

Dilution, Distortion and Diversion: A Post-Jomtien Reflection on Education Policy^{*†}

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Introduction

The following news item appeared on International Literacy Day, 2004.

“Facing a shortage of students, the Directorate of Education has decided to close down 53 government schools, many of which are in old Delhi. This is in addition to (the) 55 schools already closed We have seen a steady decline in enrollment in government schools.”

- Hindustan Times, 8th September 2004

Instead of showing concern and taking steps to improve the functioning of the government school system, the authorities seemed to be celebrating. They declared,

“The closure of the schools helps the Directorate in two ways. Firstly, the teachers can be posted in schools having few teachers. Secondly, there is saving on annual expenditure of maintenance and repairs.”

- Hindustan Times, 8th September 2004

The government schools in Delhi have almost 70% of the school-going children of the metropolis. Close all of them and the Directorate will be helped maximally. It will save its entire annual expenditure!

This is not the first time that India has witnessed such a phenomenon. In 1999-2000, 30 government schools in the city of Indore were closed down and their campuses, located on prime lands in the heart of the city, were either converted into police stations or handed over to private interests for developing commercial complexes. The District Collector, in his report to the Chief Minister, proudly called it a process of ‘rationalisation’! No one cared to know as to where had all the children gone. All of them had joined the rapidly mushrooming low-fee charging school shops in the neighbourhood of the erstwhile government schools.

Almost at the same time, the Ahmedabad city corporation closed down one of its primary schools and handed over its campus along with the buildings to a French-sponsored Society to provide education to the well-off sections of society on a ‘French Pattern’! The poor people in the neighbourhood protested but no one cared.

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Few would believe that the above events were not random happenings taking place due to some local aberrations or some inefficient education officers. These represented the outcome of a well-designed deliberate policy of allowing the government school system to gradually deteriorate until it is replaced by the fee-charging private schools. This is precisely what the global market forces, led by powerful international financial institutions and funding agencies, have been working for. This paper is aimed at analyzing and exposing this complex phenomenon so that it can be resisted by the people whose children are being denied education.

Look at another happening.

On November 28, 2001, the Lok Sabha was debating ‘The Constitution (Ninety-third Amendment) Bill, 2001’, introduced by the Government of India purportedly to make education a Fundamental Right. As the debate progressed, about 40,000 people from different parts of India held a rally a few kilometers away in Ramlila Grounds to protest against the Bill. They were contending that the Bill violated the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution and essentially amounted to snatching away the Fundamental Right to education that had become available to the people as a consequence of Supreme Court’s historic Unnikrishnan Judgement (1993). They were demanding ‘*Sub ko Shiksha, Samaan Shiksha*’ (Equality in Education for All). In effect, the rally was reminding the Government and all political parties of the commitment made *thrice* to the nation: first, through a Cabinet Resolution in 1968 in the form of a national policy and twice by the Parliament again through a national policy (i.e. in 1986 and 1992) to evolve the Common School System for all children as the National System of Education, as recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66). They also knew that the Bill would allow the State to withdraw from its Constitutional obligation under the original Article 45 of ensuring free and compulsory education for all children ‘until they complete the age of fourteen years’ by excluding the children below six years of age and by shifting, in measured steps, its obligation to the parents and the community in the name of making it their Fundamental Duty. The rally’s demands basically reflected two major concerns that had by then begun to impact on the public discourse on education in India, especially due to what happened during the Nineties. These concerns were: (a) increasing abdication by the State of its Constitutional obligation towards elementary education (i.e. a minimum of *eight* years of education from Class I to VIII); and (b) steady dilution of policies and programmes relating to ‘free education of *equitable* quality’ for all children (Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, 1995; Sadgopal, 1994, 2000, 2001d, 2002b, 2003a). Ignoring a nation-wide public protest, negating three significant amendment motions moved in Lok Sabha and turning a deaf ear to critical speeches by several MPs, the Bill was pushed through both Houses of the Parliament. Curiously, there was not a single dissenting vote in either House, despite articulation of severe criticism. The Bill was eventually signed

by the President in December 2002. We shall return to this matter later.

In order to comprehend the roots of people's concerns, it is necessary to refer to two sets of critical policy-related documents: one national and the other international. First, the *National Policy on Education-1986* (henceforth referred to as NPE-1986) and its companion document called *Programme of Action-1986* (henceforth referred to as POA-1986), both approved by the Parliament in May 1986 and November 1986 respectively.¹ Both the NPE-1986 and POA-1986 were revised by the Parliament in 1992 and, as a result, are known as NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) and POA-1992 respectively. Second, the *World Declaration on Education for All* and its companion document called *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs* adopted by the 'World Conference on Education for All (EFA): Meeting Basic Learning Needs' held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 (these documents are referred to as the Jomtien Declaration and Jomtien Framework respectively).

This paper will attempt to establish that the twin trends of gradual abdication of Constitutional obligation and steady dilution of policy relating to 'free education of *equitable quality*' that clearly emerged during the Nineties, as also reflected in the 93rd (now called 86th) Constitutional Amendment Bill, had its roots in the policy framework of NPE-1986 and the programme design of POA-1986 (as well as their revised counterparts of 1992). The policy framework will be probed with the aid of policy analysis tools. This will reveal that the policy was designed to basically promote exclusion of crores* of children from elementary education and introduce inequality by institutionalizing low-quality multiple tracks or parallel streams of education. It was this character of NPE-1986 that provided both the foundation and the necessary socio-political space to international funding agencies, including the World Bank, to exacerbate abdication, accelerate the pace of exclusion and further marginalise people's aspirations for a Common School System and genuine Neighbourhood Schools². We begin with NPE-1986.

Non-formal Education: Probing the Policy Framework

The National Policy on Education-1986 (i.e. NPE-1986) marked a watershed as it was the first policy-level acknowledgement since independence that elementary school education of *comparable quality* will *not* become available to all children of India in the 6-14 age group. The notion of education of *comparable quality* for all children, irrespective of their class, creed, caste, gender, linguistic or cultural background or physical/mental disability, was clearly implied in the Constitution. Such an implication is seen when the

* 1crore = 10 million.

original Article 45 (i.e. free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years)³ of Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) is read in conjunction with Articles 14 (equality before law), Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them), Article 16 (equality of opportunity in public employment) and Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty), the latter four Articles belonging to Part III (Fundamental Rights).⁴ The concept of equality in *educational opportunities and conditions of success* is further strengthened in Part IV of the Constitution by Article 38 (social order with justice and elimination of inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities), Article 39e,f (tender age of children is not abused; children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity; childhood is protected against exploitation) and Article 46 (promotion with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). However, despite such unambiguous Constitutional provisions, the NPE-1986 stated:

“A large and systematic programme of non-formal education will be launched for school drop-outs, for children from habitations without schools, *working children and girls who cannot attend whole-day schools.*” (NPE-1986, Section 5.8) [emphasis added]

It further resolved:

“This effort (i.e. ‘*ensuring children’s retention at school*’) will be fully co-ordinated with the network of non-formal education. It shall be ensured that all children who attain the age of about 11 years by 1990 will have had five years *schooling*, or its equivalent through the *non-formal stream.*” (NPE-1986, Section 5.12) [emphasis added]

As per Acharya Ramamurti Committee Report (GOI, 1990, Chapter 6: Section 6.2.3, Table 2), the out-of-school were almost half of the children of school-going age at the time NPE-1986 was adopted. The above component of NPE-1986 implied that these out-of-school children shall be provided non-formal education, a *parallel* stream to the *mainstream* of formal school education. Most of the out-of-school children were working children, whether paid wages or not.⁵ Indeed, the notion of ‘mainstream’ emerged in India only because NPE-1986 gave legitimacy to a parallel stream such as non-formal education, a layer *below* the formal school. Until then, in principle, there was only one officially acknowledged, planned and financially supported stream in Indian education (i.e. government, local body and government-aided schools of comparable quality), the relatively minor streams of private unaided schools (erroneously called public schools) and Kendriya Vidyalayas (or Central Schools) notwithstanding.⁶ Recognising this, the Education Commission (1964-66) had strongly recommended the establishment of a *Common School System* (often misunderstood as *Uniform School System*) through the instrumentality of Neighbourhood Schools. The Common School System was accepted

in the first National Policy on Education- 1968 (i.e. NPE-1968) in order to ‘equalise educational opportunity’ for all children and to promote ‘social cohesion and national integration.’ In this sense, the policy imperative of non-formal education amounted to violating not only the Constitution and NPE-1968 but also NPE-1986 itself which had made the following commitment:

“The concept of a National System of Education implies that, up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have access to education of a *comparable* quality. To achieve this, the Government will initiate appropriately funded programmes. Effective measures will be taken in the direction of the *Common School System recommended in the 1968 policy*.” [emphasis added]

- National Policy on Education-1986, Section 3.2
(also retained in the policy revised in 1992)

Since non-formal education was designed to be provided largely through evening centres, it was directed particularly to the child workers. POA-1986 was explicit on this point when it stated:

“ it has been assumed in the Policy that a large number of out-of-school children are unable to avail themselves of the benefit of schooling because they have to work to supplement family income or otherwise assist the family. NPE proposes taking up of a large and systematic programme of non-formal education for these children and children of habitations without school.” (POA-1986, II.4)

The policy also had a special provision for afternoon centres for girls. This implied the willingness of the policy makers to adjust with, rather than challenge, the gender stereotype of the role of girls in domestic chores and sibling care.

