



“India Must Turn the H-1B Shock into a Brain-Gain Opportunity”

Prof. (Dr.) Ajay Kumar Singh,
Senior Professor - Faculty of Commerce & Business,
DSE, Delhi University

“AI Tools Can Bridge the Rural-Urban Education Divide—If Access Is Equitable”

Intro: The shockwaves of President Trump’s \$100,000 H-1B fee are already being felt across Silicon Valley and Bengaluru alike. But behind the anxiety lies a quiet possibility—the return of thousands of highly skilled professionals who could redefine India’s growth story. From start-up revival to education reform, **Prof. (Dr.) Ajay Kumar Singh of DSE, Delhi University** explains to senior journalist **Mahima Sharma** how India can turn this global policy shock into a catalyst for transformation. He asserts that this will be powered by smarter funding, global collaborations and a stronger innovation culture. An exclusive interaction on **Socio-economic Voices** this week on **Indiastat**. Read on...

MS: US President Trump's recent executive order imposes a \$100,000 fee for H-1B visa applications. It is bound to impact Indian tech professionals seeking opportunities in the U.S. Are we ready for the return of the technically advanced diaspora? What detailed steps or govt policies are required that the already there job-gap, is not impacted by this back-flux?

Dr Singh: President Trump's new rule, effective from September 21, 2025, requires companies to pay a \$100,000 fee for each new H-1B visa application. This move is expected to reduce the number of work visas issued, especially affecting Indian tech professionals who make up a significant portion of H-1B visa holders. As per news reports JPMorgan economists estimate that this policy could cut up to 5,500 work visas monthly. This is a challenge on the one hand and opportunity on the other hand. We can create an eco system to leverage this situation both at the Government and Non government level.

In response, some companies are shifting operations back to India. For instance, Accenture plans to create 12,000 new jobs in Andhra Pradesh. This back-flux of talent could lead to a shortage of skilled professionals in the U.S. To prevent a job-gap, India needs to enhance its infrastructure, offer better job opportunities and provide incentives for professionals to stay and contribute locally. Apart from the job opportunities, start up opportunities should also be explored in a systematic manner with incentives and schemes like Start Up India; Stand Up India, etc.

MS: In response to the U.S. tightening its visa policies, countries like the UK are easing immigration routes for high-skilled workers. How can India leverage this shift to attract global talent and enhance its educational ecosystem?

Dr Singh: As the U.S. tightens its visa policies, the UK is easing immigration routes for high-skilled workers. The UK has introduced a points-based immigration system that favors skilled professionals, making it an attractive destination for global talent.

India can capitalise on this shift by creating a conducive environment for skilled professionals. This includes offering competitive salaries, improving work-life balance and investing in research and development. Additionally, enhancing India's educational ecosystem by aligning curricula with industry needs and promoting innovation can make India an appealing destination for global talent. In this context, G20 Talent visa has been introduced already by India in continuation of G20 Summits in this regard. This is targeted at researchers, scholars and professionals from G20 nations. This can be a game changer for creativity, innovation, research and development. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has already created an enabling eco system in the education sector coupled with National Policy on Innovation and Startups for students and Faculty of Higher Education Institutions 2019. The increasing number of Universities both public and private are taking the lead in creating an enabling innovation culture.

MS: With India allocating approximately 4.6% of its GDP to education, what innovative funding models can be explored to meet the UNESCO-recommended 6% target without overburdening taxpayers?

Dr Singh: India allocates approximately 4.6% of its GDP to education, aligning with international benchmarks set by UNESCO, which recommends countries invest between 4% and 6% of their GDP in education.

To meet the UNESCO-recommended 6% target without overburdening taxpayers, India can explore innovative funding models such as public-private partnerships, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and alumni contributions. Additionally, leveraging technology to enhance the efficiency of educational institutions can lead to cost savings and better resource utilisation. A Social Stock Exchange has been started in India which should allow educational Institutions to raise funds. This is a new platform which has been created to bring donors and social enterprises with transparency of a regulator. This is one such initiative which can help in attaining the 6% target.

MS: Student debt in India is crossing ₹96,000 crore. How can we make higher education more accessible without leaving students buried in loans?

Dr Singh: Student loan debt in India has crossed ₹90,000 crore. **What you did not mention is that this debt has an annual growth rate of about 15%.** This growing debt burden highlights the need for making higher education more accessible without leaving students buried in loans.

To address this, India can implement income-driven repayment schemes, provide interest subsidies for education loans and promote vocational training programs that offer employment opportunities without the need for extensive formal education. Additionally, increasing the availability of scholarships and financial aid can alleviate the financial burden on students. Apart from all these, mandatory internship or employment for 10 to 15 hours in a week would reduce the debt burden on the one hand and also make the students future ready employable graduates. AICTE, UGC, NCTE, BCI, NMC, etc. should have online platforms to connect students and employers with dashboards to monitor progress.

