

CHENNAI CONFERENCE: PERSPECTIVE, PROGRAMME AND EXPECTATIONS

**All India Conference
for Abolishing Commercialization of Education and
Building a Common School System
30th June - 1st July 2012**

Organized by:

State Platform for Common School System (SPCSS), Tamilnadu

In association with:

All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE)

Venue:

Valluvarkottam, Nungambakkam, Chennai

BACKGROUND

The **All-India Conference for Abolishing Commercialisation of Education and Building a Common School System** is being organised by the **State Platform for Common School System (SPCSS), Tamil Nadu** in association with **All India Forum for Right to Education (AIFRTE)** on **June 30 - July 01, 2012 at Chennai, Tamilnadu, India**. This Conference is located at a crucial historical moment of contemporary India. This is the moment marked by 20 years of ruthless pursuit of globalisation agenda and neo-liberal policies by the Indian state and sustained struggles waged in response by the masses on a range of issues with a view to protect or restore their democratic and Fundamental Rights. This is also the moment when “We, the People of India” have realised that the ruling classes would accelerate their attack on the imagery of free India that was forged during the national struggle against colonialism and, at the same time, deliberately violate the Constitutional vision of India rooted in that imagery. Today, each and every resource of our country including water (*jal*), forests (*jangal*), land (*jameen*), livelihood (*jeevika*), biodiversity (*jaiiv-vividhata*), knowledge (*jnana*), means of production, language, skill, education, health and cultural heritage has been converted into a tradable commodity for the global market. To be sure, the common people are increasingly becoming aware that this onslaught could not have

happened without due deliberation by the State. Precise in its method and clear in its objective of promoting the interests of the corporate capital, the Indian state has not hesitated to manipulate legislative, judicial and executive structures provided in the Constitution. Policies were misconceived, legislations rushed through, budgetary priorities distorted and various supportive institutions made superfluous for this questionable end. Many a times, when people dared to dissent, democracy was short-circuited using media, police or even military. In pursuit of the corporate agenda, the ruling classes have vehemently rejected or sidelined almost all pro-people and patriotic ideas or proposals emanating from mass consciousness.

The same picture holds true for the education system of our country as well. Educational policies and institutions have been handed over on a platter to corporate capital and global market. In order to escape from its Constitutional obligation of providing education of equitable quality to every child and youth, the government is actively outsourcing policy making institutions and even curriculum to international agencies, private businesses, well-oiled NGOs and religious bodies. The Constitution mandated for an education system that could lead to a democratic, egalitarian, just, secular and enlightened India. However, we find that education is increasingly being used as a source of division, discrimination and deprivation and a tool to manufacture a pliable slavish-workforce kowtowing to the ideology of the market. Undoubtedly, the moment has arrived when we have to decide what kind of India we want, what role education must play in building such an India and, most importantly, what should be done by “We, the people of India” to realise vision of the freedom struggle. This is precisely what the Chennai Conference aims at and this is what defines its historic challenge.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

These issues would be reflected upon in the Chennai Conference, especially in the context of school education from pre-primary to class XII. How do we dismantle the present system of multi-layered schooling based on inequality and discrimination and replace it with a fully state-funded Common School System based on neighbourhood schools? What is the meaning and socio-political significance of ‘free’ education? Does it merely mean an education without tuition and other ‘fees’ or does it mean a guarantee of education which does not place any kind of financial burden whatsoever on the child or the guardian? Of course, such a system of schooling would need a system of governance totally different from what we have had to date. Although state-funded, how do we design a system of governance that is democratic, decentralised and participatory? How do we eliminate the festering burden of centuries-old disparities due to class, caste, gender, religion, language, disability and region and instead include pro-people diversities from across the country? While acknowledging the role of a national curriculum framework in order to attain the Constitutional ideals, the challenge in ensuring space in such a

curriculum for creativity of students and teachers, for geo-cultural diversity and multilinguality, for innovation in learning-teaching processes, for integration of critically screened local knowledge and other such essentials. How do we develop holistic relationship between school and higher education by eliminating the various contradictions between the two stages (like entrance examinations and coaching business)? This implies that the agenda of the Chennai Conference includes the issues of fully state-funded and free education from 'KG to PG' as well as a guarantee of equal opportunity to every child for continuing higher education after class XII. This is to say that our struggle is not confined to '**Common School System**' alone but covers the entire domain of '**Common Education System**' from 'KG to PG'. In the Chennai Conference, we would explore the means of forging an alternative pro-people agenda around these questions.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Conference are as following:

1. To develop the concept of fully state-funded **Common School System** based on **neighbourhood schools** from pre-primary stage to class XII in order to attain the Fundamental Right to free education of equitable quality, incorporating the Constitutional values and ideals without discrimination whatsoever and to establish this as the Constitutional obligation of the State.
2. To raise the demand of fully state-funded **Common Education System** from 'KG to PG' as an issue of people's movement so that the Constitutional Right to equal opportunity to access qualitative higher education after class XII is guaranteed to every child.
3. To formulate a strategy of people's movement for building **Common Education System** from 'KG to PG' by abolishing commercialisation of education as a precondition in order to reverse the ongoing neoliberal onslaught for restoring the Constitutional agenda as a national priority.

