

A EDUCATIONAL REFORM SYSTEM IN INDIA: A VISION OF SOCIALISM, DEMOCRACY, AND SECULARISM

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ABSTRACT

Those who regarded the state as an agent of welfarism said that its implementation would have ensured educational justice, reduced social inequality, and created a more democratic society and government. Recent neoliberal policy changes in the country have destroyed even that welfarist capitalist state. The paper claims that capital dominance causes unfairness and inequality in Indian education. It also claims that democracy and socialism via a Common School System can only be accomplished through a major social revolution, but that we should continue to make education more equal and accessible.

Keywords: Society, Government, Social.

Introduction

The Context

Every new law dismisses many issues while resolving some within a specific country and citizenship framework. While this is not the occasion to reflect on how legislations are formed by the objective of nation-building and there always appears to be a mismatch between people (popular imagination) and law, legislation has to be positioned within the political economy of neoliberal capitalism in our times. The well lauded Right to Education (RTE) Act must be placed in a comparable perspective. By promoting a feeling of access equity, the legislation ended the discussion on a Common School System (CSS) in India, which was part of the National Policy on Education until 1984. (but never implemented on the ground).

This essay examines education, democracy, and socialism to revive CSS discussion. This article also tackles the arguments in India over the last decade on how CSS will create a more democratic, equitable, peaceful, and tolerant society and provide equal access to high-quality education to all students.

When the Education Commission originally suggested the CSS, India has demanded its implementation (1964-66). This article adds to the CSS content and form debate. . . We are in a new stage of capitalism, not a transition beyond capitalism, as Ollman puts it:

These developments make society even more capitalist. After all, more of the world is privately owned, more wealth is devoted to maximizing profits rather than serving needs (and only serving needs in so far as they maximize profits), more people sell their labor power to live, more objects (ideational and material) have price tags and can be bought in the market, and money and those who have a lot of it have more power and status than ever before. Globalization is ruthless capitalism. (Ollman, 2001, 93-94)

The neoliberal paradigm has perversely altered education (Kumar & Hill, 2009), worsening global education inequalities and reducing critical thinking (Hill & Kumar, 2009). Neoliberalism has destroyed any sense of decommodified education in India (Kumar, 2009a).

The state has institutionalized discrimination and inequity in the education system through the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, which continues to allow private capital as an important player in education and maintains the multilayered state-managed education system. This partisan conduct by the Indian state makes CSS an important weapon for democratization and socialism.

The anecdote leaves us with certain questions to think about:

Can education be examined without considering its subjectivity?

We propose "nation-building," "socialism," "competition," and "democracy" without expecting them to be rigorously scrutinized. Why is critical involvement suppressed?

Is it because one idea/perspective is considered sacred?

One must question the notions to be applied. . For instance, can we really understand why the Education Commission of 1964-66 placed more emphasis on certain concepts— 'national development', the importance of agriculture, the needless 'academic orientation' of the education system, or the need for education to provide inputs in 'national reconstruction' (Government of India, 1966)—without contextualizing the report and its ideological baggage in its historical time frame? So, this essay strives to:

- To grasp ideas within a time-space continuum and how CSS symbolizes a specific historical conjuncture in Indian history;
- Critically analyze CSS's development;
- To address equality and democracy, which are fundamental to CSS;
- To examine how to assist change and what tools may help;
- Always consider how CSS may create a socialist democratic society when addressing these problems.

Before reading the reasons following, I want to warn readers. This article rejects viability and do ability arguments because radical experiments are happening everywhere and have been happening in many communities throughout history. To maintain educational and socioeconomic systems, the Common School System is argued to be financially and otherwise unviable (this recalls educational institutions as sites of reproducing the status quo). So, private capital in education should be eliminated rather than adjusted within a CSS. The paper claims that capital dominance causes unfairness and inequality in Indian education. The RTE Act was passed undemocratically due to capital's neoliberal form. Constitutionalizing and institutionalizing unfairness and prejudice can only be a neoliberal state's savagery.

