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## ON THE MODERNITY OF INDIAN SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM: A NOTE



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### ABSTRACT:

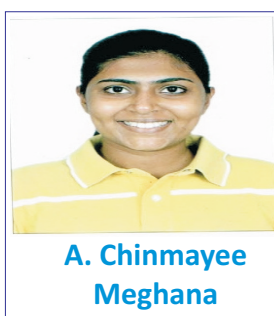
Is the present Indian School Education System really modern? This question is examined with reference to three parameters of modernity, viz. 'inter-subjectivity', 'transparency' and 'universality'. The critical commentary in the paper leads to the conclusion that the goal of universalizing education and consequently ensuring inter-subjectivity and transparency cannot be achieved unless education's quality is linked to its social relevance.

### KEY WORDS:

Modernization, Quality of Education, Social Relevance.

### INTRODUCTION:

'Modernity', 'Modernization', 'Inclusive Education', 'Education for All', etc. are all buzzwords amongst the academics and public policy makers today. However, implementation of these ideas is not as easy as their conceptualization, and our everyday life experiences give ample examples to us to substantiate the discrepancy between policy and practice as also contradictions within policies and practices themselves.



**A. Chinmayee  
Meghana**

Before going ahead, it is important to understand what modernity is in the first place. Although modernity has been defined in various ways by various scholars and differently in different disciplines, I choose to understand it as per the conceptualization by Gupta (2015). According to him, modernity is defined in terms of three parameters which are as follows:

- 1. Universality:** 'of, for or done by all' (Oxford English Mini Dictionary)
- 2. Inter-subjectivity:** the unconscious, untheorized, unthought out way people see themselves in others
- 3. Transparency:** the right to know and public access to information

Hence, any individual or institution or society that functions by these principles will be called 'modern'.

In this paper, I specifically seek to examine the concept of modernization of the present Indian education system and the problems underlying it with respect to the provision in the Right to Education (RTE) law to provide 25 percent reservation for the



economically weaker sections of the society in private schools and government-aided minority institutions, which came into effect from the year 2010.

#### CHALLENGES TO THE PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSALITY

I draw on the findings of the researchers from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad, Central Square Foundation, Accountability Initiative and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. According to the survey done by these researchers who have attempted to study the outreach of RTE law and its actual implementation, five years since the RTE Act set aside one-fourth of all seats in private schools for students from poor families, implementation of this move remains a study in apathy (see IIMA-CSF-AI-VCLP, 2015; Nanda, 2015).

The same survey found that less than one-third of these seats were filled in 2013-14. Of the 2,140,287 seats available with private schools under RTE for economically weaker sections (EWS), just 29 percent were filled. The survey, which sourced data from the human resource development (HRD) ministry and states, found that Delhi (92 percent), Madhya Pradesh (88 percent) and Rajasthan (69 percent) were among states that fared better. In nine states, less than 20 percent of these seats were filled, reflecting poor monitoring by the state and central governments, lack of awareness and disinterest by private entities. Among these, Andhra Pradesh filled just 0.2 percent of available seats, followed by Odisha (1.85 percent) and Uttar Pradesh (3.62 percent). Even in relatively developed states such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the figures were just 11.25 percent and 19.35 percent, respectively.

It is evident from the above stated research that the RTE law has not been translated into practice in most parts of India. Moreover, this provision does not help move towards the goal of universalizing quality education to all children in the country. As it is, restrictions on private schools are severe, limiting their numbers relative to huge demand for schooling. 25 percent seats in these schools are opened up to the poor and this constitutes only a drop in the ocean compared to enormous numbers of underprivileged children in the country. Where will the children, not covered in this 25 percent go? In this way, the state may, as well end up giving up total responsibility for the poor to the private sector eventually. On the one hand, the government intervenes heavily in sectors where markets can work--the taxpayer-funded Rs 30,000 crore bailout for Air India in 2012 is only one such example. But precisely where markets cannot work and government intervention is needed--such as providing elementary and primary education for all children--it prefers to push the 'burden' on to the private sector. Will such a lopsided approach really work in favour of reducing the educational inequality and opportunity?

#### CHALLENGES TO THE PRINCIPLE OF INTER-SUBJECTIVITY

**Consider the following news, posted on IBN Live dated March 1, 2013:**

**“New Delhi:** Expensive private schools are no longer out of bounds for the economically weaker sections. The Supreme Court recently confirmed the Constitutional validity of 25 per cent quota for the economically weaker sections and now a new rule means more seats are available to children from under privileged families.

Ashok Kumar can rest easy now. After a 2-year-long legal battle, the daily wage-earner's son can finally be admitted to a private school. This has been possible after the Directorate of Education passed a notification ordering all private schools which were allotted land by the government to reserve 15 per cent seats for poor children.