In this sense, NPE-1986 legitimised both child labour and patriarchy. We shall soon return to this theme.

Unmasking the Rationalisation

The rationalisation for setting up alternative and parallel streams was offered by POA-1986 as follows:

“The essential characteristics of NFE are organizational flexibility, relevance of curriculum, diversity in learning activities to relate them to learners’ needs, and decentralization of management.” (POA-1986, II.25)

In the following paragraph (No. II.26) on NFE, POA-1986 listed a spectrum of features which were presumed to help in ‘maintenance of quality’. These included a learner-centred approach, instructor as a facilitator, emphasis on learning rather than teaching, enabling learners to progress at their own pace, use of techniques to ensure fast pace of learning, stress on continuous learner evaluation, participatory learning environment,

joyful extra-curricular activities etc. The next paragraph listed the criteria for selection of NFE instructors, taking care not to call them teachers!⁷

“The criteria for the selection of the instructor would include

- being local,
- being already motivated,
- acceptable to the community,
- preferably from the weaker sections of society, should have given some evidence of work in the community.” (POA-1986, II.27)

POA-1986 went on to add that,

“Keeping in view the importance of enrolment of girls, and also the fact that NFE has the potentiality of developing into a major programme of women’s development, wherever possible women will be appointed as instructors.” (POA-1986, II.28)

The notion of NFE was further elaborated in Government of India’s report presented to the Jomtien Conference in March 1990 which stressed the characteristics of NFE in the following words:

“In terms of cognitive learning NFE is comparable with the corresponding stage in formal education. Attention is to be paid in NFE to non-cognitive aspects of learning, just as much as we propose in the school system.

It has flexibility to adjust curriculum and textual materials to the needs and interests of the learners.

Its total duration is generally shorter than in formal education.

The programme can be organised at the time convenient for the learners, generally in the afternoon for girls and in the evenings for working children.

It is not dependent on highly paid professional teachers but is organised by local persons who are specially trained for it.

There is the possibility of migration between the formal and non-formal systems.”

- NIEPA (1990, p. 53-54)

Let us examine the bizarre logic behind the conception of NFE. The policy makers seem to be essentially telling us that the formal school system *should continue* to be characterised by,

- organisational inflexibility;
- centralised bureaucratic management;
- irrelevant curriculum;
- lack of diversity and flexibility in relating curriculum, textual materials and learning activities to the needs and interests of the learners; and
- school timings that would be inconvenient to almost half of the children, particularly to the girls and working children.

The policy makers are further clear that the formal schools *will continue* to practice a pedagogy that,

- negates learner-centred approach;
- refuses to view the ‘instructor’ as a facilitator for enabling children to learn;
- de-emphasises learning while emphasising *only* teaching;
- rejects the objective of enabling the learners to progress at their own pace;
- ignores techniques for ensuring fast pace of learning;
- disallows continuous learner evaluation (i.e. allows only summative evaluation at the end of the year, or worse, at the end of the primary stage);
- opposes participatory learning environment; and
- provides no space for joyful extra-curricular activities.

The policy further implies that the formal school system *should* appoint teachers who,

- belong to villages or urban localities far removed from the schools where they are expected to teach;
- are basically unmotivated;
- are unacceptable to the community;
- come from dominant sections of society (i.e. who are generally unsympathetic to the weaker sections);
- do not have any record of work in the community; and
- are generally not women, even when it is possible to appoint them.

This is not all. According to the policy makers, the formal school system need neither be concerned with the enrolment of girls nor attempt to evolve into a major programme of women’s development, as this gender-sensitive attribute should be the sole preserve of NFE! The formal school system, as policy makers seem to be declaring, is destined (or rather *should be destined*) to be gender-insensitive and anti-women!!

Preferring Contradictions!

(rather than resolving them!)

The policy makers had clearly decided that all the desirable features of education must belong to NFE whereas the formal school system should

continue to be afflicted with all the undesirable features! If this was not the case, why would the policy not propose ways and means for incorporating these desirable features into the formal school system itself and, thereby, begin the process of educational reforms for all children? Indeed, this flawed logic is contradicted in the policy itself by the following two perceptions underlying the formulation of the NFE programme:

- i) In spite of these superior attributes designed in the policy, NFE shall aspire to be merely *comparable* with the corresponding stage in formal education, in terms of both the cognitive and non-cognitive development (NPE-1986, Section 5.9; NIEPA, 1990, pp. 53-54). This comparability is what will make 'migration between the formal and non-formal systems' possible. One wonders why the superior attributes of NFE would only ensure 'lateral entry' into the formal school, and not entry at a higher stage! The policy is silent on this obvious contradiction.
- ii) All the desirable features of education – organisational, curricular and pedagogic – as listed in the policy and POA in relation to NFE, will be introduced by an 'instructor' whose levels of qualifications, teacher training, salary and other service conditions would be of much lower order than those of the regular teacher of the formal school system. Yet, these under-qualified, essentially untrained and under-paid 'instructors' (without any stability in service) will for some magical reason turn out to be, as per NPE-1986 (Section 5.9), 'talented and dedicated young men and women', which, obviously the policy implies, their counterparts in the formal school system can't be or rather should not be expected to be. Not just this. The NFE instructor, despite these handicaps, is expected by the policy makers to have much greater initiative and skills in attracting the presumably 'unwilling' and hitherto out-of-school children, particularly the girls and the working children, to the NFE centres and then ensuring their effective, enjoyable and, more importantly, relevant learning - something the formal school teacher is not expected to do! All this will be achieved by the 'miraculous' instructor by holding the NFE classes for merely 2-3 hour per day (in contrast to the formal school held for 4-5 hours per day) since the policy states that NFE's 'total duration is generally shorter than in formal education' (NIEPA, 1990, p. 53). The expectations of the policy

makers from the NFE instructors do not end here. Since no provision for even thatched huts (let alone buildings) or the teaching aids available under the Operation Blackboard scheme (meant only for formal schools) is made for NFE, the instructor

is expected to use her/his 'genius' to even arrange for all these from the community, failing which what she/he is supposed to do, the policy prefers not to specify.

This entirely flawed logic and internal contradictions in the policy and POA relating to NFE were noticed and debated by the NPE Review Committee-1990 (NPERC or Acharya Ramamurti Committee; GOI, 1990)⁸ which observed:

"The above listed highly desirable features of NFE are indeed relevant to formal schools as well and they are also the essence of the child-centred approach mentioned by NPE. The criteria mentioned by POA for selection of NFE instructors - being local, being already motivated, acceptable to the community, being preferably from the weaker sections in society, having given some evidence of work in the community – are the criteria relevant to the selection of formal school teachers also. Therefore, it is unclear why the policy has advocated NFE, in effect, as a parallel system." (GOI, 1990, Section 6.4.6)

Based upon this logic, the NPERC recommended that the formal school system be itself 'non-formalised' to include all the desirable features of NFE instead of setting up two parallel systems, one for the children from relatively better-off sections of society and the other for poor girls and working children (GOI, 1990, Chapter 6, pp. 169-172).⁹ The NPERC proposed specific policy changes and a detailed programme design for building up a responsive and relevant formal school system that can not only reach out to the children from marginalized social segments and remote habitations but also be much more socially and pedagogically meaningful to the children from the middle class and even the elite sections than is the prevailing formal school. In effect, NPERC seemed to be raising an uncomfortable question for the ruling Indian elite: Whom is the formal school system designed for if it is both inaccessible and unsuitable for almost half of India's children? NPERC, therefore, advocated the necessity of transforming the formal school system itself in such manner that all children, irrespective of their socio-economic status, can socialise and learn together in consonance with the vision of the Common School System (GOI, 1990, pp. 92-93, 169-172, 182-184).