This paper also argues that CSS can only accomplish democracy and socialism with a profound social upheaval, but we should still work to make education more egalitarian and accessible. In reality, under the current state and social structure, CSS or adopting a non-multilayered education system remains a critical battlefield because it would decommodify zones that have been/are being commodified and made into blatantly overt market areas.

Evolution of the Concept of the Common School System: some critical reflections

The 1964-66 Education Commission of India prominently featured the Common School System (CSS) (Government of India, 1966). Educationists (Jha, 2006; Kumar, 2006; Sadgopal, 2006, 2008) and state commissions have written extensively on it (Government of India, 1986, 1990; Government of Bihar, 2007). The Education Commission recommended the CSS to create a National System of Education since "the minority of private, fee-

charging, superior schools" fulfilled "the demands of the higher classes while the overwhelming proportion of free, publicly supported, but inferior schools were exploited by the remainder." This increased "the class and mass gap". So, the study advised establishing a CSS to create an education system that based access on "talent" rather than ability to pay tuition.

The paper ignores the crucial relationship between social structure and education. . First, it is a subjective category that is determined by the interaction of a variety of social, economic, and cultural forces; second, this interaction changes according to capital's needs (resulting in different syllabuses, examination systems, etc.); and third, this interaction sustains the system by reproducing it but also opens up spaces of resistance. The Indian educational discourse has to see resistance as anchored in the education system as a way to challenge, dispute, and undermine the prevailing paradigm. The government claims that the biggest challenge facing the nation is creating a national public education system that covers all regions and levels of schooling and ensures equitable access for all pupils. All public and assisted private schools will be part of this system. It should be good enough that no parent would send their kid to independent or unrecognized schools. The nation should aim towards this. (1966, p. 231).

To achieve this CSS, it suggested prioritizing teachers' working conditions, gradually making primary and secondary education tuition-free, and integrating local bodies and private organizations into school education to ensure that every institution has the minimum conditions needed for success.

. To democratize this education system, a CSS would promote classroom cohesiveness where students from all classes would interact. Educationists say that '[a] Common School System running via Neighbourhood Schools would have instead allowed students of varied class, caste, religion and linguistic origins to learn and mingle together. This would have promoted equality, social fairness, and appreciation of India's rich variety and composite culture (Sadgopal, 2008).

This pedagogical conversation is intriguing. This approach raises problems regarding whose harmony, system security, and nation-building. The capitalist state and system are the issues. A concept of education as promoting harmony, stability, or compositeness ignores how differing social systems create an innately uneven social order. Hence, structures are seldom questioned, and when they are, they are not regarded as part of the education system's pedagogy. Consequently, education's function in social creation of labor force is seldom considered its core (Allman et al, 2005). .

This essay explains the present state of neoliberalism and its impact on education policy and the school system. Bertell Ollman makes this point differently by arguing that while capitalists in this new age of globalization certainly need workers with the right mix of skills and knowledge to run their businesses, they need every bit as much – and I believe even more – people across society and particularly in the working class who will accept worsening conditions and accompanying fears and anxieties without making waves. Certainly, capitalists would be happy if education improvements focused on tests could achieve the intended result. If it can't, capitalists, their government, media, cultural, educational, and social institutions will use other methods. (2002)

Many educationists argue that capital drives education policy and system reforms (Rikowski, 2002).

Exam proliferation and privatization of public education are also linked. Success in business and tests requires standardization, measurable outcomes, and a commitment to change all procedures to get them. How long does it take for a model for education to become a new definition? When that occurs (and to the degree it has occurred), businesses who know how to cut "inessentials" should run education. More tests, whether intentional or not, set the basis for education privatization. (2002)

The Education Commission Report supported a CSS because of its potential to transform education and society (Government of India, 1966, p. 10):

it "will be open to all children irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic conditions or social status"; "where access to good education will depend not on wealth or class, but on talent"; "which will maintain adequate standards in all schools and provide at least a reasonable proportion of quality institutions";

The study emphasizes improving teachers' working conditions, although chapters on curriculum, teacher education, etc. are not in CSS. In the chapter "School Education: administration and oversight," the study considers CSS as a logistical and administrative problem.

