

CBSE'S POPULARITY AND THE BAND WAGON FALLACY

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ABSTRACT: In the last two decades CBSE has emerged as the most sought after and unchallenged board of education. India is a country of diversities with its federal states following different customs, language and culture. When it comes to education, these states follow ICSE, CBSE, IGCSE and their own English and vernacular medium boards. The state education boards have often been self-serving in their agenda with an allowance to students in achieving marks as high as possible. The numerical data available in a few states are definite indicators to this observation. Under these circumstances, a few decades ago, CBSE made inroads into all states in India. Parents, teachers and educationists across the states welcomed the advent of CBSE. For, all and sundry felt that CBSE education would help the learners earn great 'esteem' at the national level. CBSE schools that had hitherto been confined to KVs and Sainik schools were now formidable forces to reckon with. All credits ought to go to a well-thought out curriculum that indeed worked wonder till the end of nineties or the beginning of the millennium. However, this was only a momentum created by the CBSE and the board has been living on its laurels for more than a decade now. The reasons for the rot are not far to seek! Fallacious curricula and egregiously populist agenda have made the CBSE a board that now survives on bandwagon fallacy or Argumentum Ad Populum. A board such as ICSE has never ever thought about changes to its approach (which is knowledge based) to suit the populist agenda to produce results that are of the highest numerical value. CBSE, however, has fallen a victim to the populist agenda which has successfully served the motives of the

government, parents and educational institutions. The pass percentages advertised every year by CBSE schools across India have a base rate fallacy attached to them. This article delves into how CBSE has managed to stay on top as an educational board in the country through its curricula and policies masqueraded as "child-centric" or "learner-centric" or even institution-friendly! Here, it is also pertinent to mention the patronage CBSE enjoys with HRD Ministry. Its affiliation procedures, of late, have been cumbersome subjecting many a school to an untold misery. Its new policy of state recognition for schools besides NOC, is another agenda-driven policy that is self-serving.

KEY WORDS: CBSE, ICSE, IGCSE, STATE BOARDS, CURRICULA, BAND WAGON FALLACY, BASE RATE NEGLECT, POPULIST AGENDA, ARGUMENTUM AD POPULUM, PASS PERCENTAGES, NUMERICAL DATA, NCERT, FALLACIOUS CURRICULA, STAKE HOLDERS, PARENTS, GOVERNMENT, AFFILIATION, BLUES, RED TAPISM, NOC, STATE RECOGNITION, POOR CONTROL MECHANISM, HRD MINISTRY, AGENDA-DRIVEN POLICY, SELF-SERVING.

INTRODUCTION:

CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION is today the most popular educational board across the nation. As per the CBSE website, there are 21,539 affiliated CBSE schools as on date. Although, the data should be deemed as current, the web site does not clearly mention when the above update was last made. However, a difference in numbers by a small

margin would be immaterial to this study!

EVOLUTION:

UP Board of High School and intermediate Education, set up in the year 1921 is believed to be an educational board from which CBSE has evolved. In the early 60s, it was renamed as CENTRAL BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION. In 60s and 70s, state and other educational boards mounted massive challenge to the CBSE. However, with the KVs, NVs and Sainik Schools under its mandatory jurisdiction, CBSE soon emerged as a formidable board.

ROLE OF NCERT:

NCERT set up in the year 1961 had been struggling to find any off shoot to carry its policies forward. ICSE, ANGLO-INDIAN and STATE EDUCATION BOARDS had then rejected the NCERT proposals outright. For, all these boards had confidently backed their curriculum structures to deliver the goods effectively and to the satisfaction of all stake holders! This was clearly NOT the case with CBSE. Under these circumstances, CBSE's memorandum of understanding with NCERT should indeed be seen as a game changer. CBSE which was under staffed and had suffered a shortage of educators, welcomed almost every NCERT proposal including the choice of text books.

1980-2000:

CBSE's curriculum (recommended and supported by NCERT) started making its presence felt at the national level (although, till 1990 the presence was limited to certain regions in the country). Till 1990, ICSE was an option as a national board of study for some regions in India. Some regions had already been following their state educational boards under which cost effective education through the medium of English was given to all the stake holders. However, the 90s saw a shift although not paradigm in nature. Many state schools desired affiliation with CBSE. And CBSE did not disappoint the stake holders at least until mid 2000s. Besides, KVS, SAINIK

SCHOOLS and NVs, there were now private CBSE schools that took pride in their outstanding success of serving the society!