MS: There is a fast rise of AI-driven personalised learning platforms. How must India ensure equitable access to these technologies across urban and rural educational institutions?

Dr Singh: A *Research Gate Study* demonstrated that implementing AI tools in rural schools significantly improved student performance and engagement, suggesting that AI has the potential to mitigate some of the challenges faced by rural education systems.

To ensure equitable access to AI-driven personalised learning platforms, India should invest in digital infrastructure, provide training for educators and develop content that is culturally and linguistically appropriate for diverse student populations. Additionally, fostering partnerships between government, industry and educational institutions can facilitate the widespread adoption of AI technologies in education. Prof. Sugata Mitra's hole in the wall experiment has proved that students are to be given access to technology and they can manage the learning themselves. Hence, all the learners should be provided with a facility like the SWAYAM platform. Their progress should be monitored and credits should be deposited in Academic Bank of Credit which has been created for educational Institutions.

MS: The global education market is projected to hit \$10 trillion by 2030. How can India tap into this and become a bigger player internationally?

Dr Singh: India can capture a bigger share by exporting education services, scaling low-cost quality delivery and building international campuses and online credentials. There are certain concrete actions we need to take.

- **Export services** like push certified online short courses and stackable credentials to Asia-Africa and other markets.
- **Approve and host** more foreign campus partnerships and joint campuses inside India to create hubs of inbound students.
- **Scale vocational and workforce training** tied to employer demand. Create more respect for vocational training and skill development with proper certifications from Government, corporates and NGOs.
- **Build credit-transfer and qualification-recognition** rules so foreign credits are accepted as part of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and Academic Bank of Credit.
- **Offer targeted scholarships** for nearby countries (Africa, SAARC, Central Asia) for both public and private Universities and Colleges.
- **Create regional education export zones** (special policy + visas + housing) on the lines of Special Economic Zones.
- **Encourage the private sector** to deliver scalable, measured courses with public quality checks in the offline as well as digital mode.

We have already taken certain small steps. In 2025 alone, India approved foreign university campuses in 2025 as part of an internationalisation push. This shows policy momentum to host inbound learners. Universities and industry set up joint research and training centres in 2025 — model for practice-led courses for export markets.

MS: OECD countries spend way more per student than we do. What lessons can we take to improve quality without skyrocketing costs?

Dr Singh: OECD reports show large variation in spending per student; OECD averages are many thousands of USD per student at primary and secondary levels. India cannot match OECD dollar spending and it is not required also. It can copy policy designs: smarter targeting, teacher investment, early childhood focus and outcome-linking. NEP 2020 has emphasised outcome based education and UGC has released model syllabus for UG programmes of various subjects/programmes. NCERT has released syllabus with new books upto 8th class and the books up to 12th class will be released soon. NCTE is also taking steps for improvement in teacher education.

OECD 2025 data shows government spending per student varies widely; higher spending does not automatically produce uniformly better outcomes — targeted spending matters. India increased education allocations in 2025 but experts warn under-utilisation; implementable reforms matter more than headline budgets. It is important to know that most of the educational infrastructure is under utilised. There are very few buildings which are open for 24

hours. There are a few educational Institutions which have more than 1 shift. We have to explore the possibilities of running physical infrastructure for 24 hours. Digital education is to be made available 24X7 for even the last person.

Concrete, low-cost and high-impact measures that we can take as a nation...

- **Invest in teacher quality first:** focused in-service training and mentoring instead of across-the-board raises.
- **Move funds** to early childhood and **remedial programs** (highest long-term ROI).
- **Use blended learning** to raise instructional time without big capital costs.
- **Target** small-class or tutor support for **weakest cohorts**.
- **Create outcome-linked funding** for districts (gainsharing with accountability).
- **Standardise learning measurements** tied to simple public dashboards.
- Consolidate small, low-enrolment schools into resource centres to **use teachers better**.
- **Use public procurement** to buy quality textbooks and teacher materials at scale.

MS: International students are being wooed by the US, UK and Australia. How can India make its universities more attractive to them?

Dr Singh: 2025 shows destination countries changing visa and recruitment rules. The UK reduced some post-study stays and tightened sponsor rules in 2025; Australia and the US changed visa and application rules in 2025. These moves affect student flows and open opportunities for competing destinations. India should ideally remove any kind of friction (visa, housing, credit recognition). This in order to raise quality in target programs and market practical ROI.

In an ideal situation we need to:

- **Simplify student visa processing** and post-study work options for key source countries.
- **Create one window** for foreign student services (admissions, visa help, housing info).
- **Fund and publicise** English-taught postgraduate programmes aimed at professionals.
- **Build internship pipelines** with domestic industry for employability.
- **Offer scholarships** targeted at nearby low-income countries.
- **Improve campus life:** clear safety standards, counselling, accommodation support.
- **Run targeted marketing** in Africa, West Asia and Southeast Asia using alumni ambassadors.
- **Fast-track quality** assurance and global recognition for new English programs.

