Public vs Private Schools in a Democracy

Harry Brighouse
Prof. University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Neera Chandhoke
Political Theorist, India

Rohit Dhankar
Prof. Azim Premji University, India

3:00PM to 5.00 PM
Friday, January 16, 2015

India International Center
# 40, Max Mueller Marg, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi - 110003

Registration: The talk is free and open to all. However, prior registration would be helpful. Register here

Seating will be on a first-come-first-serve basis. Kindly be seated 15 minutes prior to the start of the talk

Enquiries: events@apu.edu.in Facebook Event: Click here

About the Discussion

Democracy grows and deepens only through the cultivation of citizens who embrace and uphold democratic values and ideals; and accordingly exercise their rights and fulfil their civic and political duties. School education plays a critical role in the cultivation of these values and the development of citizenship in a democracy. At the same time the democratic ideals of justice
and equal opportunity place a demand of equal education being a fundamental right of children. This raises important questions about the extent of responsibility and freedom of the State, Private providers of education and Households/parents.

(i) What is the role of the State in educational provision in a democratic society? Is it the primary responsibility of the State to run a public schooling system for all children? Can the state regulate and constrain market forces providing education? To what extent can the state be an arbiter between households and the market?

(ii) Households and parents have the greatest incentive and interest in making appropriate decisions on behalf of their wards. The freedom to choose the kind of schooling they prefer is a fundamental aspect of any democratic arrangement. Does this "democratic liberty" mean unfettered choice in the schooling of their children? Or should the state be trusted to make decisions on behalf of households? Then can the state be an "honest broker"?

(iii) Should private providers be able to offer education with minimal interference from the State? Are private providers necessarily more efficient and better at educating than the State? Is government failure to provide good education a bigger threat than market failure?

In India, significant policy decisions and prevailing trend of privatisation are making it important for a serious debate on these questions. Public opinion ranges from School Choice programs allowing unfettered opportunities for private providers at one end of the spectrum, to a Common Schooling System completely funded and run by the state at the other end. Speakers in this panel discussion will reflect on and debate these and similar issues.

About the Speakers

Harry Brighouse is well known among philosophers of education, and has first-hand experience of the school systems in the United Kingdom and the USA. He has been representing influential theoretical and philosophical arguments in favour of a public education system. His work on Social Justice and Education, (OUP 2003), Justice (Polity 2005) and On Education (Routledge, 2005) has been very influential which has set agenda on political philosophy thinking in education. He is professor of Philosophy and Education at University of Wisconsin-Madison USA.

Neera Chandhoke is a political theorist who has done extensive work on civil society, democracy and the state. Her work on civil society, social justice and democracy in India has been influential among the community of political scientists and academics. She has been a passionate teacher and a keen
observer of educational practice in India. Her books include State and Civil
Society: Explorations in Political Theory (Delhi, Sage, 1995), Beyond Secularism:
The Rights of Religious Minorities (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999), and
The Conceits of Civil Society (Delhi, Oxford University Press 2003. She was
professor of Political Science at Delhi University, and now is a national fellow
of ICSSR.

Rohit Dhankar has been an educational practitioner in long career in school
education. He is the founder of Digantar, a Jaipur based organization
committed to alternative pedagogic practice and serves as a Secretary to
Digantar. Over the past few decades he has been involved in national
educational policy, curriculum and pedagogy and in interventions in
government schools. Besides, He has been instrumental in designing
philosophy of education curriculum in Master of Arts in Education Programme
at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and Azim Premji University,
Bangalore. Currently, he is the Director, School of Education and Academic
Development, Azim Premji University, Bangalore.

About Azim Premji University

Azim Premji University has a clear social purpose – of working towards a
just, equitable, humane and sustainable society. The University is
committed towards developing outstanding professionals for the education
and development sectors in India, conducting contextually relevant
research in these fields and strengthening the capacities of existing
professionals through high quality continuing education programmes.

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