Policy's Vision of Social Engineering

Both the NPE-1986 (Section 5.9) and POA-1986 (Chapter II, Section 25) insisted that NFE was designed in order to fulfill policy's overriding assumption that 'NFE can result in provision of education comparable in quality with formal schooling.' It is indeed ironical that the policy first creates a layer of lower quality below the formal school, mainly for poor girls and the child labour, and then claims to design features in it to make it 'comparable with formal schooling.' It prefers not to take any radical measures to transform the social and pedagogic character of the mainstream formal school system such that it will be able to attract the child labour as well as the children from remote habitations, particularly the girls, while ensuring that they enjoy learning and receive education that is relevant to their lives along with the rest of the children in their neighbourhood. The policy makers offer the following lame excuse for not taking the radical measure of transforming the formal school system:

"Given the present condition of the schools in general, the challenges before the school system are many, e.g., enrolling and retaining children who cannot afford to attend school regularly; a harmonious interaction with the community around; improving the infrastructure, quality and learning environment; and ensuring that every student acquires minimum levels of learning. *These challenges are daunting enough* and it *does not seem desirable to overload the school system* with yet another formidable challenge of meeting the educational needs of children with severe para educational constraints." (emphasis added)

- Report of the CABE Committee on Policy (1992)

[GOI, 1992a, Section 9.13]

Three contradictions need to be noted in the above statement. One, the policy makers do not regard the 'daunting challenges' listed above to be the central task of the formal

school system, if not the very *raison d'être* for its existence. Two, these 'daunting challenges' do not seem to constitute 'the educational needs of children with severe para educational constraints'. One wonders what will. Also, the policy erroneously assumes that it is the child, rather than the school system, that is handicapped by 'severe para educational constraints'. Is the above lame excuse offered because of the lack of policy makers' interest in either abolishing child labour or changing the role of girls from poor families in domestic chores and sibling care? This is obvious since the timings of the NFE centres were adjusted to evenings for the child labour and afternoons for the girls, instead of ensuring that they come to a regular *day-time* formal school, thereby challenging the socio-cultural constraints operating on their lives, as has been successfully demonstrated by MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh and advocated by Sinha (2000). The fact is that the policy conceived of a parallel stream like NFE which, instead of helping to eliminate the practice of child labour and resist patriarchy, ended up adjusting with and legitimising it.

The policy makers were determined to institutionalise the newly emerging principle of social engineering through parallel layers of so-called educational facilities (not schools). NPERC's recommendation, therefore, to transform the infrastructural, social and pedagogic character of the formal school system did not find favour with the CAGE Committee on Policy (GOI, 1992a, Sections 9.7-9.13) which re-iterated the same flawed logic critiqued above.¹⁰ The NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992), accordingly, retained the parallel NFE stream for crores of working children (two-thirds of them being girls), without providing a feasible design in the modified POA-1992 for radically transforming or improving the formal school system. Extending this spurious logic, it was only natural for the CAGE Committee on Policy to also reject NPERC's recommendation for building up a Common School System (GOI, 1992a, Sections 6.1-6.6). This retrogressive stand of the CAGE Committee on Policy with regard to NFE and Common School System at least followed an internally consistent logic and thus enabled the State to clear the path, as we shall see later, for the Structural Adjustment Programme being then imposed on the Indian economy by IMF and the World Bank.

Camouflage

We may recall the laborious rationalisation that the policy makers preferred to indulge in, which amounted to somehow deluding oneself to trust the rhetoric about the superior attributes of NFE (in comparison to formal schools) designed in the policy. However, there is substantial evidence that none of this indulgence had its genesis in a genuine concern for the deprived girls engaged in domestic chores and sibling care, working children or the children living in remote habitations, but in the perception of the policy makers about the lack of financial resources available for elementary education. An

insight into the mindset of the State is provided by the perspective document entitled, ‘Challenge of Education – A Policy Perspective’ released by the Government of India as a prelude to NPE-1986 in the following words:

“Now, *faced with other constraints*, Non-Formal education is being assigned a very large responsibility in relation to the achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education by 1990. It is expected that of the additional 64 million children coming up for elementary education, nearly 39 million will be educated entirely through this system.” (GOI, 1985, Section 3.13) [emphasis added]

This brings out three undeniable facts.

- i) The policy makers had made up their mind about institutionalising non-formal education for the marginalised sections of society as a parallel layer to the formal school system *well before* the draft NPE-1986 was circulated all over the country for the much-hyped debate amongst the people of India. Does it not imply that the so-called public debate on the draft NPE-1986 was a mere eye-wash, if not a complete farce? Or may be, it was a means of necessary legitimization in a democracy!
- ii) The non-formal stream was not designed as a minor stream. It was expected to be a bigger stream than even the formal stream – for almost 60.9% of the additional children ‘coming up for elementary education’ (i.e. 39 million out of 64 million children).
- iii) The government was ‘*faced with other constraints*’ that persuaded it to substitute the vision of the Common School System with the policy of ‘parallel layers’. Having done this, the policy makers indulged in the rhetoric of NFE having organisational, curricular and pedagogic attributes that were supposedly superior to the formal school system.

It is almost scary to realise how policies are formulated. Contrary to the public perception, policies are made without any objective basis or scientific evaluation. Let us see what does the ‘Challenge of Education’ document say on this issue:

“To-date, no systematic study of the effectiveness of Non-Formal Education is available. It is being argued by some educational planners that this may not be a viable alternative to school education. There are difficulties in the effective monitoring and evaluation of its implementation. These arguments have to be balanced against the necessity of using some mechanism to reach children outside the formal education system.” (GOI, 1985, Section 3.14)

What were these constraints faced by the Government in 1985 that persuaded it to violate the Common School vision of the NPE-1968 (and later also of NPE-1986)? What were those compulsion against which the sound logic of the educational planners had to be balanced against?

Answer to such questions is provided by the same ‘Challenge of Education’ document in the following paragraph:

“ any substantial improvement in educational coverage as well as retention, which constitutes the core of universalisation of elementary education efforts, will not only require significant increase in educational expenditure on elementary education *but will also have a multiplier effect on the total education budget through increased enrolments in the secondary and higher education*. Hence, policy deliberations vis-a-vis universalisation of elementary education need to be matched with hard financial decisions. Alternatively, other educational approaches, such as non-formal/distance education, and vocationalisation have to be worked out in detail for a large scale implementation and replication. [Emphasis added]” (GOI, 1985, Sections 4.64 and 4.65)

It is then clear that the policy makers were not persuaded by the superior attributes conceived by them for NFE but by the perceived financial constraints. Since ‘policy deliberations vis-a-vis universalisation of elementary education need(ed) to be matched with hard financial

decisions’, NPE-1986 saw in NFE a way out of the dilemma of providing education to 60.9% of the children in the relevant age group. It did not matter much even if ‘no systematic study of the effectiveness of Non-Formal Education (was) available’ or if some educational planners did not see in this ‘a viable alternative to school education.’ After all, NFE was meant only for the marginalised children, not for the children of the middle class families or those of the ruling elite! However, in a democracy like India, one needed to exercise abundant caution. The camouflage of attaching the rhetoric of superior attributes to NFE was, therefore, cleverly designed and incorporated in the policy statement as well as the POA-1986. The Government of India had no hesitation in presenting even the Jomtien Conference held in March 1990 with the same camouflage. The international funding agencies might have even welcomed this camouflage since, as we shall see in the next Section, the Jomtien Conference was organised precisely for preparing the groundwork for imposing the Structural Adjustment Programme of IMF and the World Bank requiring developing countries like India to minimise their expenditure on the social sector. One of the most significant victims of this requirement in the next few years was going to be elementary education. It is a moot point whether NFE was an outcome of the financial constraints as perceived by the Indian policy makers or of a lack of commitment on their part to push forward the vision of egalitarian education inherent in the Common School System. Or may be it was designed to fit in the framework of the Structural Adjustment Programme which might have been quietly operational in India well before it was publicly declared as an inevitable part of the New Economic Policy from July 1991 onwards. Whatever may be the compulsions, it is now understood retrospectively that NFE provided the foundation for institutionalising a range of parallel layers of low quality streams of educational facilities for different social segments in the wake of the neo-liberal agenda.

Post-Jomtien Phase of Indian Education

The Jomtien Conference was jointly convened by the UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and The World Bank.¹¹ These international agencies have continued to hold follow-up conferences at both the regional and global levels during the Nineties.¹² The decadal follow-up of the Jomtien Conference was held at Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 wherein the progress made by the various nations to achieve the EFA goals as set out by the Jomtien Declaration was reviewed. Just as the Jomtien Declaration guided educational planning throughout the Nineties, the Dakar Framework of Action (World Education Forum, 2000) has now become the new policy-level international guide post for the first 15 years of the 21st century.¹³

The Jomtien Conference proved to be a turning point in the history of education in India. The Government of India gave a hasty concurrence to the Jomtien Declaration (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 1990), without even consulting the Parliament on its major Constitutional and policy implications. This marked the beginning of the phase of steady erosion of Parliament's role in policy formulation in education as well as of the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Human Resource Development in formulating the agenda of Indian education and setting its priorities. As provided for in the Jomtien Declaration (Article 10) and Jomtien Framework (Section 3.3), external aid from a host of international funding agencies, operating under the World Bank umbrella, was systematically allowed in the primary education sector *as a matter of policy* for the first time in post-independence India.¹⁴ This policy departure coincided with the beginning of the New Economic Policy in July 1991 in India. With this, it became necessary for the Government to accept the IMF-World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme. The launching of the first World Bank-sponsored comprehensive District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1993-94 was part of this requirement and its attendant Social Safety Net provided under IMF-World Bank design (GOI, 1993, p. 88). The serious implication of this new situation was recognized by the Government. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) at its 46th meeting in March 1991 formulated a set of guidelines for externally aided projects which were re-iterated at the 47th meeting in May 1992. These guidelines sought to ensure that "external assistance does not lead to a dependency syndrome" and remains "an additionality to the (national) resources for education" while being in "total conformity with the national policies, strategies and programmes" (GOI, 1993, p. 89).

