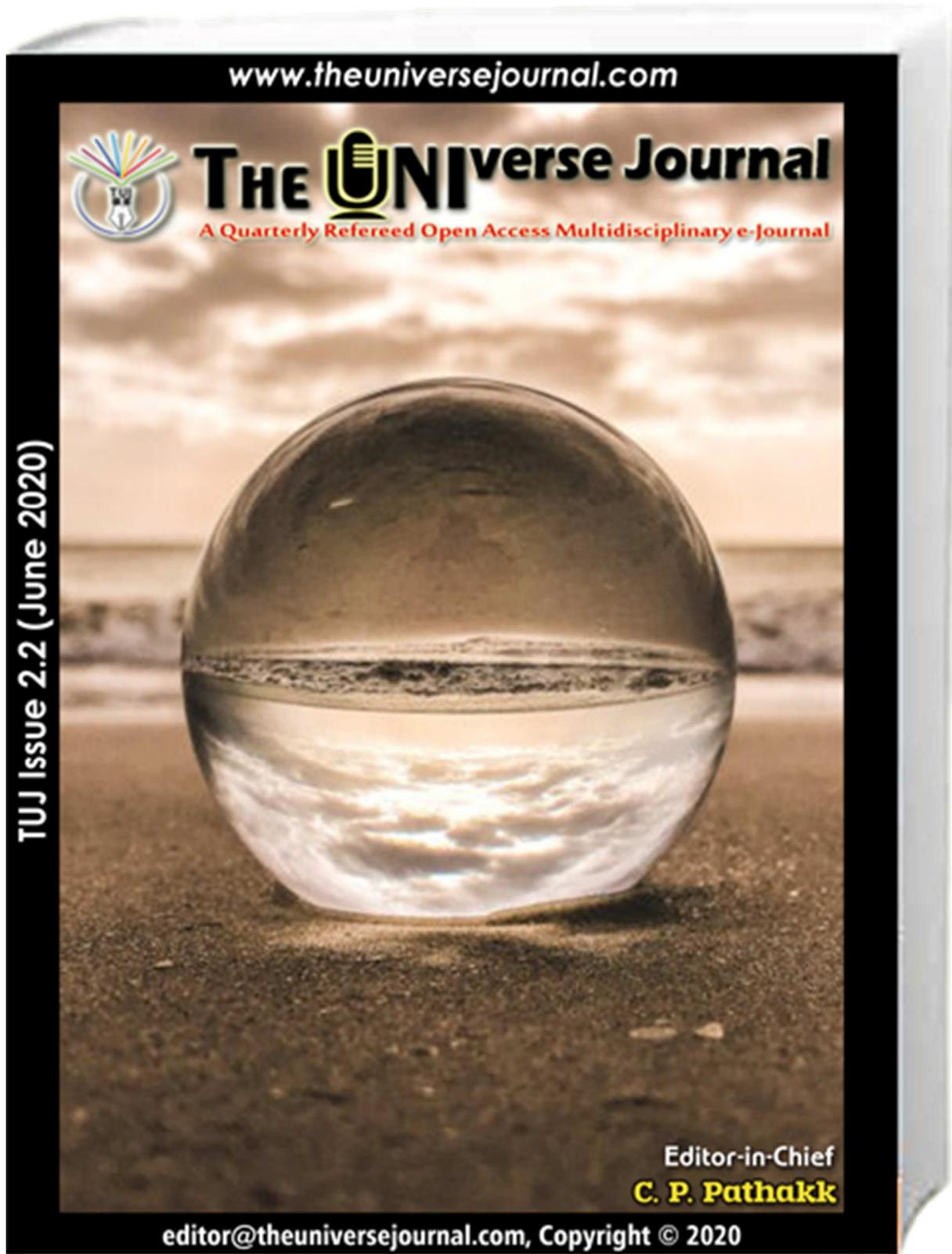


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“Understanding Government Education System: Problems and solutions.”

