



Paper Heist: A Comparative Study of CAT 2003 , BSSC 2017 and NEET 2024 Scams in Bihar

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Abstract: Bihar is a state with rich historical legacy in education, but in recent years, systemic flaws have marred it, especially the examination processes. This paper examines the phenomenon of Bihar emerging as an epicenter of examination scams and paper leaks by identifying its causes, mechanisms, and implications. Rooted in socio-economic disparities, political corruption, and administrative inefficiencies, these malpractices have undermined the credibility of the state's education system. Based on a detailed case study analysis, media reports, and policy reviews, this research work analyzes the impact

of such scams on students, educators, and society at large. Moreover, it provides a strategic framework for reform that is built around transparency, technological intervention, and community accountability to regain the lost trust and integrity of the examination system in Bihar. By surpassing these hurdles, the research will add to the larger debate regarding ethical governance and educational reforms in India.

Keywords: Community Accountability, Education Mafia, Modus Operandi, Paper Leak.

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Introduction:

"True education must correspond to the surrounding circumstances or it is not a healthy growth." – Mahatma Gandhi.

A fair education system emphasizes inclusivity, equity and the provision of necessary resources to support every learner's unique needs. The recurring incidents of paper leak, and the incompetence of the education system has undermined fundamental right to education and employment, leaving students in despair and uncertainty. As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the suicide rate among students reached 7.6% in 2022. The continuous betrayal of trust in the name of paper leak has shaken the rule of law, adhered to by our constitution. The repercussion of this leak is profound, affecting the foundation of fairness and integrity that our education system is supposed to uphold.

An investigation by the Indian express found that there were 41 paper leaks over the last five years in 15 states, affecting 1.4 crore jobs seekers who had

applied for over one lakh vacancies. With the recent NEET 2024 scam and the EOU of Bihar Police uncovering significant lapses and mismanagement in conducting the exam there is a need to analyze the systematic failure of education system in Bihar and how these rackets underpin functionaries of deep-rooted mafias who betray all hopes, hardwork and dreams of youth in vain. In this article, we dealt with three prominent cases in Bihar. We tend to find out possible linkages of paper leak in the context of Bihar and to provide the possible solutions for legislation and policymakers.

Review of Literature:

1. **Pandey, S.K. (2024). Education and social changes in Bihar-** This book dwells upon the enduring legacy of Bihar ancient university reflecting the cultural ethos, emphasis on learning and intellectual pursuit as a foundational element of society. These universities were significant centers for learning, attracting students from Asia. They offered multiple courses emphasizing a rich tradition of scholarships. During the later era education system in Bihar was influenced by regional rulers and Islamic conquests. However, the impact on broader educational development was limited. The British colonial period marked a significant turning point for education in Bihar with the introduction of western structure. The book throws light on the state's oblivious attitude towards mental and financial draining of students.

2. **Mishra, S.K. (2017). Bihar education system in shambles: Building History with Rubble-** This article provides a detailed critique of the education system in Bihar, India. Mishra discusses the ideological breakdown in the 1970s, the Bihar movement, and the call for Total Revolution by Jayaprakash Narayan, which led to sociopolitical instability and further degradation of the education system.

3. **Ahmad, S. (2024). Bihar's Descent from Ancient Centre of Learning to Hub of Education Mafia is for all to see-** This article states that Bihar has witnessed a troubling decline in its educational standards, giving rise to an "education mafia". This term refers to organized groups involved in malpractices such as exam paper leaks, fraudulent admissions, and other corrupt activities within the education sector. Their operations have not only tarnished the state's educational reputation but have also highlighted the deep-rooted issues plaguing the

system. The pervasive nature of these malpractices has led to widespread distrust among students and parents, who feel that merit and hard work are overshadowed by corruption. Despite efforts by authorities to curb these activities, the education mafia continues to find new ways to exploit the system in Bihar.

4. **Mathew, J. (2024) Revitalizing Bihar's Education System: Lessons from 'Work Hard Be Nice'-** This article points toward the shift in Bihar's educational patterns from ancient to the contemporary era of politicized administration and how various factors like lack of infrastructural development, poor quality teachers, lack of funding, existing poverty cycle, caste discrimination, political instability, and inconsistency affects academic structures in Bihar.

5. **Sinha, D. (2021) Corruption and Governance in Bihar education system-** This book analyses the systemic issue of Corruption and Governance, highlighting its implications on student psyche and the series of paper leaks taking toll on the fair education system.

6. **Tiwari, B.K. (2024) The Never-Ending Story of Leaked Exam Papers-** This article cites the reported paper leak in the last 7 years, where more than 70 examination papers have been leaked in different states. The article put emphasis on intentions and policies of the government made but despite this paper leak continues in the states. It talks about steps to be taken and more than strict punishment to provide an effective solution to this problem.