Yet, a series of policy-related documents were issued during the following years, each impacting upon the policy in a significant manner. The list will include Education For All (GOI, 1993), DPEP (GOI, 1995, 1998), Education Guarantee Scheme (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998, pp. 9-12), Para Teacher scheme (Ed. CIL, 2000; GOI, 2001a), Ambani-Birla Report (GOI, 2000), National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000) and Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative &

Innovative Education (GOI, 2001a). The minimum norms for school infrastructure and strength of teachers in a primary school, as specified in Operation Blackboard of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992), were diluted for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and EFA-National Plan of Action (GOI, 2002, 2003a; Tilak, 2003; Sadgopal 2003c). Similarly, the policy relating to women's education stands diluted – from empowering women to merely enrolling girls on school registers – in line with the Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks, as also reinforced by the monitoring parameters (e.g. Gender Parity Index, an index based on enrollment ratios) formulated by UNESCO (Sadgopal, 2003c). For none of these, it was considered necessary to take approval of the Parliament, even when these contradicted elements of the education policy approved by the Parliament.

During the post-Jomtien phase, the Indian education policy was diluted in the following significant ways, whether directly as part of the externally aided projects (e.g. DPEP) or otherwise (e.g. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan):

- **Trivialisation of educational aims:** Education being made synonymous with literacy (Sadgopal, 1994); competency-based market-oriented narrow framework of Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) imposed on curricular planning and assessment (Dhankar, 2002; Sadgopal, 2002b, p. 118-120); education of girls viewed in terms of only reducing their fertility rates, slowing population growth or increasing their productivity (World Bank, 1997, pp. 1, 39, 53); basically education being viewed in behavioural paradigm.
- **Fragmentation of knowledge:** The 'world of work' separated from the 'world of knowledge', thereby reinforcing the Brahmanical-cum-colonial character of Indian education¹⁵; cognitive domain viewed in isolation of the affective domain and psycho-motor skills (e.g. in MLL); primary education de-linked from upper primary stage, ignoring the concept of integrated elementary education of eight years¹⁶.
- **Withdrawal from policy commitment to build a Common School System:** As discussed earlier in this paper, the issue of improvement (or transformation, if necessary) of quality and relevance of the formal school system in order to build a Common School System for all children was gradually de-focused after NPE-1986, particularly during the post-Jomtien phase. Instead, institutionalisation of multiple or parallel tracks of low-quality 'educational' facilities replaced the Common School policy as the key strategy for providing the so-called education to crores of out-of-school children belonging to *dalit* and tribal sections of societies, several segments of other backward classes, cultural and linguistic minorities, and physically and mentally disabled. Two-thirds of each of these sections, facing educational discrimination, comprised girl children. Apart from continuing with NFE during the post-Jomtien phase, the following multiple tracks or parallel streams were introduced: accommodating the 9-14 age group children in adult

literacy classes (GOI, 1993, p. 51)¹⁷, Alternative Schools (GOI, 1998, p. 18), Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Centres (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998, pp. 9-12; GOI, 2001a; 2001b, Section 3.2.2.2), Multi-Grade/Multi-Level Teaching (GOI, 1995, p. 10, 16; 1998, p.18), Bridge Courses and Back-to-School Camps (GOI, 2001b, Section 3.2.2.2; 2002, p.11) and correspondence courses for the 6-14 age group (NCERT, 2000, pp. 22-23; GOI, 2001b, Section 3.4.18; 2003a, p. 44; 2003b,c, Schedule A).

Four sets of observations will be made here to reveal the ruthlessness with which the State has pursued its agenda of promoting and institutionalizing inequality in education.

a) EGS has no provision whatsoever for any infrastructure (not even for a tent or thatched roof); its supposedly chief beneficiaries viz. the *dalit* or tribal communities are expected, as per the EGS design, to arrange for some space for the centre (GOI, 2001a)!

b) In externally aided DPEP, Multi-Grade/Multi-Level Teaching has meant nothing other than one/two teacher(s) being trained to teach five classes simultaneously out of sheer necessity. In spite of the confused rhetoric by the DPEP authorities, it is not designed to be the progressive pedagogy of ‘grade-less teaching’, as is the case at Digantar (experimental schools practicing grade-less teaching) near Jaipur, Rajasthan. DPEP has thus violated the Operation Blackboard norms of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) for providing at least three teachers and three classrooms to every primary school. Dhankar (2002) analyses this DPEP policy aptly:

“The need and rationale for multi-grade teaching is either socio-political or managerial; and *pedagogical considerations are only grafted on to it*. The real solution to the problem is to appoint more teachers But appointing more teachers costs money. Since most of the children in these schools belong to the weaker sections of society, easier and less expensive solutions are sought. Therefore, a pedagogical solution for this socio-economic problem is devised in the name of multi-grade teaching strategies. As the (conventional) grade was used to manage children, now in a changed situation the idea of multi-grade is used for the same purpose. claiming that (it) is an effort for quality improvement, is *nothing more than making a virtue out of an ugly necessity* – ugly because the children who bear the brunt belong to the weaker sections of the society.” (emphasis ours)

The policy (Section 5.7) had stated that ‘Operation Blackboard will be enlarged to provide *three reasonably large rooms* that are usable in all weather and (a range of teaching aids)’ and ‘at least *three teachers* should work in every school, the *number increasing, as early as possible, to one teacher per class* at least 50 per cent of teachers recruited in future should be women’ (emphasis added). To be sure, these norms were approved by the Parliament in May 1992. Through Multi-Grade/Multi-Level Teaching, DPEP has cynically attempted to justify the single teacher and two-teacher schools (almost two-thirds of all primary schools), instead of building up political pressure or legislative action or catalyzing community demand for fulfillment of Operation Blackboard commitments. This violation during the late Nineties, touted as an interim strategy, apparently opened the doors at the beginning of this century for

institutionalising the dilution of Operation Blackboard norms from three teachers-three classrooms per primary school to two teacher-two classroom per primary school in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) and EFA – National Plan of Action (2003). This dilution is now the basis of financial allocations (GOI, 2003a, Table 9.3, p. 92). It also explains, at least partly, how the Government managed to reduce the Tapas Majumdar Committee's estimates by 30% for the Financial Memorandum attached to the 86th Amendment Bill.

c) NCERT (2000, pp. 22-23) recommended correspondence courses (euphemized as Open Schooling or Open Learning System) for the 6-14 age group without any basis in educational research or experience whatsoever. Again, this proposal is in violation of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) which had restricted the role of the so-called 'open learning system' to secondary and higher education (Section 5.37). Yet, such a farcical pedagogic notion is already a part of the Tenth Five Year Plan (GOI, 2001b, Section 3.4.18) and EFA – National Plan of Action (GOI, 2003a, p. 44) and will be shortly presented to the Parliament for legitimization (GOI, 2003b,c, Schedule A). Apart from legitimizing child labour, the introduction of correspondence courses for the 6-14 age group children, most of them being 'first generation learners', implies that the girl child will be *officially* denied the *relatively* more liberating atmosphere offered by school than what she is likely to get at home, bound by patriarchal traditions (Sadgopal, 2003c).

d) Whenever faced with criticism throughout the Nineties, the policy makers claimed that these multiple tracks or parallel streams are merely *interim or transitional* arrangements in order to *eventually* mainstream all children to reach regular formal schools. This is precisely what the nation was told about non-formal education in the wake of NPE-1986 and in the years following NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) which promised that the NFE scheme 'will be strengthened and enlarged' (Section 5.8). The EFA (1993) again assured that 'many measures are being adopted to further strengthen this scheme' (GOI, 1993, p. 51). In 1995, the externally aided DPEP asserted that it would 'strive for the development of an effective NFE system which can meet the diverse educational needs of children' (GOI, 1995, Chapter II, Section 17). In 1998, DPEP declared that 'every state is deciding to set up different forms of alternative schools to ensure participation of working children, street children, children of migrating communities, drop outs etc.' (GOI, 1998, p. 18). To be sure, all the categories of out-of-school children mentioned in the DPEP of 1998 are same as those mentioned in NFE scheme of 1986 policy. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2002) informs that,

"Studies on the Non-Formal Education scheme have pointed out the lack of flexibility which impedes effective implementation across different States. Efforts to provide for a diversity of interventions have been made in the revised scheme that has been approved recently such as setting up of Education Guarantee Schools, Alternative Schooling facilities, Balika Shikshan Shivirs, 'Back-to-School' camps etc.' (GOI, 2002, Chapter III, Section 3.5, p. 35).

