

Impact Factor: 3.1 (UIF) DRJI Value: 5.9 (B+)

Privatisation of School Education: A Social Welfare Program or Industry for Profit

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Abstract:

In India privatisation of school education started with the privatisation of other sectors in 1991. In the past two decades privatisation of school education has been growing rapidly. Initially the pace of privatisation in the education sector was guite slow and till the end of the century only 5% of schools were in the private sector. Since 2001 the number of schools in private sector has grown rapidly and in the 2011-12 session it was around 21.2%. There are ample studies available which show that private schools are not running as social organisation working on the basis of "no profit no loss" rather they are making huge profit out of it. Out of over 14.10 lakh total schools in India around 3 lakh are in private sector. There are mainly three reasons of the growth of private schools: a) low investment in the school education by the central and state government b) decreasing the quality of government school and c) advertisement, guaranteed result and other customer attractive policies of the private schools. Hence we can say that it has become a parallel system of school education in India. There are both merits and demerits of this system. This paper reached the conclusion that the demerits of this system of private education are more than that of merit in the interest of mass education.

Key words: Gymnasium, lyceum, cost recovery mechanism, element of equity, PPP, Charter School.

Wood's *Despatch* (1854) was the first milestone towards mass education in India. Since then about 160 years have passed, but the aim of Education for All is still to be achieved. It is not only the matter of numbers; quality also suffers a lot. Single teacher schools, access teacher pupil ratio, untrained teachers, improper school building or school under tree, lack of teaching adds, teacher absenteeism, student absenteeism, copying in examination, lack of transparency in evaluation system, education of the socially backward children, mushrooming of private school with insufficient infrastructure and untrained teachers, insufficient salaries of teachers, education of girl children, compounded with 12.6 million child labourers and street children (Census of India 2001) across the country are the burning questions to be solved.

One can say that making education a fundamental right (2002) and Right to Education Act (2009) are the second and third milestones towards this end but still it is not sufficient. How to implement these rights effectively? Do these rights help the children out of school due to poverty in any way? Are these rights helping the child labourers and street children in any way? Unless and until these children are not covered, these rights would exist only on paper. There are many hurdles still to be crossed in the way of the implementation of these rights. Many of the countries having successful education systems do not allow privatization in school education however they have privatized the higher education to some extent. The simple reason for the mushrooming of private schools is to appropriate money as much as possible. They cannot and will not impart education with the motive of social welfare.

There are several types of schools running nowadays in India. The four main categories of schools are government schools, private aided schools, private unaided schools and unrecognised schools (Report DISE-2010-11). Again there are two types of government schools in India. In the first category there fall those schools which are run by Central Government

such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV), Kendriya Vidvalayas (KV), Kasturaba Gandhi Balika Vidvalayas (KGBV), National Child Labour Protection Schools (NCLP), NPEGEL (National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level) etc. Schools run by state governments are Government Primary, Secondary or Seniour Secondary Schools. schools run under Department of Education, Tribal Welfare Department and Social Welfare Department. Besides, some schools are also run by Local governments under various Local bodies like Municipal or Panchayat Schools. For the country as a whole. DISE 2011-12 report states that out of the total schools in India (including all government and private) 51.67% are run by department of education, 17.46% are run by local bodies (local governments), 5.25% run by tribal or social welfare, about 21.20% are private schools. 0.10% schools are run by Central Government, 1.88% are run by other government management while remaining 2.44% are run by Madarsas and other religious and charitable bodies.

Category of Schools	%
Department of Education	51.67
Local Bodies	17.46
Tribal or Social Welfare Department	5.25
Private Schools	21.2
Central Government (JNV, KV etc.)	0.1
Other Government Management	1.88
Schools	
Others**	2.44
Total	100

Table: 1 Category of Total Schools in India in %

Deliberately many myths have been circulated among general mass by paid media about the merits of private school system and particular private schools, that the private schools provide quality education, the result in these schools are very good with

^{*}Source: DISE (District Information System for Education) reports 20011-12

^{**}Unrecognized and Recognised Madarsas and other schools managed by religious and charitable organisations

high marks, that they are teaching in English medium, that they have very good infrastructural facilities, like water, toilet, sanitation, Internet facilities etc. The online admission system also lured parents to get admission of their wards from the entire country irrespective of distance as they have boarding facilities too. It is our duty to remove all these myths and put the facts before the general mass for the greater benefit of the masses. Most of the private schools are fully dependent on fees collected from the students. They have no other source generating funds like grants or donation from other agencies, except the student fees. Most of the private schools show very high results in their internal marking to lure the parents and students. They advertise their successful candidates or participants in newspapers and other media.