Private unaided schools are carefully considered for CSS integration. The paper states that "what is truly required is a discriminating rather than a uniform strategy in respect of support to and oversight of private aided institutions" (p. 231) and then explains how to distinguish between good and bad ones. The report wants to build excellent private aided schools as CSS "seed farms," so "private" money is not a barrier. Good private-aided institutions need "enough" independence and "appropriate" funding. In such organizations, government management should eventually decrease (see p. 235, para 10.15).

The 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE 1986) also reaffirmed the CSS's creation. The NPE 1986 review group argued that India needed CSS. Activists and educators saw the Bihar government's 2007 committee on CSS feasibility as a big milestone. ¶ This study defined CSS:

A Common School System (CSS) provides excellent education to all students regardless of caste, creed, community, language, gender, economic level, social standing, or physical or mental capacity. Bihar Government, 2007, p. 29

The report recommends a minimum infrastructure in every school, an optimal pupil-teacher ratio, better teacher training, a common curriculum framework with flexibility "relating to textbooks, teaching aids, teaching-learning process, evaluation parameters, assessment procedures and school calendar," and a "holistic and child-friendly" pedagogy that "has a liberating influence." (2007).

It calls CSS "the most efficient technique of acquiring social capital" (Government of Bihar, 2007, p. 31). . Bourdieu popularized social capital in "The Forms of Capital":

Social capital is the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or membership of a group, which provides each member with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" that entitles them to credit in various senses. Bourdieu (1997)

Nonetheless, Rikowski sharply criticizes Bourdieu, which might be used to criticize "the development literature" that the study discusses. We live in a "world of capital" because of

Bourdieu's social capital. Social capital is expressed in all our connections, including our MySpace and other online friendships. Modern social institutions, organizations, and groups have social capital. In Bourdieu's social world, "capital" is everywhere.

We cannot "avoid" capital, but Bourdieu's social universe of capital is significantly different from mine. Labor-capital conflict defines capital's social world for me. Workers generate capital, mediate and assist all of its changes from surplus-value (its earliest form) into money, state, etc., and capital then oppresses and controls labor and laborers. Bourdieu's capital notion lacks the labour-capital link. Capital totally governs social life. . (2008)

CSS and nation-building appear to preoccupy the Common School System Commission. It fails to contextualize by applying materials/arguments from a different period and place to a neoliberal framework. Public education may promote social cohesion and state security (Government of Bihar, 2007, p. 38) and prevent "national disintegration" (CSS) (p. 32). Finally, misgovernance is one of the potential costs of not having a CSS. India's lack of a Unified Education System has hurt governance and corruption. The Indian educational system instills superiority, hierarchy, and insensitivity toward the impoverished from an early age, which shows itself un government at every level. The current educational system promotes cutthroat competition, privileges, and self-interest at the expense of others, and it discourages sacrifice, solidarity, and collaboration (Government of Bihar, 2007, p. 33)

So, we see a myopic view of how competition or individuation works in society and how it maintains ruling class hegemony. So, recent breakthroughs in CSS focused on how to sustain a capitalist state. It espouses democracy, equality, and social justice without explaining them.

CSS, Socialism, Democracy and Secularism

Unless one demonstrates an unavoidable relationship between society and education/knowledge processes, democracy, socialism, and secularism originating from a schooling system are hard to understand. If education is seen as a separate topic, this relationship cannot be made. It uses a dialectical approach to social connections (Kumar, 2009b). How and why does this connection exist? . Raduntz shows how this occurs, and Indian curriculum and pedagogy reforms and school privatization reflect this:

At the present stage of capitalism, education has become a crisis management technique in its responsibilities as a productive force, a consumer of surplus capital, and a way of storing and cycling surplus labor through cycles of employment and unemployment in a lifelong educative process. It has also been important in research, staff development and training to mitigate the excesses and social stressors of frequent organizational restructuring, and helping people adapt to their employers' requirements. (2006).