CBSE

CURRICULUM:

CBSE, in coordination with NCERT by the 90s had created a curriculum that would cater to the demands of the admission tests in Engineering and Medicine. However, on objective analysis, it would be a fallacy to believe that the above curriculum is qualitative enough to meet the needs of classes one to ten. (It may be pertinent to note that the quality of KV, NV and SAINIK SCHOOL teachers available till the mid millennium masked this egregious lacunae as they had made determined efforts to disseminate knowledge beyond the NCERT text books) It is predominantly the senior secondary curriculum that is designed to meet the demands of the afore-said admission tests. CBSE and its acolytes have been beguiling all stake holders for a long time now by claiming that the board has a formidable curriculum right from the primary classes. A simple example is that the CBSE Science syllabus in class 10 (comprising Physics, Chemistry and Biology) leaves much to be desired in comparison with its own syllabi in Physics, Chemistry and Biology at senior secondary level. The same could be said about the Mathematics and Social Science syllabi in class ten. The English syllabi of classes 10 and senior secondary, however, smack of equal mediocrity and have been of no creativity, what so ever. Furthermore, the NCERT books prescribed for CBSE are mostly error-ridden and are rarely delivered to schools at the beginning of the academic year. To be fair, one has to accept that the NCERT books are written with a "decent" intent in mind. But then the standards they have set until class 10 could at best be described only mediocre. Evidently, at the senior secondary level, the curriculum permits or rather silently recommends parallel reference books that could help the children conquer the mark-driven exam blues. This is one dichotomy most parents (important stake holders in the system) do not seem to see through!

ICSECURRICULUM:

Ever since its inception, ICSE has not been in liaison with any educational agency as far as quality control is concerned. The curriculum is knowledge-driven. The prescribed text books cover all aspects of knowledge. A learner putting in laborious efforts to master the content shall not disappoint himself/herself as regards knowledge and his/her preparedness to take up admission tests after senior secondary. However, the integrity of the board is such that it has NOT designed its senior secondary curriculum based on the previous years' admission test questions or contents that are explicit requirements of an admission test. However, the board has hardly compromised on the quality of its Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics or Biology syllabi as far as the magnitude of knowledge is concerned! As regards English, one can apparently see that an ICSE student learns English literature for two years (classes 9-10 and 11-12) to gain mastery over the prescribed syllabus. A universally accepted legend like Shakespeare is a must-study for secondary and senior secondary classes. This is in stark contrast to Shakespeare being relegated to small excerpts in CBSE!

CBSE AND ITS POPULARITY:

CBSE's popularity is attributable to:

- patronage of MHRD
- gullibility of masses
- greed of private school owners/promoters
- its mediocre syllabi till secondary classes
- government-supported publicity
- easily achievable pass percentage in comparison with that of ICSE
- its creation of an illusion of student-centric approach.
- its repeated media publicity on stake-holder friendly initiatives.
- its creation of an illusion that its curriculum is comparable to that of the foreign educational boards.
- its beguiling design of senior secondary syllabus close in line with competitive and admission tests (where practice of questions is preferred over content or knowledge)

MHRD'S PATRONAGE:

MHRD has always bestowed upon CBSE an "unexplained" patronage. It is beyond the comprehension of this author that MHRD has seldom shown any interest in improving the enrolment in government schools. There are thousands of Government schools that lack basic infrastructure. Neither has the Ministry extended its patronage to boards like ICSE.

GULLIBILITY OF MASSES (BAND WAGON FALLACY)

The masses like what is popular. This cognitive dissonance is called BAND WAGON FALLACY or AUGMENTUM AD POPULUM.

CBSE has been producing the best results across the country. Till class 10, it is indeed "difficult for a child to fail". The syllabus and the question papers at the national level are of such **magnitude** that a minimum of 80 percentage or a corresponding grade would be a walk in the park for almost every child. No parent would be interested to conduct a study of CAUSALITY to evaluate a result that is exciting. Neither would a school be worried about the "skewed results". The band wagon fallacy of accepting and hailing what is popular is apparently the reason for CBSE's overwhelming success.

