

---

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.

---

## ESSENTIALS OF COMMON SCHOOL SYSTEM

1. A common School belongs to every child and entry is not restricted to any religion, caste or creed or community.
2. It is wholly funded by the State. No fees are levied and children are entitled to free education.
3. No discrimination of any kind is permitted not only in admission but in the classrooms .  
The infra-structure and practices in the school are disabled-friendly.
4. Mother-tongue will be the medium of instruction.
5. Education of equitable quality will be assured to all children in a full-time regular school It will promote the development of the Head, Heart and Hand of the child.

### NEIGHBOURHOOD SCHOOL

Neighbourhood school is the necessary corollary to the Common School System. By this strategy, it becomes the duty of every school to admit every child in its neighbourhood and it is the right of every child to seek admission into the nearest school. Neighbourhood school lays no other condition than proximity to the school. This has several advantages to the child as well as the community.

1. The travel time to meander to the school is reduced, thereby the child has extra time for study and recreation. The child can also help the parents in household work. (This should not be misconstrued with child labour)
2. There will be no need for free bus passes, resulting in considerable saving for the State.
3. School transport system will be greatly reduced, leading to saving of fuel as well as improvement of the eco-system. Air pollution will be reduced. In Tamilnadu alone nearly 25000 vehicles-buses, vans, autos- take children from home to school.
4. Death of children due to accidents will also be minimised.
5. Every child comes to know of other children in her neighbourhood which will increase comradery. The socio-economic barriers will have little effect on children.
6. The community will consider the School as its own and will take greater interest in its functioning. Parents of diverse backgrounds will play a useful role.

### THE STATE AND THE CSS-NS

It will be evident that all these require a kind of society where equality is guaranteed to every citizen. While the Preamble to our Constitution grants equality, in practice it

is not so. While socialism has been thrust into the Preamble during the Emergency, no effort was taken to bring in a socialistic State. If only the status of the Directive Principles had been converted into mandatory duties of the State, some change could have come.

### CSS IN SOCIALISTIC NATIONS

CSS-NS are being fully practiced only in Socialistic countries. I was fortunate to be in a village in the erstwhile Soviet Union before its disintegration. Then enrolment of children was going on and I was delighted when little children with bugles and drums went from house to house and invited the children to be enrolled to join their procession. The procession ended in the school and the new children had a happy time with other children. I was told that that would go on for a fortnight for the new children to get acclimatized to the school and the children there. No dragging of unwilling children to the school by the parent. I dreamt that at least in one of the 7 lakhs of hamlets such a method is adopted. Children were given great respect. Teachers were fully trained and child-friendly. Quality education was provided to all children. This is what I consider as the hallmark of CSS.

### PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE NOT CSS

Some link Public schools in US and elsewhere with CSS. Of course Public Schools provide education without discrimination. Privatisation of education is in full swing in most countries. An article in a magazine complains, "A small group of billionaires is promoting privatization, deprofessionalisation and high-stakes testing as fixes for American public schools". The argument in favour of privatization is that when parents and students have greater choice, schools would be forced to compete for customers, thereby driving the schools to up their quality. But a study by the Teachers' College, Columbia University finds that private schools serve far fewer students than traditional public schools, and have high attrition rates among their lower performing students(2011). A powerful movement is going on against privatization of schools.

Since the sole motive of private schools is profit-making, it cannot co-exist with public schools. While Kothari Commission has not barred private schools from CSS, experience within and without has shown it is well nigh impossible to implement a non-discriminatory system of education available to all children under the dual provision

---

of private and public schools.

#### WHAT NEXT?

A survey of history will show that nowhere has educational revolution preceded social revolution. Changes in the education system will happen only when the socio-political climate is congenial to change. Our objective therefore boils down to bring about a radical change in the political system. Political parties have evinced little interest in CSS-NS. People, though aware of the need for quality education, are not prepared to fight for free quality education through Government schools. Their eagerness to get their children into private schools taking advantage of 25% reservation shows they are not eager to send their children to government schools. We have to build a powerful movement to convince the common people that their children are entitled to free quality education and they have to force the government to upgrade their schools and ensure good education. CSS-NS should turn out to be a mass programme. It is possible and we will make it possible.

#### MOBILISATION OF PEOPLE AND RESOURCES

All these call for activating the masses in favour of CSS-NS. AIFRTE can at best provide a theoretical support, but

mobilization of the masses has to be undertaken on a large scale. In this, students, teachers, trade unions and like-minded persons and organisations are to be used to send the message. Street plays, dramas, public meetings, press conferences etc., are some of the means to reach the people at large. AIFRTE's perspective statement should be translated into all regional languages. Posters should also be printed in all languages. Not only publicity but the spirit of the masses should be aroused so that CSS-NS becomes a universal demand of the people. AIFRTE cannot undertake this mission all by itself. Its member organizations should be assigned the job. In whatever State AIFRTE has no affiliated unit, we have to find one. In Tamilnadu, the demand for Uniform Equitable Quality Education was conceded by the Government only when it turned out to be a mass movement and student wings courted arrest and faced police brutality. Unless CSS-NS turns out to be a mass demand, it would just be a utopian dream.

**Dr S.S. Rajagopalan**

Retired Principal, High School, Tamil Nadu

*e-mail:* ssrajagopalan@hotmail.com

---

## Pseudo Educationists and Edpreneurs

One important argument advanced in favour of the formation of a state, scholars confer is to provide indivisible public services like Education and health to the citizens. They are called as merit wants that can be provided by an institution that stands for sovereign political power. The World Bank economists have used their intellect to distinguish between public goods and private goods even in education. They have called only school education as a public good and higher education as private good as it provides benefits to the individual and not to the public (even if one becomes a Nobel laureate we should not claim him or her as a citizen of a country). Even this distinction did not save school education in India is a different matter. Those who are familiar with the American higher education know that around 65 percent of the students are provided with free education through scholarships. The private universities survive with the munificent endowments and the research projects that the distinguished alumni get from private sector. However, they are very few. The situation in

the higher education of the advanced countries varies from country to country. Now the Indian government is seeking ideas and recommendations from concerned citizens, business groups etc as to how to expand higher education to meet the growing needs of an economy.

Indian higher education of the modern variety was introduced by the British to meet their requirements and to help create an elite class that helped them to survive and would run the state once they leave. There are several issues in this statement, but we concentrate on the current discussion on a report given by a group of business-cum-educationists recently in Delhi on private participation in higher education. The committee on "Corporate participation in Higher Education" constituted by MHRD under the chairmanship of Mr. Narayana Murthy presented the report to the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, in New Delhi on May 08, 2012.

It is reported that the committee wanted land free of