Ollman (2001, 2002) argues that government schools are changing pedagogically even if they are not privatized. This link between schooling and the production process is vital for recognizing the changes in the schooling system, but it also raises the question of how to handle the rising concerns about education depriving pupils of a democratic ethos. In India, oppression manifests as communalization, elitisation/bourgeoisification, and de-sensitization of schooling. Hence, instead of only mentioning Ambedkar or Rani Lakshmbai, education should address many types of repression. It's how to handle the child's daily caste discrimination. This is impossible without changing educational practices, teacher education, and education paradigms. CSS must now imagine these elements. . Marx notes in Contribution to the Critique of Political Economics that certain circumstances and

experiences are created:

Men get into specific production relations that are necessary and independent of their volition, corresponding to a certain level of material productive force growth. The true basis of society is its economic structure, which supports a legal and political superstructure and certain types of social awareness. Material creation affects social, political, and intellectual life. .

As Allman notes, CSS faces a greater challenge as neoliberalism attacks education in new ways:

Liberalism, which promotes free markets, has been around since Adam Smith. But, neo-ideological liberalism's impact on people's understanding and feelings about capitalist systems is unique. . (2007)

Hence, educationists-transformers have a critical task in establishing CSS for a socialist, democratic society. How would a CSS promote socialism or democracy? Before resolving this issue, we must define our ideal socialism or democracy.

"Socialism" has grown to mean many distinct things, sometimes opposing ones. Marx debated whether to call the Manifesto of the Communist Party a Socialist Manifesto, but he decided against it because there were two types of socialists: one representing Utopian systems (Owenites in England and Fourierists in France) and the other consisting of "manifold types of social quacks who wanted to eliminate social abuses through various universal panaceas and a variety of other means."

India is simply more complicated. As students, we heard the Nehruvian conception of Indian economy as socialist. The political science textbooks informed us that India was a socialist nation (and so is our Constitution), but they also taught us that Karl Marx's socialism advocated the eradication of private property. Jaiprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia's "socialists" gave rise to the Backward Caste and one Dalit movement in India. None of them considered abolishing private property; instead, they placed socialism inside capitalism, where the production process would lead to inequality. Instead, the Indian Constitution prohibited affirmative action in private institutions, evicting the poor from the city center to build their neoliberal aspirations, etc. If a socialist state envisions an uneven education system with private actors granted legitimacy, then diverse types of education for different groups of people are inevitable. Expect private wealth to leave education. . As the definition of socialism is complex, questions have arisen on why the state has overlooked even an inadequate CSS and tried hard to eliminate its viability.

Hence, we have two choices: envisage socialism given by hegemonic capital or struggle toward socialism outside capitalism? A CSS can only create circumstances for socialism. As said above, it must place education in a broader perspective. Socialist states inspire democratization. Patnaik claims bourgeois societies are anti-democratic:

As bourgeois society has long claimed that it alone can ensure democracy, calling it essentially anti-democratic may seem paradoxical. A self-acting and self-driven economic structure that operates independently of human desire and awareness denies freedom and democracy. This denial is disguised. Formal bourgeois democracy shields subjects from political participation. '

Capitalism is anti-democratic and hierarchical, hence inequality is inevitable. So, democracy must be understood and defended as a system. Hence, equality, liberty, and freedom

definitions in such a society become difficult. A divided space defines freedom, equality, and democracy. . Thoughts that question the totalizing character of capitalism and provide an alternative have always been marginalized, from knowledge creation to daily conflicts, since they threaten capitalism and contradict its comical image of democracy or socialism. Wood says the world is now "a fragmented universe constituted of "de-centred subjects", whose totalizing knowledges are unachievable and unwanted." (2007). 11 Wood (2007).

So, democracy must be viewed in connection to the totalising system, which is otherwise fractured by a concern with fragmented, independent individuals. Without such an approach, we will stay stuck in a "liberal" democracy. Formal democracy and universal suffrage were "tremendous historic advancements," but capitalism "provided a fresh solution to the age-old issue of rulers and producers" (Wood, 2007, p. 203). By fragmenting the globe, the rulers found new methods to maintain their dominion.

Now that democracy could be restricted to a distinct "political" domain while the "economy" followed its own norms, it was no longer essential to express the privilege-labour divide in a political separation between appropriating rulers and laboring subjects. Even without constitutional boundaries, citizenship may be narrowed if the citizen body was no longer limited. Wood (2007).