According to the new rule, schools allotted government land have to now reserve 15 per cent

quota at all levels, which is above the 25 per cent at the entry-level following the Right to Education norms. Minority schools, too, have to reserve 15 per cent seats at the entry-level.”

The ‘poor’ and the ‘uneducated’ would be jubilated to hear the above news, just as Ashok Kumar, the daily wage earner in the above passage expressed a sigh of relief after getting his son admitted to a private school. Little does he know, that the real battle against inequality has just begun and there is a long way to go before he can ‘rest easy’. The following questions, which people like Ashok Kumar have been robbed to raise, come to my mind:

1. Is the private school prepared to ‘educate’ Ashok Kumar’s son?
2. Does the curriculum support students from the kind of background that the daily wage earner’s son comes from?
3. Will the peers in his class, who hail from the middle and upper class sections of society accept him as one of their own?
4. How will he ever be able to outperform his peers in a curriculum that suits their needs more than his, and makes him feel, right from the beginning, that he is lagging behind in the race to the top?
5. Have the teachers in the private schools been given adequate training to deal with ‘Inclusive Education’?

Assuming that the idea behind the provision in the RTE law – to provide 25 percent reservation in private schools and government-aided minority institutions--was to address educational inequality, there seems to be a serious flaw at the fundamental level.

Even for the ‘lucky’ few among poor children who are admitted to private schools, complementary steps have not yet been taken by the government to provide them an inter-subjective environment to study. Since the subsidy provided by the government is not enough to defray the cost of their education, this cost is largely transferred to other students (while also giving private schools more opportunity to profiteer, since they are not allowed to book legitimate profits). This further has increased the chances of establishing a patron-client relationship between fee-paying and poor students, leading to condescension rather than equality. Moreover, poor students are likely to fare worse in class as they are exposed to fewer cultural products (poor kids’ parents cannot afford them, affluent parents can). Rather than abolishing the class system, this move is seemingly entrenching the ‘class divide’ in the classroom.

Furthermore, according to NCERT (2007), we must acknowledge that almost 93 percent of the workforce in the country is engaged in the unorganized sector. A majority of the children, therefore, enter schools, (irrespective of whether it is government or private), with the cognitive and social capital derived from this background. However, the school curriculum not only ignores this rich experiential base but also denigrates it as being inferior. Most of the times, the situation becomes worse because the school manages to (a) alienate the child from the knowledge base she had acquired from her family and community; (b) destroy her pride in her productive labour as well as her commitment to the related values; and (c) de-skill her of the multiple skills she had gained before coming to the school.

This phenomenon is a consequence as well as an instrument of oppression and denial to which these sections of society have been subjected for centuries. As would be expected, the dominant epistemic framework of the school system represents the privileged position of the urban middle classes and the elite, increasingly moulded by the ideology of globalisation. Even here, the vested interests of the upper caste male tend to dominate.

Furthermore, despite the numerous post independence policies and programmes enacted by



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the government, including the SarvaShikshaAbhiyaan, that have led to an increase in the enrollment rates of children in school across the country, the drop-out rates continue to be very high. Various field studies and the NSSO data reveal that the children of the SCs, STs and religious and linguistic minorities, especially the girl child in each of these categories, are not just 'dropping-out' voluntarily or out of ignorance but are either 'walking-out' in conscious protest or are being simply 'pushed-out'. Indeed, the persistent use of the term 'drop-outs' in the policy discourse is itself an evidence of the false premises on which the policies addressing Universal Elementary Education have been founded. These policies are premised on the view that 'all is well' with the school system and all what is required is a set of 'strategies' to bring the out-of-school children into the schools. These mechanically designed 'strategies' will continue to collapse as long as they do not directly address the question of the socio-cultural and pedagogic character of the school curriculum.

Almost ignoring these socio-economic and cultural realities, the present education system in India is founded on the artificially instituted dichotomy between work and knowledge (also reflected in the widening gap between school and society). Perhaps, this dichotomy lies at the root of the present exclusionary character of Indian education system which deprives more than half of the children of elementary education (Class I-VIII) and prevents two-thirds of them from completing high school, the situation of SC and ST children (with the girl child in particular) being much more alarming.

### CHALLENGES TO THE PRINCIPLE OF TRANSPARENCY

In the public sphere, I feel the enactment of the Right to Information Act in 2005 has led to increased transparency. However, transparency remains a huge issue in private schools, thus demeaning the spirit of modernity. There is no need to labour on this point.

### CONCLUSION:

The issue of quality of education cannot be separated from its social relevance, which is what the state has done since the past so many years. Unless checked consciously, this tendency will have an adverse impact, as brought out in several studies and National Sample Surveys, on the goal of universalizing education and consequently ensuring inter-subjectivity and transparency, as no child will devote 8 or 10 years of her life in an educational programme which lacks both relevance and pedagogic quality.

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