In the words of Ball and Youdell (2008) increasing privatisation of the school system is problematic in that it sets schools up against each other, promote competition between schools, criticizing each other, commodifies the process of learning like goods, and categorizes students in terms of their worth, against the very spirit of equity. It promotes an educational system where schools are forced to divert their resources to the students that will bring the greatest results, as performance outcomes are of utmost importance to their survival. To maintain their good record they usually give high marks to their students in the internal examinations. In Chile. where a voucher scheme is already in operation, some of these issues are evident. Despite the legal prohibition of student selection in any voucher school, private subsidized and recently municipal schools tend to select the better pupils.' This is against the sense of equity as selecting few students and rejecting many others is against the very aim of universal education.

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Number of Institutions by Management							
School	Government		Private		Total		
Category	Government	Local	Aided	Unaided			
		Bodies					
Primary	58	28	6	8	100		
Middle	56	18	9	17	100		
Secondary	30	9	26	35	100		
Higher	46	0.5*	18	36	100		
Secondary							

Table: 2

Source: All India Educational Survey AISES 2010

From the above table it is clear that the number of government schools is much more in primary education (86%) and upper primary/middle schools (74%). The situation takes a turn at secondary level in which government schools (39%) are far less in number than private schools (61%) and in higher secondary level where the government and private schools are 46.5% and 54%. It seems that if this ratio would continue for some more time, the secondary and higher secondary education would soon become a profit making industry. Hence the government should intervene to check the quantitative growth of the private schools at the present level before it could be too late.

In the words of S. J. Ball (2008), "the evidence that privatisation of schools works to improve educational standard is thin. However, there is some evidence to suggest the opposite." In India, three type of private schools are running simultaneously. They are: schools charging very high fees and good educational facilities, schools providing normal facilities and schools having insufficient teaching facilities. The quality of education imparted by second and third category of schools, is very miserable while their number is quite large. Due to growing unemployment teachers are forced to teach at a very low remuneration. According to a 2011-12 DISE report the percentage of professionally trained teachers in elementary schools in India in total government, private aided, private

^{*}Higher Secondary Schools under local bodies are now controlled by the Government

unaided and private unrecognized schools are 83.36%, 87.41%, 71.17% and 42.92% respectively. Hence, except private aided schools the number of trained teachers in private unaided and private unrecognized schools are very miserable.

The existence of 21.2% of private schools in a developing country like India where 68.7% of population earn below 2.0\$ a day and 41.6% of population earn below 1.25\$ a day is a matter of serious concern. A large proportion of secondary (61%) and senior secondary schools (54%) are in private hand, while Primary (86%) and middle/elementary schools (74%) are still predominately occupied by the government sector. A majority of the private schools in India exists in urban or semi urban centers. This is because in remote and rural areas, it is difficult to run private schools where a large proportion of the masses are living below poverty line. Hence in these areas government institutions are the only hope for the toiling masses where free education and free meal are served effectively.

Country	Year	Population	earning	Population earning below
		below 1.25\$ a day		2.0 \$ a day
India	2005	41.6		75.6
India	2010	32.7		68.7

Table: 3 Population below International Poverty Line in IndiaSource: World Development Indicator 2013 http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.8 accessed on 28.11.2013

It has been seen in the Hindi speaking states of Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh that they lure parents and students that they will impart education in an English medium. Most of the parents never bother how it is possible to provide education in English medium by untrained and ineligible teachers with insufficient infrastructural facilities. The lapses in inefficient government school education system force the parents to send their children in these private schools.