We should be prepared for yet another revision of the scheme in the near future since the target of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan of 'providing universal enrolment by the year 2003' is far from being met. The above policy analysis shows that these multiple tracks or parallel streams are there to stay with us for as long as the policy makers refuse to (a) focus attention on transforming the mainstream formal school system; (b) build a Common School System; and (c) reprioritise national economy to ensure adequate resources for this central nation-building task. Otherwise, the promise of making these multiple tracks into 'transitional schools' - the latest name for the range of NFE schemes - will remain an elusive dream.

- **Lowering the status of school teacher:** In unabashed violation of Sections 9.1 to 9.3 of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) that call for raising the status of teachers, the post-Jomtien *operating* policy has been to replace the teacher with under-qualified, untrained (or under-trained) and under-paid persons appointed on short-term contracts, to be called Para-Teachers (Ed. CIL report on Para-

Teachers, 2000; GOI, 2001a; Kumar *et al*, 2001; Sadgopal, 2002b, p. 118 & 2003a, p. 15). The Para-Teacher is known by a variety of euphemisms in different States viz. *Guruji*, *Lok Shikshak*, *Shiksha Karmi*, *Lok Mitra*, *Vidya Upasak*, *Vidya Volunteer* etc. but care is taken not to call her/him a teacher. This policy of para-teacher is now being rapidly extended to secondary and higher education as well, clearly to facilitate privatization and commercialization of education.

- **Erosion of women's education policy:** The NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) provided for a sharp perspective on 'Education for Women's Equality' (Sections 4.2 and 4.3) as follows:

"Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values This will be an act of faith"

The entire credit for this progressive stance must go to India's own women's movement which persuaded even the policy makers to move away from the conventional notions. The only programme that was designed to reflect this policy insight was *Mahila Samakhya*. Its objective was to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of women; build their positive image by recognising their contribution to society, polity and the economy; develop their ability to think critically; enable them to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health, especially reproductive health; and ensure equal participation in developmental processes (POA-1992, Chapter 1: Section 1.5.1). However, *Mahila Samakhya* remained marginal throughout the Nineties. For every 100 rupees allocated for elementary education in the Union Budget, hardly 25 paise

were given to it. In due course of time, even this miniscule programme lost its basic direction.

The Jomtien-Dakar Framework does not even refer to patriarchy as an issue and essentially reduces girls' education to merely enrolling them on school registers and giving them literacy skills. This is exactly what happened when World Bank-sponsored DPEP adopted *Mahila Samakhyā*. The focus on collective reflection and socio-cultural action by organized women groups, as advocated by the policy, was abandoned. It became a *mere girl child enrolment* programme. Critical issues such as girls' participation in schools, gender sensitization of learning material and teacher education and holistic educational aims were ignored. Unfortunately, the notion of gender parity (ratio of enrolment of girls and boys) in UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003-04 also reinforces this confusion. Also, the World Bank diluted the goal of women's education to just raising their literacy levels and productivity (rather than educating or empowering them) and turning them into mere transmitters of fertility control, health or nutritional messages (World Bank, 1997). The Dakar Framework has now added the ambiguous notion of Life Skills that seems to be yet another mechanism for social manipulation and market control of the adolescent mindset, particularly the girls. India unfortunately gave up its progressive policy on women's education in favour of the international framework that was guided more by the considerations of market than by women's socio-cultural and political rights.

- **Increasing abdication by the State:** We will only briefly touch upon this alarming post-Jomtien trend here since it has been referred to elsewhere as well as reflected in the various aspects of policy dilution listed above. What is needed is recognition of the relationship between these trends and IMF-World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme which is accelerating the pace of moving Indian education towards privatization and commercialization, as proposed by Ambani-Birla Report (GOI, 2000). However, we need to advance our understanding beyond the Ambani-Birla formulations which gave the false impression that it called for privatization only in higher education and partly in secondary education – the Report seemed to be saying that elementary education must be entirely a State responsibility. The post-Jomtien policy measures adopted by the Indian policy makers have evidently enabled the State to rapidly withdraw even from the elementary education sector. This is reflected in the ever reducing financial commitment for this sector, as discussed in detail below in the context of the 93rd (now called 86th) Amendment. There is mounting evidence that the State is not ready to re-prioritise the national economy in favour of education of the deprived sections of society and has become dependent on external aid, as it seems to be refusing to provide for even the diluted policy measures and for the much reduced financial requirement.¹⁸ This official stance is in clear violation of the CAFE guidelines against

‘dependency syndrome’ and policy dilutions in relation to external aid (GOI, 1993, p. 89).

The following observation by Tomasevski (2001) on the Jomtien Declaration and Framework will provide the necessary perspective for comprehending the adverse changes in Indian education during the post-Jomtien phase:

“The language of the final document adopted by the Jomtien Conference merged human needs and market forces, moved education from governmental to social responsibility, made no reference to the international legal requirement that primary education be free-of-charge, introduced the term ‘basic education’ which confused conceptual and statistical categories. The language elaborated at Jomtien was different from the language of international human rights law.”

- Tomasevski, K. (2001)
Special Rapporteur on the right to education
to United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Taking an early cue from the Jomtien Declaration and foreseeing political, historical and educational significance of this turning point, this author proposed to view the post-independence history of education in India in two separate phases for the purpose of policy analysis viz. **Pre-Jomtien and Post-Jomtien phases** (Sadgopal, 1994).

Tampering with the Constitution

Back to the 93rd (now called as 86th) Amendment debate in Lok Sabha. The amendment Bill had the following four major lacunae:

- i) The Bill sought to exclude almost 17 crore children up to six years of age from the provision of Fundamental Right to *free* early childhood care and pre-school education. This was in contravention of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) which considered this support during childhood as being crucial for child development and preparation for elementary education (Sections 5.1 to 5.4). The implication was clear: early childhood care and pre-school education will be denied to not less than 40% of the children in this age group, two-thirds of them being girls, whose parents barely manage to earn minimum wages. This will also prevent girls in the 6-14 age group, belonging to the same sections of society, from receiving elementary education as they will be engaged in sibling care.
- ii) The Bill made the provision of Fundamental Right to education even for the 6-14 age group children conditional by introducing the phrase ‘*as the State may, by law, determine*’ in the new Article 21A. The implications of this phrase will be discussed below.
- iii) The Bill shifted the Constitutional obligation towards ‘free and compulsory education’ from the State to the parents or guardians by making it a Fundamental Duty of

the latter under Article 51A (k) to '*provide opportunities for education*' to their children in the 6-14 age group. This purpose is now sought to be achieved by promoting and legitimizing 'community participation' in raising resources for elementary education (GOI, 2003b,c), yet another measure towards abdication by the State.

iv) The Financial Memorandum attached to the Bill provided for only Rs. 9,800 crores per annum (i.e. 0.44% of GDP in 2002-03) over a ten year period for implementing the provisions under the Bill. This commitment was far from being adequate, as it was 30% less than what was estimated by the Tapas Majumdar Committee in 1999 to provide elementary education to all the out-of-school children through *regular formal schools*. This lower estimate was made possible by depending on low-quality parallel tracks of education and lowering several other critically important infrastructural and pedagogic norms for deprived sections of society (Tilak, 2003 and Sadgopal, 2003c).

Detailed critiques of the 93rd Amendment Bill contended that the lacunae were deliberate, rather than being a result of an oversight (see Sadgopal 2001a,b,c,d and 2002a; Swaminathan, 2001). The amendment was being made, these writings sought to establish, not to make elementary education a Fundamental Right, but to fulfill the dictates of IMF-World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme that demanded reduction in public expenditure on social sector. The lack of guarantee of free early childhood care and pre-school education will not only result in underdevelopment of the deprived children during childhood but will also adversely affect their learning capacity during school education.

In particular, the above critiques focused upon the implications of the phrase '*as the State may, by law, determine*'. No such conditionality existed in the original Article 45. It is contended that the phrase was introduced in order to legitimize the low-budget low-quality multiple and parallel tracks of so-called educational facilities for poor children as well as other forms of policy dilutions discussed above. This phrase also legitimizes the increasing abdication by the State of its Constitutional obligation towards ensuring elementary education of *equitable* quality for all children.

