

Conference Report
14th Annual International Conference of CESI 2024
Hosted by Panjab University, Chandigarh

Theme: State, Market and Civil Society: Rethinking Education for Sustainable Futures

The 14th Annual International Conference of the Comparative Education Society of India (CESI), 2024, hosted by Panjab University, Chandigarh from 22nd-24th November, 2024, was a vibrant and intellectually stimulating three-day event that brought together scholars, educators, policymakers and practitioners from diverse academic disciplines, research fields and geographical contexts. This year's conference was centered around the theme of "State, Market and Civil Society: Rethinking Education for Sustainable Futures." The conference aimed to critically examine the shifting dynamics between state, market and civil society in the context of education, particularly with regard to sustainable futures. Participants engaged in insightful discussions about the evolving roles of these institutions and their impact on educational access, quality and equity, especially in the face of increasing neoliberalism, privatization and global capitalism. The theme emphasized the need to rethink the role of education in building sustainable, just societies and fostering inclusivity, especially for communities at the margins.

The Executive Committee of Comparative Education Society of India and the Conference Organising Committee, Panjab University, Chandigarh is extremely thankful to Ms. Amrita Patwardhan and Mr. Kishore Darak for providing a generous funding support from Tata Trusts. The donation from Tata Trusts was very helpful in the successful organisation of the CESI, 2024 conference.

Key Areas of Focus:

The conference explored a wide array of interconnected issues within the educational landscape, including the privatization of education, the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and the changing functions of civil society organizations (CSOs). A significant part of the dialogue also revolved around the growing influence of global and local markets on educational systems and the increasing involvement of non-state actors in policy-making. The conference aimed to critically examine how these changing dynamics have reshaped educational goals, governance structures, and pedagogical practices across the globe.

Panel discussions, keynote addresses and open forums were designed to foster active engagement among participants, providing them with opportunities to share their research, exchange ideas, and reflect on the implications of the emerging issues evolving from the studies. Highlighting the tensions and contradictions between the state, market, and civil society, the conference also explored how the interface can help shape educational systems and practices.

Highlights of the Conference:

DAY 1:

- The inaugural session held on 22nd of November, 2024 began with the welcome address by the convener of the conference, Prof. Satvinderpal followed by the Vice Chancellor's address which was read by Prof. Simrit Kahlon, DSW Women, Panjab University, Chandigarh. The society and its journey was presented by Dr. Ruchira Das, General Secretary CESI followed by the introduction of the theme of the conference by Dr. Emon Nandi, Member CESI EC. The Presidential Address was given by Prof. Renu Nanda, President, CESI. **The Keynote** was delivered by Prof. Edward Vickers, Professor, Comparative Education, Kyushu University, Japan and UNESCO Chair on Education for Peace, Social Justice and Global Citizenship. He spoke on the topic

“Technocracy, Instrumentalism and Ethics: Rethinking Educational Scholarship in an Age of Fracture” The inaugural session later was presided by Honourable Vice Chancellor, Panjab University, Prof. Renu Vig.

- **A vibrant cultural evening** was held on the same day as part of the conference to exhibit the culture of Punjab. The students of Panjab University showcased their artistic talents, offering a delightful blend of traditional and contemporary performances.

DAY II:

- The second day of the conference began with a **Plenary session on Punjab** titled “Knowing/ Understanding Punjab: Mapping the Historical, Social and Cultural Contours”. The panelists of this session were Prof. Ranjit Singh Ghuman, Professor of Eminence, GNDU, Amritsar, Prof. Surinder Singh Jodhka, Professor (Sociology), JNU, New Delhi and Prof. Sukhmani Bal Riar, former Professor (History), Panjab University, Chandigarh. The panel focused on the complex socio-political, economic and cultural dynamics of Punjab and highlighted the need for a nuanced understanding of Punjab's challenges, emphasizing economic diversification and social mobility to shape a stable future for the region.
- On the same day of the conference, a **Special Lecture** was organized to further enrich the conference discussions. The invited speaker for the lecture was Prof. Krishna Kumar, Honorary Professor at Panjab University, former Professor at Delhi University, and former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). His lecture titled “Understanding Higher Education and Its Current Predicament,” offered a critical analysis of the challenges facing higher education in contemporary times, addressing issues of policy, governance, and the broader socio-political context that shapes higher education system.
- On the second day of the conference, the **CESI Journal titled Comparative Education Studies (CES) was formally launched**. The vision of the journal was presented by Prof. Jyoti Dalal at the inaugural session and the journey and path ahead was presented at the launch session by Prof. Shivali Tukdeo, the Executive Editors of CES.

DAY III:

- On the third day of the conference, a **Special Session** was conducted to delve deeper into global educational reforms. The speaker for this session was Prof. Marmar Mukhopadhyay, Chairman of the Educational Technology and Management Academy in Gurgaon and former Director of the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi. Prof. Mukhopadhyay’s lecture, titled “The World of Learning: A Comparative Study of School Education Reforms in 52 Countries,” provided an in-depth analysis of school education reforms across diverse global contexts. He offered valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by different nations in their pursuit of educational development.
- The **Valedictory Address** was delivered by Prof. Furqan Qamar, Professor, Jamia Milia Islamia and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Rajasthan and Central University Himachal Pradesh, former Advisor (Education) at the Planning Commission of India who spoke topic “Dissecting the Decline in School Enrollment: Why Weren’t the Private Schools as Adversely Affected by the Triple Whammy?” The session was graced by Prof. Y.P. Verma, Registrar, Panjab University, who concluded the event on a high note.

Parallel Sessions:

- Over the three days of the conference, 52 parallel sessions (including 14 invited/proposed panels) were held where eminent educationists/scholars/grass root workers/representatives from the non-state organizations shared their work. These sessions covered a wide range of critical topics, including the contradictions, linkages, and partnerships between state, market, and civil society; the role of higher education in sustaining democracy; early childhood education and schooling for a sustainable future; and the impact of decoloniality, globalization, and internationalization on education. Other themes were comparative research methods in education, the influences of global and local factors on curriculum and pedagogy, and the role of teachers and teacher education in fostering a sustainable future. The conference also addressed historical perspectives on education development, issues of identity, inclusion, and the integration of language, arts, and culture in education. Emerging topics such as education technology, artificial intelligence, and digital social inequality were also discussed, alongside the challenges faced by education in nation- states and marginalized communities. Sessions on the political economy of education, financing, and management, as well as policy reforms, frameworks, and policy borrowing, further enriched the dialogue. Philosophical discussions on educational systems, ethics in education, gendered experiences in navigating the educational landscape, and the regulatory frameworks shaping education were also key areas of focus. These sessions allowed participants to explore deeper into specific aspects of the overarching theme, leading to dynamic exchange of ideas and dialogue.

Overall, the contributions of all the speakers, panelists and participants were invaluable in advancing the discourse on education and its role in shaping sustainable societies. The conference successfully underscored the need for further research, dialogue and policy action to promote more equitable, inclusive and sustainable educational systems across the globe.