The Philadelphia School Reform Commission found that there was 'no evidence to support private management as an especially effective method of promoting student achievement (Ball and Youdell 2008). In 2001, the governor of Pennsylvania took control of all the 326 private schools situated in Philadelphia including 84 Charter Schools.¹ Out of 2 lakh six thousand students of this city around 70% are on the brink of poverty line. On the basis of this example we conclude that this system does not suit a majority of poor students. The act of this takeover by the Pennsylvania government shook the very foundation of privatization of school education. The example of Chile also proves the opposite.

In Chile the private schools worsen the situation of middle and low income families and students as it restricted the educational opportunities for them and the vouchers system proved counterproductive for majority of the masses. Privatisation is against the Government of India ideals stated in the 5 Year plan of increased access and social mobility. It is also against the spirit described in the preamble of our constitution which advocates for equality in opportunity. It is also against the spirit of Right to Education Act (2009) which advocates for free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years or class 8th. "In private schools, the social mix of the pupil population is much more restricted than in government and aided intermediate colleges." (Jeffery and Jeffery 2005) It is suitable only to a small group of students of well to do families who captured the lion's share of resources.

In April 2012 the Supreme Court of India upheld the constitutional validity of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009. A bench of Chief Justice S. H. Kapadia and Justices Swatanter Kumar and K. S. Radhakrishnan exempted the private unaided minority schools from the RTE Act which mandates that 25% seats should be reserved free of cost to the students from socially and economically backward families up to the age of 14 years. It has been found that many of the private schools deliberately keeps

^{1.} Charter Schools are schools which receives public funding but operates independently.

vacant many of the reserved seats on the excuse that no students have turned up for the admission in these categories.

These schools have been notified and notices have been sent to the school authorities that any such type of malpractice would not be tolerated and the erring schools will be prosecuted as per law (*The Hindu* September 20, 2012).

In Russia, as of 2012 survey, only 3% of total schools in the country are in private sector which is called zymnazium,² or special schools meant for special purposes and Lyceum,³ (Russian 'Litsey'). These schools were totally in the hand of central government during the Soviet period (MoE, Russian Federation, 2012). In higher education the situation is opposite: currently around 60% of the total higher education institutions are in the private sector. In most of the cases private institutions have registered their presence in the area where government institutions are either absent or limited in numbers, like institutions of management, tourism or humanities.⁴ Hence Russia did not allow privatization in school education though it has privatized the higher education institutions to some extent.

Even in U.S. only 12% schools are in the private sectors, out of which 37% are Catholic schools, another 26% belongs to schools of other religions and the remaining 37% are secular schools. But private schools in U.K. and USA differ from the private schools in India in terms of the grant system. In India philanthropic grants from individuals, communities, NGO's, and other are decimal. Consequently the private schools are

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² A type of school with strong emphasis on academic learning providing advanced secondary education, in ancient Greece Gymnasium stands for both physical and intellectual education, later on in Germany it restricted only for intellectual education and in English it restricted only for physical education.

³ Lyceum (Latin) Gymnasium in Classical Athens, in Imperial Russia, it was an institution of higher education like Demidov Lyceum of Law, in modern Russia, it is a quality secondary school.

⁴ In Russia, intuitions providing education in the subjects belonging to humanities are few as it was de-motivated during the period of Stalin on the ground that the studies of these subjects are not economically viable in terms of output like subjects of pure science or math.

mainly dependent on the aid from government. But in case of unaided schools the situation is worse as they totally dependent on the fees raised by students. Therefore, they raise various types of fees like, construction fees, examination fees, and maintenance fees, fees for teaching aid, sports charges, and contribution for uniform, competition, meetings and many other type fees.

Many sociologists hold the view that sending children to private schools has also become a symbol of social status. In many small urban areas even middle class families who are barely above the line of poverty send their children to private schools. Some of them are lured towards the advertisements that the children will be taught in an English medium and some of them want to show their comparatively high social standard among other neighbors. They send their children in private schools without knowledge of the quality of their teaching.