To the agitated MPs from various political parties who criticized the Bill in both Houses of the Parliament, an assurance was repeatedly given by the Minister that the lacunae in the Bill will be taken care of by enacting a new law. How would a law take care of the lacunae introduced in the Constitution through an amendment? If the Government intended to rectify the lacunae later through a law, why was it bent upon introducing these in the Constitution in the first place? The leadership of various political parties neither raised nor pursued such uncomfortable questions in the Parliament. The assurance of a law to be enacted later seemed to have led to a curious consensus in the Parliament on the Constitutional amendment (now termed the 86th amendment), in spite of its unambiguous bias against crores of children (girl children in particular) belonging to

various deprived sections of society (Sadgopal, 2001d, 2002a) and violations of several provisions in the Constitution relating to Parts III and IV.

The Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004

Let me also briefly examine the draft 'Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004' (GOI, 2004, Draft III). This is the law that was promised by the previous NDA Government in Parliament, presumably to take care of the lacunae in the 86th Amendment Bill. Ironically, a careful scrutiny reveals that, instead of 'taking care of the lacunae' in the 86th Constitutional Amendment, the aforementioned draft Bill increases the lacunae in several ways. It would suffice to refer to Schedules I & II of the Bill which together provide for *three types* of centres for 'imparting education', specifying their respective minimum norms. The draft Bill thus is an unabashed attempt to legitimise parallel streams of education of differential quality viz. regular schools, EGS Centres and Alternative Schools, already institutionalized in the *operating* policy and programmes (e.g. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), for the deprived sections of society. This will also legitimise the

undesirable sociological principle of 'a separate educational stream for each social strata.'

The draft Bill is both ambiguous and weak on inclusion of the physically and mentally disabled children in the regular approved schools. Its provisions will encourage as well as facilitate violation of the policy commitment for inclusive education which is integral to the fulfillment of Constitutional obligation for equality in education and for building up the Common School System (Jha, 2003). As noted by Jha (2003), the Bill might even promote privatization and commercialization of the education of the disabled.

A detailed and holistic analysis was presented by me at two consultations organized by MV Foundation and CACL in Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar respectively (Sadgopal, 2004a) and some other aspects documented elsewhere (Sadgopal, 2004b). This established that the Draft Bill attempted to (a) legitimize low quality educational streams for under-privileged sections of society; (b) provide legitimate space for extra-constitutional authorities to introduce their ideological agenda in school education while keeping them outside the purview of the constitutional framework; (c) negate the role of panchayati raj institutions; (d) promote privatisation and 'corporatisation' of school education; (e) franchise parts or whole districts to NGOs, corporate or religious bodies for running elementary schools; (f) shift the state's constitutional obligation towards elementary education to the parents and local communities; (g) promote "special schools" for disabled children at the cost of inclusive education; and introduce a range of other distortions.

In a sense, the draft Bill carries forward the process of abdication by the State of its Constitutional obligation for which a legitimised space was created by the 86th Constitutional Amendment by attaching the conditionality i.e. '*as the State may, by law, determine*' to the guarantee of right to free and compulsory education for children in the 6-14 age group. The Draft Bill is designed to fully protect and also 'guarantee' the exclusion and discrimination institutionalised by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in its following statement:

"All children in school, Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) centre, alternate school, 'back-to-school camp' by 2003." (GOI, 2003a, p. 27)

With this guarantee for protection, the State is continuing to persist in its refusal to reprioritise national economy and pursue its campaign for seeking increased external aid, thereby further subjugating nation's education system and policies to the control of the global market.

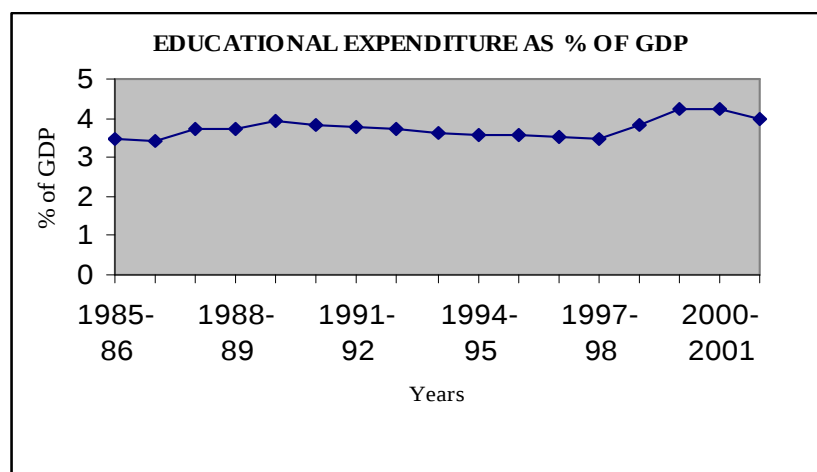
Resources, National Economy and External Aid

The externally assisted DPEP started in 1993-94 and, by the year 2000, it had spread to 275 odd districts in 18 States – almost half of the country. Government of India's Education For All document (1993), while reproducing the CAGE guidelines for externally aided projects, partly also cited earlier, stated:

"It would be fair to say that while external funding would be an interim contribution to meet the resource gap, there is *no alternative other than augmenting domestic resources* to achieve the objective of EFA. Economic liberalization and the consequent financial restructuring can be *expected to facilitate greater resource flow* to elementary education." [emphasis added]
- Education For All: The Indian Scene, Govt. of India, 1993, p. 90

External aid has had an adverse impact on the political will to reprioritise national economy for mobilizing public resources for universalisation of elementary education. Soon after the 1986 policy, we saw an upswing in national effort to mobilize public resources for education. By 1989-90, almost 4% of GDP was being spent on education, with little less than half on elementary education. Ironically, with the onset of external aid in primary education in the Nineties, the investment in education (including in elementary education) started declining steadily and was as low as 3.49% of GDP in 1997-98, the same level as in 1985-86, just before 1986 policy. Clearly, the political will to mobilize resources for elementary education weakened following the entry of external aid. It is only during the last 2-3 years that there has been some improvement, followed by declining trend again in 2001-2002, though the level of external aid was twice in this year than that of 1997-98.

GRAPH



Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2001-02

[Rectified on the basis of 'Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education' (various years), Ministry of HRD]

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In January 2004, the previous Government signed yet another agreement with the World Bank for a loan of Rs. 4710 crore for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for 2004-2007 i.e. Rs. 1,570 crore per year (World Bank, 2004). At the current level of GDP, this loan amounts to merely 0.06% of GDP i.e. merely 6 paise out of every Rs. 100 India will earn in 2004-2005 (the level of total external assistance in this sector since 1993-94 has invariably been much lower than this level)! For this pittance, we entered into conditionalities that will never be made public, as has been the case with externally aided projects since 1993-94.

The official stance is in clear violation of the CAGE guidelines against 'dependency syndrome' and policy dilutions in relation to external aid (GOI, 1993, p. 89). This dependence on external aid in fact implies that *there need not be any change in the priorities of national economy* since additional funds will keep flowing in, as long as the Government of India is willing to adjust its educational policy to the conditionalities of the international funding agencies. These are matters of great concern for those of us who have been consistently questioning the role of external aid in elementary education. This issue has unfortunately not found any recognition in the CMP of the UPA government and is yet to become a part of the political discourse at the national level.

We need to advance our understanding beyond the Ambani-Birla formulations which gave the false impression that it called for privatization only in higher education and partly in secondary education – the Report seemed to be saying that elementary education

must be entirely a State responsibility. The post-Jomtien policy measures adopted by the Indian policy makers, however, have evidently enabled the State to rapidly withdraw even from the elementary education sector. This is reflected in the ever-reducing financial commitment for this sector, as discussed earlier in the context of the 86th Constitutional Amendment and elsewhere (Endnote No. 19 has four significant comments on the ambiguous position taken by UPA in its CMP on this issue).¹⁹ There is thus mounting evidence that the State is not ready to reprioritise the national economy in favour of education of the deprived sections of society and has become dependent on external aid for this purpose, as it seems to be refusing to provide for even the diluted policy measures and for the much reduced financial requirement.¹⁸

Conclusion

This paper has sought to establish that the exclusion and discrimination inherent in the present *operating* education policy (to be distinguished from that passed by the Parliament), though considerably exacerbated by the impact of globalization, has its roots in the national policies formulated well before the global market forces gained a dominant position in India. In this we have a significant lesson: As we must deepen our analysis to comprehend the nature and full dimension of the adverse impact of globalization on Indian education, we can not exonerate our own policy makers from accepting primary responsibility for the collapse of Indian education policy since independence. Indeed, the weaknesses and internal contradictions in our policy provided the necessary political space to the forces of globalization to intervene in Indian education.