7. **Jha, S.K. (2003) CAT paper leak triggers crisis of confidence in IIM's, government plays blame game-** This article dealt with how Mastermind may have bribed lower-level employees of printing presses. The article dealt with the CAT paper leak scenario in 2000. It also showed how scammers manipulated their lower-level employees in the process of bribery. A group headed by Ranjit Singh leaked 200 banking exam papers as well. The same scammers groups were associated with All India medical entrance exam 2000 leak in Patna.

8. **Sharma, M. (2024) Broken Promises: Caste, Crime and Politics In Bihar-** This book deals with the rule of political heavy weights in executing the institutionalized paper leak.

9. **Chandra, N. (2022) BPSC paper leak- 3-member committee to submit report on exam**

cancellation- This article argued how BPSC has constituted a three-member inquiry committee. The inquiry committee will investigate the matter within 24 hours and the decision to cancel the examination will be taken on the basis of the report of the committee.

10. Bhelari, A. (2024) Bihar Assembly passes Bill to prevent paper leaks in competitive exams- This article states that Bihar has joined the ranks of states with “anti-cheating” legislations through the passage of Bihar Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024.

Critical gap in literature and scope for further study: We found out through previous research works, that there were many research articles on the adverse effects of paper leak on the students and society in general. But in none of those research work, they tried to trace the systemic and organizational linkages throughout the two decades of 2003-2024, ranging from CAT 2003 SCAM, BSSC 2017 PAPER LEAK SCANDAL and the latest NEET-UG 2024 PAPER LEAKS allegation. This article will be beneficial in identifying the linkages present in all these recurring incidents which have not been explored so far. The policy suggestions given in this research paper will help in making a significant contribution towards addressing the grave concerns and their consequent detrimental impacts. This research paper brings to the floor the different ethical considerations that need to be inculcated in the educational curriculums, the training manuals of administrators and the policymakers’ conscience. This research will contribute in bridging the gaps in the academic literature by providing data and analysis that are related to the different paper leak scams in Bihar.

Objectives:

This article attempts to explore the following objectives.

- To historically trace the paper leak incident specific to Bihar (CAT 2003, BSSC 2017, NEET 2024).
- To analyze the modus operandi of such rackets.
- To dig in the nexus of different paper leak cases.
- To interpret it with bureaucratic and political failure.
- To come up with effective solutions to combat issues.

Research Questions:

- What are the factors responsible for paper leak scams in Bihar with specific reference to three major cases to analyze the government approach to CAT SCAM 2003, BSSC SCAM 2017, NEET SCAM 2024.
- What are the linkages (if any) between the cases taken and the nexus operational?
- What steps have been taken by the government agencies with respect to the concerned cases and find out the commonality between them through comparative analysis?
- What are the effective strategies and measures that can be implemented to prevent paper leak scams in Bihar?

Methodology:

In this article, a comparative approach is adopted in order to analyze three case studies of paper leaks in Bihar. The three case studies analyzed thoroughly are CAT paper leak 2003, BSSC paper leak 2017, NEET 2024 paper leak. The findings deduced have been compared to find linkages in verdict of cases, report of committees and investigation method with regard to all three cases of the paper leak scams. The data have been collected through secondary methods taken from books, journals, articles, Judgments of Supreme Court and High Courts and government reports.

Findings:

A comparative analysis of the three case studies revealed that there are various detrimental effects of paper leak affecting the society in general which are mentioned below:

1. Political and Administrative Challenges:

- Ranjit Don’s rise within political circles, especially his affiliation with the Lok Janshakti Party (a BJP ally), underscores the role of political patronage in perpetuating such malpractices. Despite his criminal history, Don remains influential and sought after by political parties, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the judicial and law enforcement system in tackling corruption and fraud in examinations. Ranjit Don was embroiled in 2003 CAT PAPER LEAK (Tribune, ss2003) and his inner circle was also involved in the latest 2024 NEET -UG

paper leak (Vanshika Yadav Case, 2024) scandal. This leniency showed that political patronage helps the criminals in carrying out these scams.

- The case highlights a broader issue of political interference in administrative matters. The lack of accountability from political executives, who are often preoccupied with elections, allows bureaucrats to operate with impunity, perpetuating corruption.