GREED OF PRIVATE SCHOOL OWNERS/PROMOTERS:

Private investors/promoters/owners of CBSE schools are apparently for exciting returns against their investments. And the best results produced by their schools bolster their credibility and esteem in 'business'. These credibility and esteem (described as 'good will' in Business Studies) are often translated into a sizeable number of admissions! Therefore, their choice of CBSE is always an obvious and foregone conclusion. After all, these are neither educators (with integrity)

nor data scientists to evaluate or weigh the merits of an education board. It is sad that most of the school promoters/owners are nothing but 'philistines' as far as educational endeavours are concerned! Hefty sums of fees are levied from parents predominantly on the basis of the school being affiliated to CBSE, the most popular board in the country. If gullibility is the reason for parental preference of CBSE, downright greed to exploit the board's popularity (for pecuniary gains) is often the reason for a promoter's preference of CBSE.!

ITS MEDIOCRE SYLLABI TILL SECONDARY CLASSES:

CBSE and NCERT are hand in glove in bringing the syllabi of primary, middle and secondary classes to an all time low. Make a comparison with IB or ICSE, the syllabi are certainly not any testimony to promotion of practical learning. A comparison with ICSE would tell us that the syllabi invariably lack in-depth knowledge. What do the syllabi aim to achieve then? It can neither disseminate in-depth knowledge nor instil practical learning skills!!!

GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED PUBLICITY:
CBSE easily trumps all the other boards when it comes to publicity. The Government programmes are often advertised by CBSE under the pretext that they promote cultural values and educational skills. Ministers quite often extend their warm reciprocation to the board, too. During her tenure as the honourable Minister of HRDM, Mrs. Smriti Irani sent communications to all teachers who had produced good results in board examinations. Every school (on available evidence) had used these "complimentary communications" to promote its image to the society and all stake holders. Other boards in India do not enjoy this luxury!

EASILY ACHIEVABLE PASS PERCENTAGE:
With the curriculum giving incredible flexibility to cut down on the depth of contents at secondary school level, it is easy for the schools to produce results that range between a percentage of 91 to 100. A simple comparison between the English syllabus of CBSE and ICSE reveals the story. An ICSE student learns his/her English syllabus for two years and sits for a public examination at the end of the second year. Furthermore, he or she has to clear two English papers (language and literature) and the aggregate of the two papers is recorded as his/her marks. On the other hand, a CBSE student learns his English lessons for about 6 to 7 months and appears for his board examinations in the same year. While the syllabus has very little 'serious literature' on offer, the question paper hardly tests a child's comprehensive language skills (as against CBSE'S claim that the syllabus facilitates creativity). A child who takes up two separate English papers (ICSE) and scores anything between seventy to eighty as percentage, ought to be considered superior in skills vis-a-vis a child (CBSE) who takes up a single paper (that too without the study of any serious literature) and scores in the same league!!! No parent or a stake holder would be keen on conducting a CAUSAL STUDY in this regard. In this context, a discerning mind could easily note that popularity trumps quality!

FALLACIOUS CLAIM OF STUDENT-CENTRIC APPROACH:

The board has been making deafening claims about a 'student-centric approach'! This is to masquerade the mediocrity in its curriculum. A curriculum that is diluted and not comparable to that of ICSE could any day afford the luxury of risking theory and in-depth knowledge to promote a 'play way' method. The CBSE manuals are ambiguous

and vague on how to balance practice and theory. And the school owners/promoters who speak of "stress free learning" at one breath ,are quite fanatical about pass percentages at the other. CBSE has hardly done anything to address this syndrome. IF ONE WERE TO GAIN PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE, HE/SHE WOULD DO SO IRRESPECTIVE OF THE CURRICULA-CBSE/ICSE/IGCSE/STATE BOARD. There is absolutely no evidence to say that a child from a CBSE school has an edge over a student from an ICSE school when it comes to practical knowledge. I would love to see a proof to the contrary!!!And to be brutally honest, from the example of English syllabus provided by me, an ICSE school student is more knowledgeable of English language and literature!!Once again, I would love to see proof to the contrary!!!

MEDIA PUBLICITY ON STAKE HOLDER FRIENDLY INITIATIVES:

With MHRD being its Patron,CBSE has no hassles in promoting its initiatives through visual and print media. The visual and media reports of the last one decade bear testimony to this fact .One can seldom find media reports about other boards(especially ICSE) appearing in media as frequently as they do in the case of CBSE.CBSE functionaries visiting private schools and talking to the parents are also beguiling forms of campaigns that have borne 'desired results'.