How do you expect the education system to be any better if flawed policies are being implemented? I would rather contend that the State is normally quite efficient (inefficiency is rather deliberate and selectively practiced!). The education system is the disaster that it is due to reasonably *efficient implementation of flawed policies*. A corollary, but a critical, lesson is about the significance of evolving and sharpening the tools of policy analysis and applying them for deciphering the mindset of the State as well as the global market forces. Also, this enterprise must not be diluted by getting lost in the *analysis of implementation* of the policy. Rather, attention must remain focused on analysis of the *character of the policy* itself and, through this, of the State.

While the State abdicates its obligations and implements such exclusionary and discriminatory education policy for the vast sections of Indian society, it promotes, at the same time, privatization and commercialization of school education (not to speak of higher education which is beyond the scope of this paper) to benefit an upward mobile minority. For this purpose, it extends *direct subsidy* to the so-called public schools for the

rich and upper middle class by (a) making available prime land in urban areas on highly reduced costs; (b) exempting their income as well as donations to their Trusts/Societies under the Income Tax Act; (c) providing, free of cost, professionally trained teachers who received their diplomas/degrees through publicly subsidized teacher education programmes; and (d) giving their institutions and examinations due recognition through Government-supported CBSE or State Boards of Examinations. Yet, these directly subsidized private schools are not expected to fulfill any of their Constitutional obligations for ensuring *free education of equitable quality* for India's future generations.²⁰ The recent trend of some of these private schools undertaking patronizing measures (often by setting up parallel streams of their own) for handful of deprived children must not be allowed to confuse the policy discourse. In contrast, the State expresses its desperation regarding lack of resources for fulfilling its Constitutional obligations, unless external aid is increased, *seemingly* unmindful of the ways in which India's education policy and agenda have been already undermined by globalization.

Indian education has hardly acknowledged that issues such as disparity, socio-economic stratification and caste hierarchies, patriarchy and gender inequity, conflicts of cultural and ethnic identity, unemployment and disemployment, regional imbalances, a development policy biased against the masses, inappropriate distribution of the economic cake, hegemonic control over natural resources, attrition of values inherited from the freedom struggle and cynical attack on democratic institutions have had a decisive impact on the structure and processes of education. The rise of communalism and the consequent attempts to impose mono-cultural hegemony during the past couple of decades has seriously begun to threaten the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual character of Indian nationhood. We have already witnessed the cynical communal assault on the nature of knowledge inherent in school curriculum (SAHMAT, 2001; Sadgopal, 2004b). Policy formulation and any realistic planning of education, therefore, call for reviewing the role of education in social change and re-designing the entire education system to deal with these issues. We must also begin to take note of the rapidly emerging linkages, howsoever tenuous these might seem to be at present, between neo-liberal and communal forces. There is no space whatsoever either in the Jomtien Declaration or in the framework of any of the externally aided programmes for building up a meaningful policy discourse on such critical issues.

It is a matter of serious concern that the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UPA Government also continues to suffer from several of the lacunae and contradictions that have afflicted policy formulation since independence. More significantly, it shows no evidence of consciousness of the challenge posed by the neo-liberal forces on the character of our education policies and the system as a whole. A detailed constructive critique of the education component of CMP has already drawn the attention of the UPA leadership, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of HRD, as well as of the

leadership of its Left coalition partners to these concerns and sought reconstruction of the education policy in consonance with the principles enshrined in the Constitution (Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, 2004).

It would not be an overstatement to assert that this policy of exclusion and discrimination amounts to *denial of knowledge* to almost 60% to 70% of India's people, while also preventing them from participation in its creation as well as control. In this sense, the stance of the State and its collusion with the forces of globalization needs to be viewed as an assault of epistemic nature on Indian society (Sadgopal, 2002b, 2003a, 2004b). The assault is designed to control the access, production and distribution of knowledge across nations and social classes. It is only by regulating, controlling and distorting knowledge that these forces can dictate their neo-liberal agenda to various nations and large sections of the global society. This paper has attempted to reveal some of such processes and mechanisms already instituted in the Indian school system and adversely impacting on children's right to education. The impact of the neo-liberal assault on the higher education system has been extensively documented by researchers elsewhere. The design for the attrition of the democratic, secular and egalitarian fabric of Indian society is thus almost complete. The process can be reversed only when, and if, a genuine grassroots movement, supported by the progressive sections of society and infused with a consciousness of the dangers inherent in this epistemic assault, is built up for redeeming India's freedom and re-asserting national sovereignty in policy formulation.

[This paper is essentially based on three chapters of a book being written by this author on education policy in India and methods of policy analysis. The three chapters that were compressed in this paper deal with a) non-formal education; b) Constitutional amendment to purportedly make education a Fundamental Right; and c) impact of Structural Adjustment and external aid on education policy. This work is part of author's research as Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.]

Notes

¹ NPE-1986 was preceded by NPE-1968, the first national policy on education, which was in the form of a Cabinet Resolution adopted by the Parliament.

² The Common School System and the concept of Neighbourhood Schools was recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66): see Sections 1.36-1.38, 10.05, 10.19, 10.20 (GOI, 1966). While recommending a 'phased implementation of the Common School System within a ten year time frame', the Acharya Ramamurti Committee Report stressed the need for 'essential minimum legislation', a common language policy for all schools and a 'combination of incentives, disincentives and legislation' to bring into its fold the recognized but unaided private schools (GOI, 1990, Chapter 4D, pp. 91-93). The concept was further elaborated and enriched by Sadgopal (2000, pp. 153-163; 2002b, 122-124; 2003a, pp. 23-27).

³ The original Article 45 now stands substituted by a modified but diluted Article 21A as a result of the 93rd (now called 86th) Amendment to the Constitution. Compared to the original Article 45, the

dilution is a consequence of (a) de-linking Early Childhood Care and Pre-school Education (ECCE) from elementary education, thereby not viewing education of all children ‘until they complete the age of fourteen years’ as a continuum; (b) withdrawing the Constitutional guarantee for provision of *free* ECCE; and (c) not including a specific time frame for fulfillment of the commitment.

⁴ Such a harmonious construction of Part IV with Part III of the Constitution was the basis of the historic Unnikrishnan Judgement, giving education of children ‘until they complete the age of fourteen years’ the status of Fundamental Right (Supreme Court, 1993). In this judgement, Article 45 of Part IV was read in conjunction with Article 21 of Part III.

⁵ It is now widely acknowledged that all those children in the school age who are not in school are to be regarded essentially as child labour, even if they are engaged in domestic chores or outside work-places to help their parents, including sibling care by girl children. This contention has gained credibility as a result of the work of MV Foundation in Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh, which led to the revealing sociological principle that ‘all children out of school are, by definition, child labourers’ (Sinha, 2000, p. 168).

⁶ NPE-1986 (Sections 5.14 and 5.15) also gave birth to Navodaya Vidyalayas - a yet another parallel layer but *above* the formal school. Navodaya Vidyalayas, like non-formal education, also violate the principle of equality in educational planning and allocation of resources but a discussion on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷ The Government used the term ‘instructors’ in order to avoid litigation. It was aware that the under-paid NFE instructors can seek justice in courts by contending that, in comparison to regular teachers, they are being discriminated, as ‘unequal pay for equal work’ violates the Constitutional principle of right to equality (Ed.CIL report on para-teachers, 2000, p.7).

⁸ This author was a member of the 17-member NPE Review Committee-1990 (NPERC) and acted as the Convenor of its Sub-committee on ‘Access, Equity and Universalisation.’ The Sub-committee examined the policy on NFE and recorded in its deliberations this flawed logic as well as these internal contradictions in much detail. However, the final report included a rather diluted version of these deliberations due to the consideration shown to the hostile opposition to this analysis by the then Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

⁹ A comment is needed on the choice of the term ‘non-formalise’ in NPERC’s recommendations for transforming the formal school system. As the Convenor of NPERC’s Sub-committee on ‘Access, Equity and Universalisation’, this author was under intense pressure from the Ministry not to criticize the NFE component of the policy since it was considered to be Ministry’s ‘best foot forward’ for achieving UEE. There were by then almost 2.4 lakh NFE centres (of these, 78,000 centres were exclusively for girls). A great deal of media hype had been by then orchestrated, glorifying NFE (as well as adult literacy campaigns) as a panacea for lack of universal access to education (just as it is being done at present for EGS centres and Alternative Schools of DPEP). Being keen to convince the policy makers of the need to focus all political attention on the transformation of the formal school system, the author used the expression ‘non-formalisation of the formal school system’, implying that the so-called desirable but otherwise non-existent features of NFE need to be in the formal system itself. This ‘appeasement’ did not work since the policy makers, as we shall see later, had made up their mind neither to transform nor to improve the formal school system, most probably under the influence of Jomtien Declaration and Structural Adjustment Programme.

