

Common School System : A Road Map of Bihar

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ABSTRACT

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training and research. Education is commonly divided into stages such as pre-school, primary school, secondary school and then college, university or apprenticeship. Education can take place in Formal or Informal Educational setting. Education began in the early ages as adults trained the young of their society in various fields that they would need to master and eventually pass on. Now in most of the countries, education is compulsory for all the children up to a certain age. According to UNESCO in the next 30 years more and more will include in the formal education system as compared to the percentage. Education is a basic human rights, like all human rights. Free and compulsory education to all children up the age of fourteen is a constitutional commitment in India. The Parliament of India has recently passed 'Right to Education Act' through which education has become fundamental right for all children of age group 0-14 years. By far the most important term of reference for the 'Samant School Pranali Ayoug' calls for it to specifically recommend 'way and means to give effect to Right to Education under Article 21A of the constitution within the framework of a Common School System'. The issue of Right to Education is critically linked to 'Common School System' founded on neighbourhood schools.

Keywords: Education, Formal Education, Constitution, Right to Education, Common School System

Introduction:

Common School System (CSS) means "A system of education providing education an equitable quality to all children irrespective of their cast, creed, community, language, gender, economic condition, social status and physical or mental ability." This definition draws heavily from the content in the report of the education commission (1964-66), also known as 'Kothari Commission'. NPE, 1968 accepted the recommendation of the Kothari Commission for bringing about the common school system. In the context of the national system of education, NPE, 1986 restated the determination of the government to take effective measures in the direction of the common school system. Both the 1968 and 1986 policies resolved to move towards CSS.

Dr. D.S. Kothari, chairman of university grant commission (UGC) to frame a national policy which would give shape and direction to newly independent Indian school education system.

According to commission the characteristics of the

common School system are:

1. Publicly founded schools open to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic condition or social status.
2. Adequate standards in all schools and at least a reasonable proportion of quality institutions.
3. No tuition fee should be charged.
4. It meets the expectations of overage parents so that they would not ordinarily feel the need to send their children to fee charging schools outside the system.
5. Exploring ways of including expensive private schools into the common school system through combination of incentives and legislation.
6. Providing free instruction for all in mother tongue at the primary level and encourage the regional languages at the secondary level.
7. Education of equitable quality is a constitutional imperative.

8. Education is not used for profiteering, spreading disharmony or practicing subjugation.
9. Schools that promote inequality, discrimination and injustice in society are not to be allowed to function.

The commonness of the common School system derives from the fact that it calls for the application of common minimum norms of quality education by all school in the system. "The system should be maintained at an adequate level of equality and efficiency so that no parent would ordinarily feel any need to send his child to institutions outside the system."

The following are also listed as essential features of CSS:

1. Coverage from pre-elementary to plus two stage.
2. Well-qualified and trained teachers and optional teacher student ratio.
3. Minimum infrastructure consisting of land and building, number, size, design and furnishing of class rooms. Drinking water and toilets, playground and sports facilities, libraries, laboratories, etc.
4. Common curriculum frame work , shared features of curriculum and comparable syllabi with flexibility relating to text , teaching aids, teaching learning process, evaluation, parameters, assessment, procedures and school calendar.
5. All schools, including private unaided schools , to provide absolutely free education from pre-primary to class VIII as per Article 21A and the amended Article 45 of the constitution; for secondary and senior education, a rational fee structure to be ensured by the state governments and local bodies in all category of schools.
6. All schools, including private unaided schools, to become neighbourhood Schools; neighbourhood to be specified for each school with a view to optimize socio- cultural diversity among children in each school , necessary legislation to cover all government, local body and private schools to be enacted.
7. Screening, interviews or parental interaction not allowed as a valid basis for admission.
8. Decentralized school-based management that ensures the necessary degree of institutional autonomy while locating it within the board

framework of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments relating to rural and urban areas respectively. This requires the formation of school management committees with the majority of members being parents of the student and appropriate linkage with local bodies.

9. Affiliation to be a common board of examination for all school in a state /UT.
10. The curriculum , pedagogy, text book and school ambience to ensure that no child feels excluded or marginalized due to the presentation of Scs, Sts, extreme OBCs, minorities the disabled and the woman in each of these sections in a negative image, inclusive education implies that the building of the post-independence India is appropriately brought alive in school.
11. Critical pedagogy to guide the transformation of the present multi-layered hierarchical school system into CSS based on neighbourhood schools ,since the CSS implies much more than a structural change, it implies an education that liberates the child's mind ,enabling her to resist injustice deconstruct capitalism and neo liberalism and straggle for social transformation.

Common School System requires every neighbourhood to have access to a good government school equipped with all the facilities available in private schools qualified teachers, infrastructures and quality education. If children from rich or poor households attend the same school, its management and teachers would be accountable, as at least the rich will be a pressure group for quality education.

Barriers in CSS:

The CAGE constituted Acharya Ramamurti committee in its analysis, outline the following reasons for the common school system (CSS) proposal not having made headway.

1. Economic and social disparities; the well to do communities send their children to school with better infrastructure , teachers and teaching standard; ordinary school are not sought after and in terms this results low investment in them.
2. The equality of education in government schools having constantly remained poor.
3. Lack of political will.
4. The proliferation of privately managed English

medium schools charging capitation fees and having expensive coaching classes.

5. Growth of institutions in the government sector like the Sainik schools and the Kendriya Vidyalayas ment for separate categories of students.