The weakening of Parent Teacher Association advocated in the NEP 1986 is also a cause of the downfall of the quality in government schools. There are agencies like University Grants Commission (UGC), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) to control and regulate the quality of higher education institutions but in the case of school education there is no effective agency except Block Resource Centre (BRC) and Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) under Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) which can control and regulate the quality of school education at all. As per 2008-09 DISE report there are around 7123 BRCs and 74902 CRCs in the country but many of the burning issues like lack of classrooms, toilets, drinking water, playground, contract teachers, high pupil teacher ratio, high classroom student ratio, lack of classrooms are still to be solved. As a result there is mushrooming growth of substandard private schools. Besides, sharp decline in the quality of government schools has been observed due to this absence of effective control and regulation. This is mainly to reach the target fixed by Millennium Development Goal of cent per cent literacy by 2015.

In a regular parent teacher meeting, (weekly or fortnightly) parents are informed about the progress of their children. On the basis of that report card parents also help the students on their part in homework and other required things. Till the beginning of this century the total numbers of private schools were less than 5%. Those days there were strong parents teacher associations to be found in government schools. As students belong to rich family, the middle class and below poverty line all were learning in the same school. Consequently every student was benefited due to this control from parents. But gradually the private schools increased up to 21.2% which is around 3 lakhs out of total 14.1 lakh schools. In other words we can say that these additional 16.2% private schools would have deviated at least 16% students from government schools.

Now the balance adversely shifted towards the students from lower and lowest strata of society getting education in government schools. Many of the parents are illiterate or semi literate and virtually ignorant about the benefit of true learning. They are just happy seeing the report card that their child passed in the annual exam. Hence they did not raise their voice for quality of education as they are quite ignorant of it. Therefore we see that the boom in private sector in education adversely affect the government schools as more and more bright students are getting enrolled in private schools creating a vacuum of learned parents in government schools.

Some educationists attempted to find out the cause of decline of quality in the government schools. Is the lack of quality in the government schools that compels the parents to send their children in private schools looking for remedy and trapped even in worse situations? How would the government resist the growth of private schools while the government schools are themselves not fulfilling the required norms? In the

words of educationist Soumen Chattopadhyay "first of all the basic problems like infrastructure and regular manpower should be solved then only we can establish control over private schools."⁵

The Student Class Room Ratio in government schools is still high in many of states of India. According to a DISE report 2011-12, in Bihar it is 79, followed by Chandigarh (41), West Bengal (41), Delhi (36), Uttar Pradesh (34) and in Gujrat it is 33. In the same report it is further revealed that in 13 districts of Assam, all 38 districts of Bihar, 16 districts of Jharkhand, 19 districts of Gujrat, 13 districts of Madhya Pradesh, 15 districts of Maharashtra, 5 districts of Orissa, 56 districts of Uttar Pradesh, 18 districts of West Bengal the SCR is above 30. Thus out of 644 districts in India the CSR is still above 30 in 218 districts.

In many of the states the situation of Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in government schools is alarming. The report further reveals that in Bihar it is 59, followed by Jharkhand (44), Gujrat (42), Karnatka (41), Delhi (39), U. P. (38), M.P. (38) and Chandigarh (37). There is a total of 225 districts in India where PTR is more than the accepted norm of 30, 38 districts are in Bihar, 23 in Jharkhand, 11 in Gujrat, 35 in Madhya Pradesh, 10 in Maharashtra, 3 in Orissa, 68 in Uttar Pradesh, 6 in Rajsthan, 8 in Tamil Nadu and 4 are in West Bengal. Hence the plight of government school education system forces the parents either to send their children in any of private schools despite their low earning or decide not to send in school at all and rather send them to work as a child labourer in labour market or work as a paid or unpaid domestic child worker.

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⁵ Professor Saumen Chattopadhyay is associate professor in Zakir Hussain Center for Educational Studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University

Facilities in Schools (Government Schools)	%
Schools having Boys toilets (All Schools)*	81.14
Schools having Girls toilets (All Schools)**	72.16
Schools having boundary wall (All Schools)	58.16
Schools having Computers (All Schools)	20.53
Primary Schools having Computers (All Schools)	7.59
Upper Primary Schools having Computers (All Schools)	40.14

Table: 4 Facilities in Government Schools (2011-12)

Source: DISE Report 2011-12, Flash Statistics National University of Educational Planning and Administration Delhi

The inability of the government to establish new primary, elementary, secondary and senior secondary schools in proportion of the growing population, lack of fund for the school education, administrative slow procedure and lack of political will create a vacuum to be filled by these substandard private schools. The Students Classroom Ratio in Bihar (79) as per 2011-12 DISE report is far above than Bangladesh (42.7) as per 2010 survey and the poorest African country Chad (69) as per 2004 survey.