Only capitalist social connections allowed "formal" democracy and liberalism. 'These social interactions have both advanced and rigorously confined democracy, and the biggest challenge to capitalism would be extending democracy beyond its restrictive boundaries. Democracy becomes associated with socialism at this stage.

If democracy is identical with socialism, then the battle for democracy is a continual process. Although socialism and democracy are synonymous, the effort to expand democracy beyond capitalism continues. 11 (abolition will be the agenda). CSS is fighting to decommodify education, provide quality for all students, and eliminate the multilayered educational system.

Democracy, Secularism and Pedagogy in CSS

How is education democratized? Democracy is subversive because it is based on critical reflection and opposition. Resistance becomes the emphasis of such an education not as a direct tool of mobilization (as is understood in ordinary vernacular) but as a way to grasp the substance of the world/everyday life and the processes it sets in motion. Critical involvement must be included into schooling. They must educate the hidden syntax of commodities logic that regulates daily existence. A pedagogy that struggles over meaning would help marginalized social groups recognize, identify, and begin to change their oppression and exploitation. . (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, 178)

Schools should be "sites for the creation of both critical knowledge and socio-political activity" from this viewpoint (McLaren, 2005, p. 105). Schools must teach kids to be social change agents and critical citizens (McLaren, 2005, p. 105).

The prevailing pedagogy purposely overlooks the concerns above as its subject matter. It 'assiduously disregards as important a knowledge of how uneven relations of power become ingrained in racial, gender, and class antagonisms that are perpetuated by the dominant social and ideological apparatuses of the state' (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 179). CSSs should defy this educational form. Pedagogy must center on the lives of the masses and alter lives. Now, neoliberal India's dominant pedagogy promotes consensus-building for a few rather than questioning. The textbook and actual life are quite different, and instructors are

used as mechanical creatures to spread the ruling class's ideals. 'A political venue for legitimising the lived experiences of the disadvantaged social classes without presuming that such experiences are transparent or lack of racism or sexism' is the classroom (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 179).

Freire's view that education is a weapon of conscientisation was based on this belief that oppression must be at the center of education. He proposes pedagogy of the oppressed, which must be created with, not for, the oppressed (individuals or peoples) in their ongoing battle for humanity. This pedagogy encourages oppressed people to think on oppression and its causes, which will lead to their participation in the liberation movement. This pedagogy will be rebuilt in the battle. Freire (1996)

Freire views education as "the practice of freedom" against "the practice of control," because people are profoundly rooted in their actual experiences. The downtrodden must be taught to reflect on themselves and the world. . These interactions are simultaneous: awareness neither precedes nor follows the world (Freire, 1996, p. 62). Problem-posing schooling extends this argument. 'People acquire their capacity to see critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they learn to understand the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in change' via such education (Freire, 1996, p. 64). This schooling paradigm sees people as becoming. Hence, "education... continually rebuilt in the praxis" (Freire, 1996, p. 65). Freire saw education as a war for humanization, dissent, resistance, and conversation to bring about change.

With this viewpoint of basing education in the context of the teacher and the taught—that is, in the dynamics of labor-capital conflict and the daily struggle—one may strive to construct a curriculum informed by the kinds of unfairness and conflict the child confronts in everyday life. The curriculum and pedagogy must bridge the gap between generic discourses and their local expressions. The kid will be able to connect to and be motivated to change unfairness if the teaching is influenced by this knowledge. Caste injustice in texts, instructors' imaginations, and local society differs. Pedagogy as a transformative force must inform the CSS.

. Criticality helps teachers and students see history as more than just "objective" facts that obscure the subjective motivations underlying them. Once people see history as a process, as a narrative that transcends the absurd and manipulating realms of objectivity, they understand why and how things happen at certain times. Remember D.D. Kosambi's view of history:

If history implies simply the succession of famous megalomaniac names and imposing wars, Indian history would be impossible to write. Nevertheless, if it is more essential to know if a certain people had the plough or not than to remember their monarch, then India has a history. History presents production methods and interactions in chronological sequence. Kosambi (1989)

Local history writing may help you understand history as a process. Based in a rational ethos (but not preoccupied with "objectivity" in a social science mentality), the teacher and the taught may understand how social forces interact dialectically with one other and with the hegemonic powers-that-be to make history. Secularism may be addressed if history and social science are seen as a bigger framework.