A study based at newly formed UT of J&K

By Bupinder Singh ‘Fidoic’

“Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.”– G. K. Chesterton

Literally, education means the imparting and acquiring of knowledge through teaching and learning, especially at a school or similar institution. Politically it’s a fundamental right provided to us by our Constitution. Economically, it is one of the most flourishing businesses with low investment and high return and with an ever increasing market. It is an enterprise; a public and private sector enterprise.

We have seen government trying its best to enhance the quality of government schools. A number of steps have been taken and several of those have been successful. Despite all the planning and money spent, the quality of education has declined over the years.

Every year, we see how government schools perform in the annual examination, and are witness to the intellect of a government school student.

Capable officers enthusiastically try to reform it, by bringing in new new-schemes. Highly qualified staff has been selected through rigorous examinations and interviews. Capable and honest officers see to it that the schools function properly. Despite these the quality is validly low. There ought to be a mole somewhere?

Let us examine the structure.

The elements of school education are, teachers, infrastructure, administration, policies and initiatives, enrolment, student related factors and curriculum. Let us examine these to bring out the problem and try to formulate a solution for it.

The Current Scenario:

Teachers and other staff, the government schools boast of having highly qualified staff. The least qualified staff in a government school, appointed in last 10 years, would be a Graduate with a B.Ed, with exceptions to those who are appointed through SRO’s, and Special Drives. Some older staff members still teaching in several schools are Matric-pass or TDC-pass albeit they also have undergone either a D.Ed or some intensive in-service training. These are the senior most teachers at the verge of retirement, or usually Headmasters in primary and middle school. They either do not have to teach, or will teach a class or two to the primary students. With a number of posts vacant and a number of teachers being used as clerks or in other non-teaching activities, the

department still has a sufficient number of teachers if it works out the maths properly. The supporting staff is actually non-existing in most of the school. Peon, chowkidar, clerk, office-person etc are entitled to only High School and above. Highly underpaid cook works in middle schools for MDM needs and is usually used as peon as well and is paid by contribution of all the teaching staff. You get the picture, right?

Infrastructure and other physical facilities. In the last one decade the infrastructure; buildings, bathrooms, cooking-areas and facilities like drinking water, electricity has been upgraded considerably. That said, they are still insufficient, most of the government school do not have adequate classrooms. Two or three different classes are being taught in the same room. Playgrounds are still a distant dream. Almost all the schools, with a few exceptions, still do not have benches for the students. They still sit on the mats, though blackboards and chalks have been replaced by whiteboards and markers. Labs and libraries, only in high schools and above.

Mid-Day-Meals. Free lunch, yes please. It is a bait, an attempt to increase the attendance and admission intake of the schools by luring in the poor people with free-meals. Though it is a nice and effective initiative and serves its purpose it has no other role in education system. A good deal of money is involved in the scheme which leads to several scams, some big and some small. Fake admission and attendance records have been maintained by a number of schools to extort money from the government scheme.

No-failure up to class 8th, One of the main culprit schemes of government schools. Every student up to Class 8th is given a pink-slip into the next class, no matter what. Whether he is capable enough or not, studies or not, comes to school or not, if his details are existent on the school register, no matter fake, he is bound to pass under this scheme. The purpose is to check dropout rate and retain admissions. The scheme is a trick of government to increase on papers the literacy rate of the state. The main problem with this scheme is if you know you can do a thing in easier way why would you try the harder way.

Checks and Balances in place: all the checks are being placed on the teaching faculty. They have to abide by a dozen rules and regulations, all of which even if followed religiously to the core, will still not yield any results. Officials have to move beyond surveillance and inculcate faith in teachers. A surprise inspection and a few questions to the students is a futile activity just to satisfy the need to be in power.