PROGRAMME AND MAJOR SESSIONS

The Conference will be opened on 30th June by songs, book-releases and unveiling of the portraits of some historical figures who have been a source of inspiration for educational transformation. This will be followed by welcoming torches (*mashaal*) commemorating historical icons of struggle for people's right to democratic, secular, egalitarian and enlightened education system brought from various districts and states across the country. Subsequently, the Conference will be inaugurated by the Chief Guest, **Prof. K.N. Panikkar** (Chairperson, Kerala Council for Historical Research

& General President, Indian History Congress; Former Vice-Chancellor, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kerala).

In the **Inaugural Session** of the Conference, eminent speakers will share ideas on issues like importance of education in social change, the inter-relationship between education and Constitutional values, the history of struggle for Right to Education from 'Macaulay to Manmohan', resistance against the neoliberal assault on education and its commercialisation and further developing the perspective of Common School System. Apart from this, some of the major sessions of the Conference that are proposed are as under:

- **Judicial session** – In this session, Supreme Court/High Court judges (both, sitting and former) and other Constitutional scholars will explore ways to constitutionally challenge the premises and provisions of the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002), Right to Education Act (2009) and the recent Supreme Court judgement that legitimises commercialisation, inequality and discrimination in education. Special focus will be to examine the political and legal avenues of struggle to remove education, health and other critical entitlements from the purview of Article 19 (1) (g) as well as to enlarge the scope of Article 19(6) in light of Articles 14, 15, 16, 19 (1) (a) and 21.
- **International Session** – In this session we will aim at knowing, understanding and drawing relevant ideas for our country from the rich experience of state-funded Common School Systems in various countries whether following the capitalist or the socialist model of economy. At the same time, we shall also uncover and analyse the attempts to undermine Common School System in various countries led by the global onslaught of neo-liberalism. Countries like Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Finland, Germany, Venezuela, and USA have been identified for this purpose. **Delegates from Cuba, Venezuela and Germany will also participate in this session.**
- **Envisioning Common School System Session** – In this session delegates will deliberate about the vision of Common School System for India appropriate to the social, cultural and economic diversity of our country. The core challenge is to ensure that the Common School System of our vision will 'exclude disparities and include diversities'. This includes, among various other issues, need for a curriculum framework that gives critical space for regional and local diversity, to make such arrangements necessary for mainstreaming the sections historically deprived of equal rights and status, to design a democratic, decentralized and participatory governance of the schools, to provide ample space in the curriculum for the criticality and creativity of the students and teachers alike.

- **Movement Building Session** – In this session discussions will be held to develop strategies for building a mass movement in order to abolish commercialisation of education and to establish a fully state-funded **Common Education System** from 'KG to PG'. We shall focus especially on those states and organisations which have witnessed such movements in considerably advanced stage so that appropriate lessons can be drawn.

The Valedictory Address will be delivered by **Justice A.K. Ganguly**, former Judge, Supreme Court of India & Chairperson, State Human Rights Commission, West Bengal on 1st July afternoon. At the end of the conference a call to initiate a nation-wide struggle shall be made by holding cultural **performances, rally and public meeting**.

CHENNAI DECLARATION

In the Conference the **Chennai Declaration** to end commercialisation of education and to launch a people's struggle for establishing Common Education System shall be issued simultaneously in at least the 22 languages listed in the VIIIth Schedule of the Constitution.

TRANSLATION

We are trying our best to provide for IT-enabled live and simultaneous Tamil-Hindi-English translations of the proceedings of the Conference. We appeal for your cooperation in this regard. *Anyone capable of such translation is requested to contact us as soon as possible.*

INVITATION FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONDITIONS THEREOF

Apart from the representatives of various bodies of students, teachers and education rights organisations, individuals from various fields including intellectuals, writers, artists, scientists, judges, trade union leaders and social activists are expected to participate in the Conference. More than 2000 people including 1500 from Tamil Nadu and 500 from across the country are expected to witness this historic Conference. Every person and organisation is invited to participate in the Conference provided they fulfil the following conditions. **Firstly**, they have an unambiguous stand against commercialisation of education and also against the PPP (Public-Private Partnership) which has become a means of transferring public funds to private agencies and corporations. **Secondly**, they resist international funding /FDI and intervention by international agencies such as World Bank, IMF, WTO and other external aid agencies or NGOs supported by them in Indian education. **Thirdly**, they

extend full support to fully state-funded Common School System based on neighbourhood schools. **Fourthly**, they are ready to be a part of a people's movement to establish a fully state-funded, democratic, egalitarian, just, secular, scientific and enlightened education system of equitable quality from 'KG to PG' available to everyone without any discrimination whatsoever.

If you or your organisation fulfil the above conditions and are willing to participate in the Chennai Conference, you are requested to give information (including name, organisation, phone/mobile contact, email and postal address) to any one of the following:

1. **Dr. Vikram Amarawat**, Office Secretary, All-India Forum for Right to Education; Email- vsamarawat@gmail.com ; Mobile- 08128293711; Phone - 079-23274360 (R).
2. **Mr. Prince Gajendra Babu**, General Secretary, State Platform for Common School System, Tamil Nadu; Email- tncommonschoo@gmail.com ; Phone – 044-28341456 (O), 044-28443660 (R).
3. Those interested may also register themselves online at the following website: www.samacheerkalvi.in .

The participants would have to bear their travel expenses. Local hospitality (including lodging and food) will be provided by free of cost. Teams of volunteers of the State Platform for Common School System, Tamil Nadu are collecting donations from the public at large in and outside of Chennai for the Conference.

We appeal you to become a part of the movement for Right to Education and **Common School System** (eventually leading to **Common Education System**) and contribute in building a new India envisioned in the national freedom struggle and the Constitution by participating in this historic Conference.

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