2. Judicial Indifference:

- The judiciary and media have shown limited interest in holding those responsible for paper leaks accountable. The chairman of BSSC, Sudhir Kumar was arrested by the Special Investigation Team of the Patna Police, with regard to the BSSC SCAM 2017 (Anantpreet Singh Case, 2022) but was later granted bail. This lack of oversight, coupled with the presence of powerful individuals in the administrative and political spheres, has emboldened criminals involved in exam scams.
- On 5th May 2024, a bench comprising Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud along with Justice J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Mishra refused to cancel the 2024 NEET-UG exam and reasoned that the paper leak was not systematic or widespread enough that it tampered with the integrity of the exam. (SC Observer, 2024) This statement exemplifies the aloof nature of our judicial system to recognize the deepening loopholes in the system.

3. Role of Organized Crime:

- The involvement of individuals like **Ranjit Kumar Singh (Ranjit Don)**, a former MBBS graduate turned mastermind behind a widespread paper leak racket, exemplifies how organized crime is interwoven with educational corruption in Bihar. Ranjit Don's network, which included coaching centers, scholars, and local politicians, facilitated the rigging of various exams, including medical and competitive tests.
- Individuals like **Sanjiv Kumar alias Guri Ji** took over the operation of solver gangs after Ranjit Don's arrest. These individuals, well-

connected in educational and political circles, ensured that candidates willing to pay could easily cheat their way through the exams.

- In the BSSC SCAM 2017, the nexus between one of the evaluators named Anantpreet Singh Brar and printer Vinit Kumar and their involvement in the paper leak shows the systematic facilitation of these scams.
- Central Bureau of Investigation, on September 20, 2024 filed a second charge sheet in connection with NEET -UG 2024 question paper theft case against Dr. Ahsanlu Haque, Principal Oasis School, Hazaribagh and city coordinator of Hazaribagh, Mohammad Imtiaz Alam, Vice-Principal, Oasis School and central superintendent and Jamaluddin, reporter of a Hindi newspaper in Hazaribagh. The investigation revealed Dr. Ahsanul Haque and Mohammad Imtiaz Alam conspired with other accused to steal NEET-UG question paper.

4. The Impact on Students and Society:

- The NEET-UG exam is a pivotal test for aspiring medical students, and its integrity is crucial to ensuring fair access to medical education. However, the paper leak scandal undermines this fairness, as students who had access to leaked papers gained an unfair advantage, while deserving students who followed the rules were left at a disadvantage.
- The leak raises questions about the credibility of competitive exams and whether they truly reflect merit. Such malpractices erode the trust of students and parents in the education system.

5. Financial Implications:

- The involvement of financial transactions in the leak—Rs 40 lakh per student—reflects the commercialization of education, where money, rather than merit, dictates access to educational opportunities. This also creates a class divide, where only the wealthy can afford to pay for the leaked papers, further entrenching inequality.
- The accused in the BSSC 2017 (Anantpreet Singh Brar Case, 2022) paper leak implied

that they used to take Rs. 6 lakhs from each candidate to circulate the leaked exam papers to them.

6. Psychological Toll on Students:

- Students who prepare rigorously for exams only to discover that others have gained an unfair advantage through corruption may experience demotivation and disillusionment. This can impact their mental health and future academic pursuits, contributing to a sense of injustice (Economics Times, 2024). As an example, NEET-UG candidate Bhawna Dalal described her experience at Bahadurgarh Hardayal Public School, which generated eight national top scorers, where she was given the incorrect question paper set, which was returned after twenty-five minutes. Many of her center's pupils received grace marks, as she claimed, but she was not given those extra credits.
- Another example was Komal, who gave her optimism at first by scoring 31 points higher than the previous year's threshold of 610. Her chances were, however, diminished by the grace marks given to more than 1500 applicants for time loss that increased this year's threshold. "What do I do now? My father, the only provider, made a significant investment in my educational coaching." Many students share Komal's frustrations, which are heightened by her statement.

7. High Demand for Government Jobs:

- The allure of a government job in Bihar, where a person's social status is largely determined by their employment in the state machinery, drives a large number of students to seek these posts, whether through merit or fraudulent means. The first phase of clerk-level written examination conducted by Bihar Staff Selection Committee (BSSC) was for only 13,00 clerk posts in state government departments and the subsequent leak jeopardized the lakhs of students appearing for the said examination.
- With limited job opportunities and widespread poverty, many aspirants, particularly from rural areas, are willing to pay hefty sums to get a government job. This creates a demand

for illegal shortcuts, leading to the growth of these organized crime rings.

8. Educational and Coaching Rackets:

- Coaching institutions in Bihar are often complicit in these scams, as they are either directly involved in providing leaked papers or act as middlemen for solvers and candidates. Role of middlemen like S.S Bhagat of IMS coaching institute played a crucial role in the distribution of the leaked CAT papers across the country (TOI, 2003)
- The coaching centers act as a conduit for illegal activities, promising guaranteed success for those who can pay. These institutions thrive in an environment where competitive exams are seen as the only pathway to success.

