, chosen partly because law and order made day-schooling the rich risky, to day schools once kidnappings for ransom fell, and now to the curriculum itself, where IB functions as brand and pedagogy as its advertising vocabulary, a word parents deploy to justify fees they compare, unfavourably, with their own college education. Second, the pipeline.

IB schools prepare the base for foreign undergraduate admission and display the insignias of universities they have exported students to, exactly, in Asthana's cruel parallel, as private engineering colleges display recruiter logos in prospectuses. The rosy picture is smudged by an American administration that, in his line, wants the tuition paid in dollars and the salary earned in rupees in Bengaluru; parents hope the policy weather changes before their nursery-age children hit puberty.

Third, the party. At the rubberised play area, two elites meet: those who acquired wealth via education, consulting partners, algorithmic traders, investment bankers, LinkedIn profile pictures in suits, prosperity recent enough that they photograph business-class legroom; and those acquiring education via wealth, real-estate and wholesale families who view the world through an owner-employee binary in which a senior vice-president is still staff.

Harmony holds because competition goes covert: industry jargon answered with Interlaken versus St Moritz, mothers sorting one another by handbag, and the closing ritual, expensive gifts exchanged for useless return gifts, while helpers from eastern India feed cake to their designated children. The sting in the tail is the thesis: as post-purchase rationalisation, all parents, beer in hand, agree IB is the best pedagogy. The evaluation follows the purchase; it never preceded it.

CONCLUSION

Read as policy evidence, the column documents signalling crowding out learning at the top of the system, and the exit of the demanding classes from CBSE and state schooling. The response is not moral instruction to parents, who are behaving rationally inside an arms race, but supply-side: public and

mainstream schooling good enough that staying ceases to be a confession of failure. Asthana's honesty about imitation is the diagnosis; policy's job is to make imitation point somewhere cheaper.

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