A teacher is bound to reach on time, he has to make a teacher's diary and lesson plans, he has to leave the school on time and he has to complete the syllabus on time all of which can be verified by the attendance register, and the teacher's diary. With this a teacher is not accountable for what he does in the school, he just has to come and leave on time, rest of the time he can kill the time.

Lesson plans and diaries are a way to convince the officials that teachers come prepared and that the course work is running as per schedule. They actually have a negative impact, most of the teachers prepare it just for the sake of it. In a government school where you have so many uncontrolled factors like, irregular attendance, repeating the same lesson again and again due to various reason, the focus shifts on completing the syllabus instead of learning.

To ensure the quality education the government has a power to stop the pay of the teacher who has poor results. Witty, isn't it. No student fails as a policy and therefore every teacher has a 100% pass percentage of his students.

Talking of Government Schools, on an average 95% of class 8th students cannot comprehend a paragraph of English and are unable to solve the basic numeracy question. They have poor scientific and general knowledge. Most of them are not even able to understand and converse in Urdu. Now, a teacher has to show result on paper. This leads to bogus examination practices and corruption.

Administration. To run this educational process an efficient system is already in place. A primary/middle school is looked after by a Headmaster. A number of middle schools form a cluster which further associate under a higher-secondary school as its cluster head. All these schools in a Zone are directly under Zonal Education officer. All the zones of a District report to a Chief Education Officer who himself is answerable directly to Director Education. Honesty at its core the system works properly. Pun intended.

Carter G. Woodson once said "For me, education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better."

Yet, everything is summed up when we compare a government school student with a student from a primary school.

Analysis of the problem.

Education is a give and take process. A student is a product of hard-work of not just the teacher but also the parent. It's a 60-40 game with 60% development at home and 40% at school. Why do you think a student of private school performs better than a government one?

To put it simply, a private school student's parent pays 5000-12000% more fee than the ones attending the government school, he is more actively involved with the progress of the student, he forces his ward to study at home, he even gets him tutored at a coaching centre, he gets him new and clean clothes, he visits the school at PTM's and the list goes on and on. Not even one of this is met by the parents of a government school students.

Second and more importantly a flawed evaluation system for both students and teacher cannot bring good results. To understand this we have to go with an example and prove this by the contradictory theory.

Our evaluation system is based on either unit-term examination system or continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) system. Ask a teacher about CCE and he will only be able to give its full-form and a faint and quaint idea of it. Both the systems in a government school are on papers. A student who knows nothing about basic numeracy passes with high marks in maths. Same goes for other subjects. There are a few reasons for this. First a fake examination held, with every student getting pass marks without even appearing in the exams. Second, even if the examination is held, it is just a formality to make students fear and think that there in reality exists a system of education at a building they call school. Thirdly, a teacher who fears about his pay being held because of poor results is willing to pay to get his students through the 8th boards. Lastly and most importantly, lack of accountability.

A teacher sets the examination question paper according to what he has taught, giving full regards to the prescribed formats or syllabus, then he helps the students to secure pass marks and at the end of it he checks the paper to ensure that every student of his class has passed with at-least 60% or more. Oh, and he cannot fail anyone.

All the students come from poor households. Government schools are not an option, they are compulsions. No-one wants to willingly send their children to the government school. These poor parents who mostly work as labourers or other subsistence jobs are unlettered and uneducated people. They cannot partake in any kind of educational process at the home, and can be easily fooled by children into believing most of what they say. They cannot afford to lose a day's job to attend the Parent-teacher meeting, and the women usually housewives, are either shy or uninterested to visit the schools. Most of these parents, deep in their hearts know that their children will grow up to be labourers and daily wagers and do not hold larger dreams for them. That is what a teacher has to deal with. The education process is confined to the school only. No parental involvement is present.

The Solution.

Most of the highly capable officers repeat the same strategy but in a different way, the core issues are not addressed, but the peripheral ones are highlighted and worked upon, which in itself is an appreciable job.