¹⁰ In July 1991, the newly elected Central Government of Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao (Shri Arjun Singh was the HRD Minister) constituted a committee under the aegis of the Central Advisory

Board of Education (CABE) to 'review the implementation of the various parameters of NPE, taking into consideration the report of the Committee for Review of the NPE and other relevant developments since the policy was formulated and to make recommendations regarding modifications to be made in NPE.' This committee, called the CABE Committee on Policy, was chaired by Shri Janaradhana Reddy, the Congress Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. The decision to constitute the CABE Committee to purportedly review the Acharya Ramamurti Committee Report essentially amounted to *not* giving effect to the major policy changes recommended therein. The CABE Committee Report, submitted in January 1992, fulfilled the objective of the Government by rejecting all the significant recommendations of the Acharya Ramamurti Committee for policy changes for promoting equity in elementary education and building up a Common School System. Thus the Government managed to keep doors open for Structural Adjustment in the post-Jomtien phase, as will be shown later in this paper. Accordingly, NPE-1986 was revised by the Parliament in 1992 with only minor modifications.

¹¹ The Jomtien Conference was attended by the representatives of 155 national governments (including Indian government), 20 inter-governmental bodies and 150 NGOs.

¹² For instance, a follow-up Education For All Conference of nine high population-level countries was held in New Delhi in 1993. These nine high population-level countries included Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan – collectively referred to as the E-9 countries. This group met recently in Cairo in December 2003.

¹³ As part of the Dakar Framework of Action, UNESCO now regularly monitors the progress made by each nation in the context of the Dakar Goals and issues 'EFA Global Monitoring Report' annually. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4 focused on the education of the girl child and was issued just before the EFA Conference held at New Delhi on November 10-12, 2003. The reports released in 2002 and 2003/4 show that *India is amongst those countries which are unlikely to fulfill any of the six Dakar Goals* (only three out of six goals were assessed), *including the goal of gender parity, even by the target year of 2015*. The Union Minister of Human Resource Development Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi took strong exception to this negative assessment in the UNESCO report and claimed that it is based upon outdated data (Hindustan Times, Indian Express & Pioneer, 8th November 2003). However, the Minister's claim was unfounded as shown by this author (Sadgopal, 2003b,c).

¹⁴Externally aided projects in primary education in Andhra Pradesh (APPEP) and Bihar (BEP) preceded the Jomtien Declaration but these were envisaged as special pilot projects, rather than being a matter of policy. The possibility can not be denied that the international funding agencies might have used the Andhra Pradesh and Bihar pilot projects in the pre-Jomtien phase to test the political waters in India i.e. the political will of the ruling elite to stand by its Constitutional obligations and policy. The Indian political leadership obviously failed the test as the externally aided projects of the post-Jomtien phase led to major violations of the Constitution and dilutions of the policy.

¹⁵The problem is probably inherent in the ambiguous notions of 'Basic Education' and 'Basic Learning Needs' in both the Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks. The ambiguity of these notions, most likely deliberate, is what allows them to be used for merging of 'human needs and market forces', as noted by Tomasevski (2001). A discussion on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. It would be sufficient to point out here that Jomtien's notion of 'Basic Education' must not be confused with the revolutionary pedagogic concept of Basic Education (or *Buniyadi Shiksha*), as evolved by Mahatma Gandhi at the Wardha Education Conference in 1937 as part of the freedom struggle which was further elaborated by a committee under the chairpersonship of Dr. Zakir Hussain as *Nai Taleem*. The almost servile 'parroting' of the Jomtien's narrow notion of 'Basic Education' by the Indian policy makers in the post-Jomtien official discourse amounts to denial of one of the most inspiring features of the heritage of the freedom struggle,

apart from further marginalizing the possibility of integrating the ‘world of work’ with the ‘world of knowledge’ as conceived by Mahatma Gandhi.

¹⁶The concept of ‘Basic Education’ in the Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks is limited to primary education of *five* years only. Elementary education of *eight* years, implied by the Indian Constitution under the original Article 45 as well as the amended Article 21A as the minimum guarantee by the State, is non-existent in these Frameworks. Interestingly, the Jomtien Framework concedes that ‘these targets represent a “floor” (but not a “ceiling”)’ and parenthetically provides for ‘(primary education) or whatever higher level of education is considered as basic’ by a particular country [Sections 5 and 8 (2) respectively]. It is indeed ironic that the Indian policy makers, instead of using these spaces in the Framework for persisting with India’s Constitutional and policy imperatives, allowed the international funding agencies to dilute *elementary* education to *primary* education as the dominant framework for educational planning and financing in the post-Jomtien India.

¹⁷This scheme to accommodate 9-14 age group children in adult literacy classes was announced with great fanfare by the then Prime Minister of India in his inaugural address at the EFA Conference of E-9 countries held at New Delhi in 1993. Such glorification of this policy measure is an evidence of *education being reduced to literacy*.

¹⁸According to ‘Education For All - National Plan of Action’ (GOI, 2003a), the total Tenth Plan requirement for UEE is Rs. 52,280 crores (Centre and State shares combined). This amounted to an average of 0.47% of GDP in 2002-03, including the external aid component. Of the Centre’s share (Rs. 39,760 crores), the Planning Commission promised Rs. 21,271 crores i.e. only 53.5% of Tenth Plan requirement. This leaves a gap of at least Rs. 18,489 crores. The gap in State’s share is not yet reported. Recent press reports indicate that Planning Commission has further reduced its allocation to Rs. 17,000 crores (i.e. mere 0.15% of GDP), thereby increasing the gap. The story does not end here. The Prime Minister made desperate appeals to the international funding agencies at the UNESCO-sponsored ‘Third High Level Group Meeting of EFA’ held in Delhi in November 2003 for increasing external aid for elementary education (Indian Express and Hindustan Times, 11th November 2003); the Minister of Human Resource Development carried forward this appeal at the ‘E-9 Ministerial-level Review Meeting on EFA’ held in Cairo in December 2003 (Rashtriya Sahara, 21st December 2003). The Government of India seems to have got an assurance of additional external aid of Rs. 15,000 crores for the Tenth Plan. However, as per press reports, the Ministry of Finance has ‘asked the HRD Ministry to adjust Rs. 15,000 crores in the original allocation of Rs. 17,000 crores’ (Hindustan Times, 17th December 2003)!

¹⁹In this context, it may be noted that UPA Government’s Common Minimum Programme (CMP) “pledges to raise public spending in education to *at least* 6% of GDP with *at least half this amount* being spent on *primary and secondary sectors*.” This pledge calls for *four* comments. *First*, this level of 6% of GDP was to be initially achieved by 1986 but the modified 1986 policy stated that the outlay will “*uniformly exceed* 6 % of the national income” during “the Eighth Five Year Plan and onwards.” Since then, practically every major political party has promised to do this in its election manifestos in each General Election. The UPA is, therefore, obliged to produce a clear roadmap for *re-prioritisation of national economy* in order to make its pledge credible. *Two*, the UPA needs to be lauded for *at least not diluting* this commitment as the BJP cleverly attempted to do this in its recent manifesto by promising to raise “the *total spending* on education to 6% of GDP by 2010, with *enlarged public-private partnership*.” This substitution of policy-level commitment to public spending by private resources was also a part of the NDA manifesto, clearly in deference to the neo-liberal agenda. *Three*, the CMP has not acknowledged the urgent need to fulfill the *cumulative gap* that has been building up for the past three decades due to *under-investment* in education. For elementary education, this was estimated by the Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999) as being equal to Rs. 13,700 crores per year for the next ten years which amounts to about 0.6% of

the current level of GDP (i.e. merely 60 paise out of every Rs. 100 of GDP). The UPA is expected to provide for this additionality, apart from reaching the level of 6% of GDP. A similar estimate of the cumulative gap in secondary and higher education sectors is yet to be made. *Four*, India is already spending almost half of its total educational outlay on elementary education. The UPA's pledge to spend at least half the total expenditure "on primary and secondary sectors" has *negative implications*. This is because, in 1998-99, 78.7% of the total expenditure was on elementary and secondary sectors taken together. The UPA formulation implies that the priority to be given to both of these sectors will be *reduced to merely 50%* of the total expenditure! Hopefully, this is a result of the usual, but still alarming, *misconception about the category of "primary" education* as referred to in the CMP.

²⁰A note may be taken here of the recent order of the High Court of Delhi to the private unaided schools to provide free education to poor children to the extent of 20-25% of their strength as per the terms and conditions of the agreement they signed while receiving free or low cost land. However, the order has only revealed the long-standing collusion between the state authorities (including the political leadership of various parties ruling the state at different times) and the private school lobby which ensured that the said agreement will be flouted unashamedly for years, if not decades. The High Court order is a tribute neither to the Government nor to the school managements but to Social Jurist, a voluntary body, which filed the petition and pursued the matter against all odds.

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