



अखिल भारत
शिक्षा अधिकार मंच

RECONSTRUCTING EDUCATION

*An organ in support of free and equitable education from KG to PG
and in resistance to all forms of trade in education*

Quarterly publication of All India Forum for Right to Education

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Editorial

These days, one may feel quite baffled by a few perhaps insightful questions thrown-up afresh in the context of some recent events. These events may include (though not limited to) the following:-The media responses on the recent verdict of Supreme Court upholding the constitutional validity of RTE Act on the question of 25 percent reservation for disadvantaged children in private schools,. The media coverage of the lately assent of both Houses of Parliament to the RTE amendment act (2010) providing disadvantaged status to disabled children, home-based education for severely disabled and exempting minority institutions from RTE. Discussion on Delhi Government's decision to start a residential school for SC, ST, OBC and minority children on PPP model of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences. The recently commenced broadcast of a television serial Satyamev Jayate on Star Plus (particularly its episode dated June 10th 2012) along with its follow-up program Asar broadcasted on Star News (dated June 15th 2012), wherein a public celebrity issued call for donations/charities for the education of disabled children to the trust/aided schools without at all discussing the aspect of public (state) funded schools.

This state of affairs raises certain pertinent questions. whether fundamental rights of citizens of any particular group/ community/class can be (and should be) protected through benevolence/charity/philanthropy/compassion/sacrifice of another individual/group/community/class? Whether such a focus grounded in these forms of benevolence is not distorting the modern notion of rights itself, which is essentially centered on the principles of dignity and equality; and according to which, rights are rooted in their recognition by the state and guaranteed protection under the law of the land? Whether personal or familial purchasing capacity of an individual or someone's donation and sacrifice should be (or could be) a guarantee for enjoying a fundamental right of a citizen? Further,

"Educate! Agitate! Organise!"

and continue struggle for

Reclaiming Knowledge, Reconstructing Education

is it sufficient to focus on inclusion, or equality / equitable should be our objective? Is it sensible and essential for the media (particularly its electronic avatar) to focus on non-implementation question, instead of engaging in an analysis that is informed by policy shortcomings as well? How should one deal with a perspective that is based on glamour and exceptional/genius instead of being situated in the framework of ordinary? How should we respond to the interventions launched ostensibly for the protection of rights of certain people particularly by the media involving public celebrities, corporate houses and other agencies of neoliberal global capital who only refer to political

in very elusory manner so as to perhaps capture the political leadership of potential mass struggles from genuine mass leaders to themselves?

We believe that this issue of “Reconstructing Education” along with the previous and the forthcoming ones will equip the inquisitive reader to more critically engage with the affairs of our times by throwing some light to the above outlined searching questions. No progressive peoples movement striving for some colossal objective, like the establishment of ‘common school system based on the concept of neighborhood schools’ (CSS-NS) can succeed without unmistakably resolving these fundamental questions.

PERSPECTIVES

The Common School System- A Dream For Ever

Even during freedom struggle, our national leaders conceived of a National System of Education and some institutions were started in different parts of the country by nationalists. Many of them were open to all and were non-discriminatory in character. Mahatma Gandhi proposed Basic Education which had the characteristics of a Common School System. Schooling for a period of eight years was considered essential for every citizen. Thus even before Kothari Commission came up with the concept of Common School System, the idea was there for long. Kothari Commission gave an impetus to the idea. Even though more than forty years have gone since the Report, it is regretful that not only a Common System has not come up, but we are drifting apart due to the neo-liberal policies adopted by successive governments and the undue influence of the World Bank on policy-making.

ONSLAUGHT OF PRIVATISATION

Mohini Jain and Unnikrishnan judgements gave a lot of hope to all educationists and social activists that education, as a fundamental right would give the State a

pre-dominant responsibility to provide education for all children less than 14 years. But RTE Act 2009 belied their hopes and desires. The Act does not mention CSS anywhere; on the other hand it has permitted privatization of schools and provided for re-imbursment of the cost of education foregone by the private managements in admitting poor children against 25% of seats reserved for them in private schools. It has also restricted the period of compulsory education for just 8 years between the ages 6 and 14. Pre-school education can only be a desirable activity of the State and it is not a fundamental right. All these show that CSS is not in the agenda of the Centre. Almost all the States are encouraging private schools and have reduced their budget allocation to education. Tamilnadu, for example, which was spending anything between 25-34% of its budget on education is now allocating only 14.6%, which includes central contribution under SSA and allied schemes. Unaided English Medium schools which numbered just under 40 in 1978 exceed 4500 at present which does not include thousands of nursery and primary schools.