ILLUSORY COMPARISON WITH FOREIGN EDUCATION BOARDS:

In 2009,CBSE introduced CCE(CONTINUOUS AND COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION).The board's claim was that the learners had been under unreasonable stress for many decades due to the demands of an examination-driven system.While damning the exam-driven testing methods as unscientific, the board quoted examples of stress-free testing methods used by the foreign educational

boards. A blue print was created to the effect that the word "exam" would be replaced with the word "evaluation".Learners would have the luxury of two semesters to complete an evaluation where in PEN AND PAPER would have only a limited role to play. Every semester would earn a child 20 marks through projects, assignments and other formative activities. This would be followed by an end of semester pen and paper exam from which 30 marks would be added to the already earned (formative) credits of 20 marks. The process would be repeated in the second semester, too. Under the CCE, almost every school in India produced outstanding results in class ten. It was indeed difficult to separate the chaff from the grain. While emulating a foreign system of testing, CBSE had put the "proverbial cart before the horse". The CCE was abused by almost every school. It was indeed difficult to separate a "genuine endeavour" at CCE from a "concocted design" aimed at inflating a school's academic performance in general and the child's ability in particular.CCE used in foreign systems is so accurate and scientific and serves the 'end in mind' or the 'objective' invariably! CBSE's efforts to rein in the schools and create a control mechanism to ensure objectivity failed miserably. And in 2017, the board announced the abolition of CCE and declared a STATUS QUO as regards the exams. However, as discussed earlier, with or without CCE,the quality of CBSE curriculum till secondary stage remains as mediocre as it has been over the last 15 years or so!

SENIOR SECONDARY CURRICULUM,THE BEGUILING CLAIMS:

CBSE has been overwhelmingly successful in beguiling the parent community as regards its senior secondary curriculum. There is no denying the fact that the senior secondary syllabi of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics

and Biology meet the standards necessary to meet the expectations of admission tests in Engineering and Medicine conducted at the national level. However, CBSE's claims (through media and other stake holders) that the other boards, especially boards like ICSE do not meet these demands are fallacious and self-serving. After deliberations with academicians and parents, I quietly picked up the ICSE curriculum (especially the syllabi of Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and Biology) and read through the contents for about a month or so. And, I have found that the contents are in no way inferior to those of the CBSE as regards the above subjects. Furthermore, an ICSE student evolves right from the primary class given the fact that there is not so much of a 'non-negligible' gulf between ICSE's secondary and senior secondary curricula! But then CBSE has been successful in promoting its senior secondary curriculum as the 'worthiest' through repeated propagandas. Moreover, CBSE's design of senior secondary science is basically inspired from the previous years' question papers of admission tests. Questions and exercises following these lessons cleverly cater to the demands of admission exams. My interaction with a few ICSE functionaries (who have chosen to remain anonymous) reveal that the board believes in the ideology of in-depth contents and challenging questions based on them furnished after the lessons. And some of these questions not only help a child meet the demands of a professional admission test, but also help him/her acquire a lifelong in-depth knowledge of the subjects. These functionaries also emphasised that the board would NEVER design its curriculum with any "populist agenda".

CBSE AND ITS POPULIST AGENDA:

CBSE produces the best results at secondary

and senior secondary levels. If one attends a causal study, it could easily emerge that the reasons furnished throughout this article could be the reason for its popularity. Furthermore, CBSE has been using its populist agenda to a very good effect to bowl the masses over! A common man notices, what strikes his eyes immediately. An impressive or over whelming result would be the best claim a lay man could buy. The theory that what is the most popular is invariably the best is embraced by all. This is indeed called BAND WAGON FALLACY or HERD MENTALITY in social psychology! I would like to draw the attention of readers that Asche's CONFORMITY THEORY needs to be discussed here. The psychologist Asche described this behaviour pattern of the public as NORMATIVE INFLUENCE. The psychologist has conducted multiple experiments and proved that humans tend to be influenced by the opinions of others even if they have different opinions about an issue. Put together in a room, many people record opinions in sync with their friends in the room. Individual experiments conducted on them, reveal that each one has had an opinion contrary to what has been recorded in the group settings! People who evaluate the popularity of CBSE also show a BASE RATE NEGLECT where important aspects or causes of a certain phenomenon are ignored!