Road Map of a Common School System in Bihar:

A commission to advise the Bihar government on how to go about the setting up of a common school system has submitted its report. This article discusses the recommendations of the commission regarding the norms and standards required for a CSS and the resource requirements for implementing such a system. It also briefly touches upon teacher education, principles of pedagogy, school management, and the draft of a right to education and common school system bill.

A common school system (CSS) can be defined as a system of schools providing education of an equitable quality to all children, irrespective of their caste, creed, community, language, gender, economic condition, social status and physical or mental ability.¹ The commonness of the CSS derives from the application of common minimum norms and standards of quality education by all schools in the system. As the Kothari Commission points out, “the system should be maintained at an adequate level of quality and efficiency so that no parent would ordinarily feel any need to send his child to the institutions outside the system...”² The common minimum norms and standards ensure both the quality and equality of the system.

The most fundamental among the minimum norms is the adherence by all schools in the CSS to the values which hold together the society in which the system operates. In the Indian context, these are the principles of equality and social justice enshrined in the Indian Constitution. In addition, the system must provide the following:

- (a) Minimum infrastructure consisting of land and building; minimum number, size, design and furnishing of class rooms; drinking water and toilets; playgrounds and sports facilities; libraries, laboratories, and teaching aids; and easy access and other required facilities to children suffering from disabilities;
- (b) Well-qualified trained teachers and optimal pupil-teacher ratios;
- c. A common curriculum framework with a core component with comparable syllabi applicable to

all schools, but adequate flexibility in relation to textbooks, teaching parameters, etc;

- d. A pedagogy which is holistic and child-friendly and which has a liberating influence;
- e. A decentralised school management with adequate autonomy and representation of parents; and
- f. Common language policy.

Moreover, the CSS is based on the concept of neighbourhood schools according to which a school must admit all the children living in the neighbourhood, which is to be specified and delineated for each school.

The basic rationale of a CSS is that it promotes equality and social justice; helps in nation-building and the creation of social capital and is most conducive to providing good education. In the 19th century when the philosophical foundation of public education was being laid in Europe and the US, the CSS was introduced principally for nation-building in countries having different classes, religions and languages. As Heyneman points out, “What was at stake was the forging of a nation based not on principles of tyrannical control but, for the first time, one based on the informed consent of the governed across the full gamut of religions, classes, languages and ethnicities”.

No developed or developing country has ever achieved universalisation of elementary or secondary education without a statefunded and state-regulated well functioning CSS. This is true of all the Scandinavian countries, the US, Canada, most of the European countries, particularly Germany and France, Cuba, China and South Korea.

In India, the adoption of a CSS was first recommended by the Kothari Commission, subsequently endorsed by a number of other commissions and committees, and twice approved unanimously by the Indian Parliament. Unfortunately, the support for the CSS has been confined to the realm of rhetoric. In practice, there has been a constant and continuing attempt to dilute and side-track the idea. This is mainly because of the dominance of the elitist class in educational policymaking in India. Parents belonging to this class send their children to exclusive schools with better infrastructure, teachers and teaching standards and have, therefore, no stake in the CSS.

The cumulative neglect of the public education system that resulted from the failure of the nation to build a CSS has now made the task of establishing such a system much more difficult than it was when the proposal was first mooted. The two formidable obstacles to building a CSS today are its massive financial implications, due in no small measure to the cumulative neglect, and the emergence in the country of a whole hierarchy of school education catering to the needs of different groups of children. However, there is no reason why a CSS cannot be established in India if there is a political will to do so.

Norms and Standards:

In its terms of reference, the commission was asked, among others, to recommend “Norms and Standards...for ensuring education of an equitable quality to all children in the State and making an assessment of its financial implications”; “to recommend a framework for Common School System from the stand-point of ensuring children’s Fundamental Right to Free and Compulsory Education under Article 21A of the Constitution” and “to formulate a plan of action for implementing the Common School System in the State”.

In carrying out its mandate, the commission set and kept in the forefront the following overall objective:

- (i) The goal of free and compulsory education for all children in the age group 5-14 years will be reached in five years starting from April 2008, i.e., by 2012-13.
- (ii) The goal of universalising secondary education will be reached in eight years by 2015-16.
- (iii) The goal of providing facilities according to the norms of the CSS, for senior secondary level education to 70 per cent of the children completing secondary level education, will be reached by 2016-17.

Let us acknowledge that no developed or developing country has ever achieved UEE or for that matter, universal secondary education, without a powerful state funded and state-regulated well-functioning common school system, founded on the principles of neighbourhood schools, in one form or another. India is unlikely to be an exception to this historical and global experiences, notwithstanding the

misconceived ambition of the Indian state to become a ‘Superpower’ by 2020.

Importance of Common School System:

The Common School System encourages active community participation in the education system. It promotes the involvement of parents, local communities, and stakeholders in school management committees, decision-making processes, and monitoring the functioning of schools. Common school system provides equality of educational opportunities and success to every child. The commission advocated a common school system (CSS), providing free education to all, without discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or status

Conclusion:

The primary objective of the CSS is equalisation of educational opportunities; equalisation cannot be achieved without bridging the yawning gap between the few expensive private schools and the multitude of government and local body schools, at least in regards to primary education to begin with. The NPERC advocated a ten-years time frame to achieve the CSS. We do appreciate the spirit underlying this recommendation. Given the magnitude of resources required, a ten years time-frame does not appear realistic.

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