

Comparative Education Society of India (CESI)

Research Interest Group (RIG) - Sociology of Education (SoE)

in Collaboration with

**Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, SSS, JNU and
Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, IIT, Delhi**

Organises a

Conference (Virtual)

on

“Sociology of School Choice in India”

May 17 - 19, 2021

With one of the largest state-run school education systems in the world, India has been both lauded for achieving near universal enrolment at elementary level of education and also criticised for low educational outcomes. Subsequently, the popular discourse has shifted from looking at state run schools as ladder to social equity to looking at state run schools as a liability on state and ineffective. This discourse has accompanied a steady push towards privatisation of schooling, giving rise to an increase in the number and types of private schools in India during the past two decades in the new millennium. At the same time, as the society began to be increasingly polarised along caste, gender, space, religion, language and ethnicity, in addition to the emerging social class divides, schools too came to represent community and parental aspirations, ambitions and strategies. This is precisely the reason why school choice discourse became a very important discourse in the Indian education system.

The alternatives to state-run schools provide a variety of promises. The private schools promise the possibility of social mobility and a chance to compete with those who have the benefit of pedigree thereby convincing parents to choose these schools. Hierarchies of existing social class are reproduced in the type of schools families opt for. For example, the low-cost private schools attract parents from low socio-economic backgrounds who dream to give their children an education and the possibility of a future they never could get. These low-cost private schools run often with limited infrastructure and resources and ad-hoc staff, yet promise better education than the state-run schools, emphasising English education, in particular. The flight of low socioeconomic status parents from state-run schools to low-cost private schools has further added fuel to fire causing the state to deliberate closing/merging state-run schools arguing that they are less viable in view of the competition offered by the market.

On the other hand, the rise of international schools suggest the choices being made by the globally mobile upper middle classes and the elite. If one looks at the sudden surge of international schools that promise international certifications and curricula or of even those

schools that use the nomenclature of 'international', and yet follow national curricula, promise a world of opportunities and pathways to parents. In between are various other school preferences made by parents, depending upon their social class situation and affordability of the private schooling. That means, there exists a well defined hierarchy of school choices that fits into the general social class hierarchy which exists in the contemporary society.

In addition, as neo-liberalism is also accompanied by neo-conservative ideas during the past three decades post 1990s, parents began to aspire for schooling depending upon their specific social context. There have been demands for schooling that promises religious values, ethnic and cultural content. At times, an environment of social disharmony and conflicts led particular religious, caste, linguistic and ethnic communities to set up their own private schools which enable educational access to their own communities and also promise both traditional, religious, linguistic and ethnic education, along with modern, secular education. Often this kind of education cater to the demands from middle classes from within the communities.

Completely different from these choices, a large section of middle classes seem to withdraw their children from regular schools and enrol them in the so-called 'dummy schools' in order to avail shadow education for meeting the demands of highly competitive admission tests for higher education. Parents withdraw their children from the regular schools and place them in the shadow education (coaching) institutions in order to fulfil their desire to gain entry into elite engineering and medical colleges and universities. This type of education is neither captured by school education nor higher education, and yet a very huge influence on the choices parents make for their children's education.

This conference thus seeks to bring together researchers in an attempt to deliberate on various facets of sociology of school choice in India. It seeks to engage with the idea of “choice” and its sociological contexts and meanings. The conference will explore and bring together **field based, empirical and intensive studies** that are undertaken so far on the theme of school choice. Efforts will be made to have a limited number of papers for presentation in each session, allowing greater scope for discussion on the papers. Besides, efforts will be made to invite scholars who have made significant contributions to the discourse of school choice in India and also theoretically.

The tentative schedule is as following:

- 1. Call for abstracts of about 1000 words: February 10, 2021**
2. Intimation of acceptance of the abstract: February 20, 2021
- 3. Submission of draft paper of 6000-7000 words: April 15, 2021**
4. Comments/Review from organisers on the draft papers: April 25, 2021
- 5. Receipt of revised full papers: May 10, 2021**
- 6. Last date for registration: April 30, 2021**
7. Circulation of final schedule of the conference and sharing of the Conference link among registered participants: May 10, 2021
- 8. Conference dates: May 17-19, 2021**

The screening and finalisation of the abstracts as well as the papers will be interactive and the final outcome of the conference is expected to be in the form of an edited volume on the

theme of the conference. Special sessions by experts on the theme of the conference will also be organised.

Registration Fees:

1. **Life Members of CESI:** Rs. 2000/- (This includes Rs. 1000/- towards the RIG-SoE Membership fees for five years, January 2021- December 2025)
2. **Non-Life Members of CESI:** Rs. 2000/- (For information regarding CESI Life Membership, please visit <http://www.cesindia.net/>)
3. **Student Participants:** Rs. 1000/-

Conference participation certificates will be issued for both the paper presenters as well as the general participants. The details of mode of payment will be circulated in due course.

Conference Organisers:

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For enquiries and communications regarding the conference:

Enquiries and communications regarding abstracts and presentation proposals shall be sent to: cesirig.soe@gmail.com