The claim of Bihar government that the Central government is not providing sufficient money for the development of education in the state is not satisfactory as it gets regular central assistance in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. Instead of providing bicycles the classroom would have been made for the proper functioning of the class. In most of the European countries this ratio falls between 20 and 25. The government of Bihar claims that this problem could be solved only if Bihar were given special status. But what about other states? Is every state facing financial crunch?

The educational system in India is predominantly state funded. Given the financial constraints, India, like many other developing countries, finds it difficult to cope with the ever increasing financial requirements of an ever expanding education system. Reform measures suggested by international agencies and recommended by various committees appointed by the national government have explored possibilities of additional resource mobilisation to reduce the burden on the public exchequer.

The 1980s was a period of economic crisis in many developing countries. During this period many countries resorted to extensive external funding, primarily through the structural adjustment programmes. Studies have shown that countries which received structural adjustment loans showed declining public expenditure on education (Lewin 1986; Sanyal 1992). It was primarily due to the fact that structural adjustment necessitated a redefinition of the role of government and envisaged a reduced government intervention in all sectors, including education.

India has a strong tradition of retaining control of its education policy in the face of pressure from the World Bank and others advancing neo-liberal agenda, in a perspective of international policy which is creating 'new a moral environment' (Ball and Youdell 2008). It would be more appropriate in light of current educational challenges for the GOI to resist increasing privatisation with its associated expenditure on technical assistance and creation of free and vocational education despite pressure from international agencies.

But the critiques of this argument believe that India has become a puppet in the hands of World Bank and other international agencies like International Monitory Fund (IMF), Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD), United States Agency for International Development (USAID). All of these agencies play a crucial role in advancing free market ideas as the basis for development. Free markets and competition as well as the contribution of the private sector (Ball 2007) were presented as 'in the national interest', central to global economic competitiveness, as a

solution of poverty, low economic growth, and the basis of knowledge based economies. It was nothing but the advertisement policies of commercial entities.

In low income countries like India these policies which are also referred to as 'policy in suitcase' were advanced through the World Band, IMF's Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPS) (Samoff 1994). Though these policies are based on efficiency and effectiveness, they have no concern over their devastating effect of social polarisation and inequality in the masses. These policies includes decentralisation, privatisation, user fees, and community financing, had devastating consequences not only on the quality and capacity of these education systems, but on their wider societies, with increased social polarisation and greater levels of inequality (Bonal 2002; Ilon 1994).

India introduces these policies or so called reform measures suggested by World Bank (World Bank 1994) for developing countries: (i) cost-recovery mechanisms include cost-sharing in the form of fees with students; (ii) redefining the role of the government by evolving a policy framework to make the sector more market friendly and public institutions more autonomous; and (iii) prioritizing investments towards quality improvement. During this period of structural adjustments, since 1990's, the public expenditure declines in general and that on social sectors, including education, declines in particular. In India too, allocation of resources to education declined during the period of adjustment (Tilak 1993). This is the reason that despite the long drawn demand for the expenditure of 9% of GDP in education, even in 2013 India is spending only 4.6% (World Development Indicator 2013).

The reform suggested by World Bank and other international organisations was not new. First of all it was find in the book "Classroom Management" written by William C. Begale (1907). Later this concept was named as "Scientific Management", which focuses only on the output reducing the

cost of production including the reduction of labor charges. This theory of scientific management was later introduced in the field of education. According to this theory students were viewed as raw material to produce goods, teaching work as production process and teacher as a labourer. Thus human being was viewed as a machine to produce maximum output.

Using this market philosophy, India gave private sector a free hand in the field of education including school education. Every size of private players jumped to fill the vacuum created by government schools. From the mega giant like Delhi Public Schools to a small urban public schools all tried to test their luck and gain something from this industry. Thus private school user fees prohibit the people below poverty line accessing the service, and also the low quality of the government schools also forced them to get admission into low fees private schools (Kingdon and Muzammil 2008).