9. Corruption in Governance

- The widespread nature of this corruption indicates deep-rooted issues in Bihar's governance. Government officials, including those in the BSSC like the BSSC Chairman, Sudhir Kumar and his relatives, were arrested after evidence pointed to their involvement are often caught up in fraudulent schemes, sometimes aided by local politicians and law enforcement (Anantpreet Singh Brar Case, 2022). This erodes trust in public institutions and creates a cycle of malpractice that is difficult to break.

10. Lackluster Security Measures.

- The lack of metal detectors, CCTV cameras, and biometric verification facilitates the criminals' access to documents. The integrity of the examination process has been compromised by the ease with which leaked exam papers may now be shared thanks to technology and the internet, therefore digitalization also plays a part. Leaked materials are also being widely shared because of online platforms like social media and messaging applications.
- With regard to the NEET-UG paper leak, the Economic Offences Unit of Bihar Police in their response submitted to the supreme court on 10th July 2024 stated that when they confiscated the sealed trunks, carrying enveloped question papers, they noticed one

envelope, opened at the wrong end (Quint, 2024). These tamper proof envelopes must be opened at a designated end which all the exam staff are trained to do. The EOU in its press note issued on 23rd June, stated that the prescribed security protocols related to transportation, storage and handover were not fully complied with due to which tampering with boxes and envelopes carrying question papers could not be detected.

Policy Suggestions:

1. Holistic Curriculum: Bihar's education system can be revitalized by drawing lessons from Jay Mathews' book, "Work Hard. Be Nice" (Mathew, 2009). The book chronicles the success of 'the Knowledge Is Power Program' (KIPP) in the United States, emphasizing a strong focus on character development. Raj suggests that Bihar could benefit from adopting similar strategies like character building Education integrating values and ethics into the curriculum to foster holistic development. The concept of inculcating values of honesty and responsibility in the field of civic education has also been emphasized by Plato. Thus, it is important for the policymakers to advance academic integrity and fairness in the education system by using honor codes, academic integrity policies, and ethical training programs.

2. Stricter Oversight: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality to change something, build a new model that makes the existing obsolete" Buckminster Fuller (Aslan, 2018) Use of technology to ensure a secure online exam system, encryption of exam papers, and machine learning algorithms to detect suspicious activities. Establishing transparency and disclosing the syllabus and exam process in advance can reduce the likelihood of paper leak.

3. Stringent Penalty: The urgent necessity for a robust and strict legal action on those found guilty, including fines and imprisonment is the need of time. Despite the recurring paper leak incidents, it is only now, that two prominent legislative measures both at central and state level by name (public examination – prevention of unfair means bill and Bihar public examination- Prevention of unfair means bill 2024) have been passed (Drishti IAS, 2024) These bills prescribe strict penalties including a minimum jail term of 3-5 years and a fine up to Rs. one crore.

4. Political Accountability: Joseph Stiglitz argued (Stiglitz,1999) that paper leaks are often linked to systematic corruption in the governance and education market. He suggested an independent auditing mechanism to oversee the education sector.

5. Enhanced Public Awareness: Arundhati Roy argues (Baul, 2014) that paper leak is associated with institutional ethics breakdown and suggests for civic activism to work as whistleblower protection.

Reform Measures: Noam Chomsky stated (Marginalian, 2012) that the commodification of education under neoliberalism fuels paper leak issues. According to him, the need is to resist privatization and prioritize public accountability. Similar view has been advocated by Amartya Sen (Rajpakse, 2016) who believes that education is the fundamental capability that enables individual corrective growth, so enhancing institutional capability and promoting inclusive development that prioritizes education as a public good will overall lead to betterment of society.

6. Need for Decentralization: Excessive centralization often leads to policy failures at local level (Paul, 2024). Vandana Sinha suggests decentralized examination system and community driven monitoring for fixing the current loopholes.

Conclusion:

The recurring incidents of paper heists in Bihar highlight a grave challenge to the integrity of the examination system, undermining the credibility of educational institutions and eroding public confidence in the administration. Factors such as systemic corruption, lack of stringent security measures, and inadequate oversight have facilitated such crimes. The consequences are far-reaching, affecting students' future, institutional credibility, and the state's reputation.

To address this issue, the implementation of robust security protocols, digitization of examination processes, and stringent legal actions against offenders are essential. Additionally, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability within the system is imperative. Eradicating paper heists requires collective effort and unwavering commitment from authorities, educators, and society. Only then can Bihar restore trust in its education system and pave the way for a brighter future.

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