Teachers as Transformers: the vital link in the transformative process

Teachers are key to system transformation. They battle for their labor rights and change the system that prepares subjugated and passive capitalists in the CSS. 'Their relevance stems from their knowledge that education and training in modern society are susceptible to processes that subordinate them to labour-power production' (Rikowski, 2002). They become teacher-transformers who implement the aforesaid methodology. Capital's location makes their job crucial and intricate.

Teachers now clearly reproduce and grow capital under the neoliberal education agenda. The neoliberal project's fixation with "performance," "efficiency," external controls, and metrics deepens concrete instructional activities' detached, abstract labor. Educators are capitalists because their work creates value. '

Labor creates value and surplus for capital to grow. Labour power—the ability to work—is a marketable commodity. After selling, the "managers of capital" utilize it to produce surplus value (product value minus labor) and profit. So, capital managers and owners must accept labor's indispensability.

Labor power is unique in capital's social cosmos since it's within workers. . Potentially antagonistic wills control it. It's the workers' property. Hence, labor power is the highest commodity, but capital can never fully possess the personhood of the laborer (which would define slave society) and consequently never have adequate control over it. Rikowski (2006). Capital also fears labor. Teachers must reject "the subordination of education and training to labour power production" as labor power (Rikowski, 2006, p. 70). Teacher-transformers are expected to establish a democratic and socialist society since they may be leaders of opposition inside and beyond the education system. A opposition to "the reduction of education and training to labour power" also supports "modes of education and training aimed at addressing human needs and opening up realms of freedom" (Rikowski, 2006, p. 71). The CSS relies on teachers-transformers to create a revolutionary pedagogy and facilitate education reform (whether it is bridging the gap between the universal and particular categories in the curriculum or bridging the gap between school and society). Rikowski believes a politics of human resistance is really pedagogic... Consequently, vocationalist awareness appears to have grown, making it difficult to oppose education as labor power creation for capitalist job in classrooms and staffrooms. (2006)

According to social justice and equality discourse, teachers must transcend caste, religion, class, and gender. The incorrect analytical framework and approach used to view the world makes such an ideal unattainable. Teacher-transformers have a social and economic background. Their ideologies and politics reflect their surroundings. Asking them to be neutral and "god-like" (even the Hindu gods were partisan towards Dalits, as has been the long legacy of teachers from Dronacharya to the contemporary teachers who discriminate against Dalit and poor children in classrooms) negates the context and humans as products of their context.

Yet, teacher-transformers are possible. Teachers might change under certain circumstances. Teachers must be anchored in politics that confronts marginalization, unfairness, and injustice to become partisan for the oppressed and promote education equity. The teacher-transformers must also be able to position education in the wider context of social relations that generate inequality and require teachers to perpetuate inequality and circumstances to preserve the exploitative status of marginalized groups and people.

CSS: the battle ahead for democratisation and socialism

Capitalism needs specialized labor. . Education also creates agreement to further capitalist authority. Hence, education is incorporated in capital via the market. Inevitably, capital requirements alter schooling.

From pay to ability hierarchisation, the market requires a segmented labor force. (A separate forum will be required to dispute how and why this segmentation was developed.) The school system supports this stratification. Hence, India has distinct forms of education, which impact a person's labor market position upon entrance. As previously said, democracy may be realized through expanding capitalist democracy and constructing decommodified zones to reduce capital's control in particular areas of human life.

CSS, by proposing that the private education system should be abolished and the multilayered character of the government schooling system be dissolved, argues, in essence, that the segmentation at entrance points should be removed. Pedagogy and teacher education reforms will accelerate this deconstruction. This will enable a democratic approach based on equitable access and opportunity for all children.

How can one resolve the disjunct between a non-segmented education system and a segmented labor market after such a democratisation process and CSS? The CSS will fight to answer this. . CSS can only be addressed in these terms if it is to address democracy and socialism.

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