Due to low expenditure in education the quality of the world's biggest school education system of India having over 14 lakhs of primary, elementary, secondary and seniors secondary government schools, decreased to an alarming state. The situation of contractual teachers is worse. In a 2010-11 DISE report around 45.22% of the total teachers in government elementary schools in India are contractual teachers. The proportion for contractual teachers in aided, unaided, and unrecognized elementary schools is 69.63%, 64.73% and 57.11% respectively. U.P. (33.97%) has the highest number of contractual teachers (174320) in government schools. Out of a total 14.11akh DISE covered schools (including private) in the country, around 2 lakhs (195089) are situated in UP (DISE Report, 2010). Why contractual teachers are not regularized? For the past two decades many governments came in power but there is hardly any change regarding the policy towards contractual teachers. In Bihar 37.82% teachers in government schools are working either as contractual teacher or as para teachers like Sikhsha Mitra.

It seems that the existing system of monitoring and evaluation as well as quality control of school education are inefficient and ineffective. In the present regulatory system there is one block education officer and in every district there is one district education officer who is responsible to control and regulate the schools in that block and district respectively.

Above district education officer there is Deputy Director of Education, who acts under guidance and instructions of Director of Education. Above Director of Education there is Education Secretary and at the helm of this hierarchy there is education Minister who is responsible for the educational development in the entire state. Despite this hierarchal system of control, the quality of education decreased sharply. It means that the existing system is not functioning well. Additionally, under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan the Block Resource Centers (BRCs) and Cluster Resource Center (CRCs) were created to control the quality of school education. Despite the efforts of BRC and CRC throughout the country, the quality is not controlled. There is need to either improve the BRCs and CRCs or establish a new agency which could effectively control the quality of school education system. Some educationists hold the view that reforming of the current system of monitoring and evaluation as well as quality control is much more important before restricting the private partners as without empowering the system restriction over private players would not serve the cause.

Conclusion

Before independence, Private schools have done a remarkable job towards the expansion of education. People of very high morals, mainly freedom fighters have donated their every resources for the expansion of education. During the World War I and II, the British government has exhausted all its resources gained from her colonies. Hence they had neither resources nor

intentions to do anything for the expansion of mass education in India. In these circumstances private individuals opened many schools and colleges. Those days teachers were teaching on a very paltry sum with a great zeal to serve the country. This practice continued till 1990 before the coming of new economic policy.

In the constitution, education was put in the state list. Hence all the state governments have tried their best to improve the education. But the state governments have limited resources to fulfill the Herculean task of mass and quality education. Hence, in 1976, education was put in the concurrent list of the constitution of India so that both central and state governments would attempt to fulfill the growing educational demand of the country. After the initiation of the economic liberalisation by the Narsimha Rao government, the nature of education gradually changed from a pious institution of no loss - no profit into a profit making industry. It is true that PPP's⁶ are a part of a rapidly growing corporate industry (Greve 2010). It can be observed in a sharp growth of number of private schools in post liberalization period. Education was viewed as an industry, student as a raw material to produce goods, teaching as a process of production and teacher as a teaching machine. Introduction of market in the field of education caused a great harm to the national education system. As despite of some drawbacks this system was fulfilling the needs of millions of toiling masses below poverty line.

There is an element of equity and justice in the government school system which is totally absent in private sectors. Therefore in these circumstances a restriction over private education sector would be very appropriate solution towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal of "Education for All" but, before that, there is need to empower

⁶ A Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is a government service or private business venture which is funded and operated through a partnership of government and one or more private sector companies. In this paper private sector referred as private educational institutions

the system of Government schools like quality of education, infrastructure, increasing Government expenditure on education, regularization of contract teachers, maintaining teacher pupil ratio, maintaining the norms of maximum class strength of 30, appointment of trained teachers or in service training and last but not least, widespread introduction of computer technology and Internet in each and every school, even in remote areas so that the element of equity⁷ and justice would not suffer at any cost, which is the spirit of our constitution.

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⁷ Equity is a concept in law based on natural justice which came into practice after the common law system, to mitigate the rigor of common law based on the discretion of the Crown. At present it is based on precedence.

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