CBSE BY-LAWS:

CBSE by-laws amended from time to time are meant for use by schools. The by-laws spell out responsibilities of the Management, Principal, Teachers and all other stake holders. The by-laws illustrate the affiliation procedure for ease of every school. Qualifications, service conditions, pay and allowances of the staff are also dealt with in the by-laws. However, the by-laws are highly in favour of the school Managements

especially when it comes to service conditions and pay and allowances to the staff. The by-laws cleverly state that pay and allowances ought to be as per RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT and STATE EDUCATION POLICY. In the event of a disputable interpretation, an aggrieved staff member has to wade through the pool of information from the RTE ACT AND STATE EDUCATION ACT to piece out the information that favours him. This is a cumbersome job that requires legal assistance. Should there be a legal dispute on pay and allowances, an aggrieved staff would certainly have his justice either denied or delayed. This is for sure! Hence, the ambiguous information on pay and allowances more often than not serves the school management and allows the CBSE to leave it all to a time consuming legal interpretation. This is indeed deliberate and perfidious!

AFFILIATION BLUES:

No board has amended its affiliation by-laws as many times as CBSE has. A decade ago or so, a school desirous of CBSE affiliation needed to produce an NOC from its respective or home state along with evidences of infrastructure, financial stability, and academic details! At one point in the year 2013, the Government had dispensed with the requirement of NOC from state. This was a relief to all the schools as the NOC rule had often put them at the mercy of state governments. However, after another few years, the NOC rule returned with a bang. This time, a draconian addition of a 'special state recognition' also featured in the rule. State governments have more often than not delayed the state recognition and NOC. CBSE, on its part, has never ever tried to prevail over the state governments in the events of inordinate delays and denials of NOC and state recognition. This has often subjected many a school to unknown misery.

While the requirement of NOC and state recognition applies to other boards like ICSE, what is pertinent to note here is CBSE's inordinate delay in granting affiliation to schools. As per the affiliation norms, schools seeking affiliation should upload their application one year before the start of the next academic year. On receipt of applications, CBSE either accepts or rejects the applications. The acceptance or rejection should come in six months' time as it should not hamper the school's functioning for the next academic year. On acceptance of applications, CBSE convenes an inspection committee to visit the school and submit a report of its inspection to CBSE. On interacting with many schools, I have understood that CBSE has inordinately delayed acceptance/rejection of the applications made by many schools. An acceptance or rejection intimated to the school very late hampers its academic functioning for the next academic year. In many cases, an inspection committee has been convened one year after the submission of applications. Principals (on condition of anonymity) tell me that their e-mail communications with CBSE either receive no response or a customised response to the effect that their applications are under process. At times, after inspection committee's submission of reports, the board takes many months to either grant or deny affiliation. MOST OF THE PRINCIPALS ARE OF THE OPINION THAT ACCEPTANCE/REJECTION OF APPLICATION and GRANT/DENIAL OF AFFILIATION SHOULD HAPPEN IN 6 MONTHS. OTHERWISE, THE BOARD SHOULD ADVISE THE SCHOOLS TO SEEK AFFILIATION AT LEAST TWO YEARS BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF AN ACADEMIC YEAR. I have also had the honour of interacting with Principals of ICSE schools. They say that ICSE either grants or denies affiliation to a school within a stipulated period of

time! Unfortunately, grievances against the CBSE are seldom redressed__by MHRD,the Patron.

CONCLUSION:

One has to be honest in feeling that CBSE's reign at the top cannot end so long as the public gives itself to the cognitive dissonance of band wagon fallacy. History is replete with masses being amenable to populist agenda. And CBSE,for all its fallacies, enjoys the support of its patron, MHRD.To be fair to the honourable MHRD,CBSE's populist agenda has had its fair share of influence on it ,too. There are no available evidences of many academics trying to apprise the MHRD of CBSE and its populist agenda! It is high time academics from schools and colleges took up the onerous task of convincing the honourable Ministry of CBSE's 'rightful place' amongst the education boards. Would someone emerge from the dark and bell the cat?

REFERENCES/CITATIONS:

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CBSE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
ICSE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
ICSE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
NCERT CLASS TEN TEXT BOOKS.(CBSE)
ICSE/ISC SECONDARY //SENIOR SECONDARY TEXT BOOKS

*Please note that till class 10,the board is referred to as ICSE and for senior secondary school,the board is referred to as ISC.For ease of reference,I have used the generic term 'ICSE'.