We can learn from foreign shores. UK policy shifts in 2025 changed post-study work rules and sponsor obligations; these shifts make alternatives more attractive. Analysis of international recruitment in 2025 highlights demand volatility and opportunity for new destinations. **These initiatives are very important to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 and Vishwaguru Bharat.**

MS: Higher education in India could become a research and innovation powerhouse. What steps are needed to make that happen?

Dr Singh: In 2025 India launched larger research and innovation funding programmes and announced new research parks and centres — but experts warned about delays, fund flow and capacity. Use both the funding announcement and critical reporting. Funding matters, but so do institutions: stable grants, quality PhD pipelines, industry links, research leadership, IP and commercialisation systems. To progress ahead in a better, stronger manner, **some concrete steps need to be taken like...**

- Stable, multi-year institutional research grants (reduce single-year uncertainty).
- Create 10–15 global-standard research universities with autonomy and heavy PhD intake.

- Decouple teaching load for research staff; hire research faculty on competitive contracts.
- Fund graduate fellowships with predictable stipends and international mobility.
- Fund translational bridges: tech transfer offices and proof-of-concept funds.
- Create research parks near universities and tax incentives for R&D collaboration.
- Set simple national metrics for research quality and open data on grants.
- Fast-track industry-university consortia in priority sectors (health, energy, semiconductors).

The RDI scheme and 2025 budget highlight India's political commitment to R&D. Yet, delays and process gaps persist. Strengthening fund disbursement and governance is vital. The newly launched India-based research centre in 2025 exemplifies how industry-linked hubs can drive efficient, outcome-oriented innovation across sectors.

MS: States like Maharashtra are signing deals with Cambridge to improve education standards. How can we expand these partnerships nationwide to really boost quality?

Dr Singh: In 2025, Maharashtra signed a landmark MoU with Cambridge for teacher training and curriculum support. It wasn't just a partnership — it was a signal. A signal that Indian states are ready to experiment with global collaborations to lift learning outcomes. But one state's success cannot remain an island. If India wants to make such partnerships count, it needs a standard playbook to scale them effectively.

That playbook must begin with **clarity** — a national MoU template that outlines measurable outcomes, evaluation metrics, and monitoring protocols. Start small: pilot similar partnerships in five states representing different realities — urban, rural, and small. Each pilot should be independently evaluated, not merely reviewed on paper.

Next, build **regional teacher-training hubs** to cascade knowledge — “train the trainers” who can reach classrooms faster and more sustainably. To ensure accountability, tie every partnership to visible school outcomes: literacy, numeracy, and teacher competency.

Every state should establish a small **implementation unit** to manage contracts transparently and prevent vendor capture. Publish results annually with third-party audits, using **matched funding models** where both sides share responsibility. **Finally, let learning travel** — through a **national public portal** where states share what works and what doesn't. Only then will partnerships translate into systemic progress.

About Dr Ajay K Singh

Dr. Ajay Kumar Singh is Senior Professor (w.e.f. 17-07-2018), formerly Head & Dean (01-04-2022 to 31-03-2025), Department of Commerce, Faculty of Commerce & Business, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi. He is also the Chairperson of Delhi University Sports Council. Dr. Singh is Adyaksh, Delhi Prant, Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal. In the past, he has also served as the Vice Chancellor of Sri Sri University, Cuttack, Odisha (2019 to 2022). Dr Singh is the Immediate Past President of Indian Commerce Association (ICA) as well as Fellow and Managing Trustee of ICA. Dr. Singh has 39 years of teaching experience in all with 255 publications.

About the Interviewer

Mahima Sharma is an Independent Journalist based in Delhi NCR. She has been in the field of TV, Print & Online Journalism since 2005 and previously an additional three years in allied media. In her span of work she has been associated with CNN-News18, ANI - Asian News International (A collaboration with Reuters), Voice of India, Hindustan Times and various other top media brands of their times. In recent times, she has diversified her work as a Digital Media Marketing Consultant & Content Strategist as well. Starting March 2021, she is also a pan-India

Entrepreneurship Education Mentor at Women Will - An Entrepreneurship Program by Google in Collaboration with SHEROES. Mahima can be reached at media@indiastat.com

Disclaimer: The facts & statistics, the work profile details of the protagonist and the opinions appearing in the answers do not reflect the views of Indiastat or the Journalist. Indiastat or the Journalist do not hold any responsibility or liability for the same.

indiastat.com October, 2025

socio-economic voices

INDIASTAT INITIATIVES

indiastatdistricts

A storehouse of socio-economic statistical of 620 districts. A cluster of 11 associate websites

indiastatelections

Provides election data for all 543 parliamentary and 4120 state assembly constituencies

indiastatpublications

A collection of election and reference books in print, ebook & web based access formats

indiastatquiz

An initiative to promote election awareness by collaborating with election offices to conduct engaging quizzes.

24 years of serving socio-economic and electoral research fraternity in india and abroad

© Datanet India Pvt. Ltd.