The essentially vital thing that they miss is the involvement of teacher. A committee of young teachers from different school, can give them a better perspective. A plan devised by the officials for the teachers might not work, but the one devised by teachers for the teacher will work definitely.

All the facilities, infrastructures, policies, checks and balances are aimed in the wrong direction. Instead of aiding the teaching-learning process the emphasis is on enrolment, retainment and gratification in numbers.

Instead of aiming for rich students to enrol in government school, the focus should be shifted on improving the life of the poor. Instead of future the focus should be shifted on present. And shifting the focus does not mean neglecting the other parts but an all-round development with primary effort towards the current scenario.

Corruption cells within the department should be made. *What can be done should be done without money and what cannot be done should not be done with money.*

A shift from syllabus-oriented teaching to learning-oriented teaching is must. New syllabus be formulated based on learning of students, with a freedom provided to the teacher to practice the best suitable method he deems appropriate. A time bound but flexible leaning objective needs to take over the rigid sheet of syllabus provided at the start of the session. This is a small duration method to reform the teaching system. Once the results are obtained the changes can be rolled back with the following changes.

Emphasis should not be on the process, lesson plans and attendance but on outcomes. A very radical step can be abolishing the syllabus for next two years, and aim at basic comprehension, numeracy, and other skills.

Most of the teachers complain, that the student was not taught in the previous class, what can we do, he does not even know basic mathematics and cannot understand the questions, how would I teach him/her? These two years be given to overcome all obstacles so any student from any class be made self-reliant. Achievable and realistic but outrageously radical.

A new evaluation system should be enforced which checks both the curriculum and the learning outcomes.

Building and infrastructure upgrade where every class has a separate room. Mats will do for the moment.

Sufficient teaching staff, that is, every school must have at least a minimum of three teachers more than the number of classes, that is a primary school should have at least 7/8 teacher, a middle school: 11 teachers, a high school: 13 teachers. Even if a class has only one student, every class has to run parallelly for all the periods, that means an equal number of teachers are constantly required to work. Clubbing two or more classes in the same period by one teacher is a joke made out of education.

Another important thing is catering to teachers and respecting them. Based on how important their job is, they are highly underpaid. A general teacher earns less than forty-thousand a month, is barred from any other monetary employment even in his free time. He is not allowed to pursue any higher education which is not directly linked with his job, he does not get promotion based on his performance or by any departmental exam, all his education and talent are subdued.

That is a feeling of being stuck, people don't want to become teacher. I bet, if you can find one child who will say, I want to become a teacher when I grow up. People who do not find any other job end up as teachers. How do you expect such a person to perform?

Being strict, and following the rules is great, but accommodating and negotiating their demands are two things that can lower the burden on teachers. Futile activities which make no sense, have to be followed just for the sake of it.

The society tells teachers how to perform their job, they are the most common victim of mud-slinging mostly because of the undue number of holidays they get like hartals, lockdowns, winter vacations etc.

Government teachers are thrown blindfolded and hands tied behind their backs, into a dark room and are told to find a way out by bumping their heads into the walls. The system if changed or even if instated with strictness, government teacher can prove to be the most important asset to the state and community. As always said '*Teachers are the builders of the nation*', but what can a builder do without an architect, labour and raw-material.

A Model School: A dream.

This middle school has about 11 teachers and around 100 students. Adequate number of classrooms where every class is in a separate room and teacher can teach without disturbance. Has facilities like, library, a science lab, a computer lab, playground etc. More importance is given to practical learning. The teachers are not bound to complete the lesson in a said duration. The headmaster tells student not to learn the question and answers but to understand the lesson so that they can solve the questions themselves. Once a month parents come to check the progress of their children. No fake admissions or attendance are kept and mid-day meal is served in the best possible way. At the end of the said duration an external agency comes to evaluate the progress of the school and examinations are held which not only evaluate the student but also the teacher. Remedial classes are held if needed. Students are able to comprehend basic English, converse in it, and do basic mathematics.