

Quality and Inequality in Indian Education: Some Critical Policy Concerns¹

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Abstract: *The paper locates educational policy in a wider socio-historical and political perspective and aims at an ideological deconstruction of policy change with a specific focus on the equality-quality conundrum in elementary education in India. It attempts to critically decode changes in notions and practices of equality and quality in national and international policy prescription, highlighting aspects of ideological contexts, power asymmetries and state dynamics and examines basic shifts in policy discourse and intent. The paper is organised in four parts. The first two parts take a broad historical overview to examine notions of equality and quality, articulated in texts and discussions pertaining to the two national educational policies and in policy initiatives introduced by the Indian state under neoliberal, global hegemonic influence. The interactive impact of educational restructuring and structures of stratification as reflected in the aggravation of key caste, class, gender and ethnic inequalities is captured in the third part of the paper. The final part of the paper draws attention to dilutions and contradictions inherent in recent policy shifts to argue that any meaningful notion of quality education for the poor is impossible to attain in the present context. It unravels the politics of quality.*

An alarming state of affairs currently grips the Indian education system. It affects the present and future of millions of Indian children. The continuing failure to enrol and ensure the basic learning of, leave alone meaningfully educate, vast multitudes of children especially those belonging to subordinated groups and to linguistic and cultural minorities bespeaks the failure to breach the link between

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social underprivilege and educational underprivilege. Even as material prosperity and technological achievements reach dizzy heights under the global capitalist politico-economic order, gender and caste-class inequalities have grown more polarised and patterns of dominance and subjugation more entrenched. For a significant proportion of the country's population, restructuring economies and cultural upheavals have spelt dispossession and displacement, alienation and poverty, indignity and insecurity in an overall context of social conflict and political and ethnic violence. We do live amidst conditions which led the anthropologist Arturo Escobar to declare that violence is not endemic to but constitutive of development (Escobar, 2004). Schools and children are not spared this fate. The violence that pervades society seeps into schools and assaults children's lives. Competition in schools has grown more aggressive and school managements have become more authoritarian. Teachers both inflict and suffer abuse. Children may be physically assaulted, driven to suicide or commit violent acts. In a reflection of horrific forms of gender, caste, and communal violence that plague society, girls are traumatised by sexual harassment, dalit children by caste atrocity and minorities by pedagogies of hate. Far from being safe havens, schools are sites of real, brutal physical, mental and emotional violence that compounds serious problems of teaching and learning.

As has been widely recognised, education world over is being relentlessly shaped by neoliberal ideologies and economic agendas of global capitalism. India is also part of the conglomeration of developing nations who are rallied together under a powerful global educational initiative, "Education for All". Major policy shifts owing their origin to the growing global hegemony of neoliberal theories of educational change, dislocate national visions and goals. Against the historical backdrop of education's traditional role in the reproduction of social inequalities, the situation of persistent inequality and growing violence makes it imperative to make sense of the multiple ways in which changing policies and contexts impact Indian education. Conventionally, policy research as a field has critically examined policy implementation and measured effects in terms of goals and targets that are set. Despite the

state's pivotal role as the main policy maker, financier, provider and controller of the national education system, policy analysis has scarcely engaged with theory and debates on the Indian state or brought them to bear on education policy formation and process. Policy discourse, and process are inherently political phenomena and hence the production of policy must be located within the dynamics of social structural power relations in specific historical contexts (Olssen et al., 2004).

Attempting to locate educational policy in the wider socio-historical and political context, this paper aims at an ideological deconstruction of educational policy with a specific focus on the equality-quality conundrum in elementary education. Equality and access have been longstanding policy issues at global and national levels. For India, the problem of educational inequality is one of central historical, sociological and political significance. On the pursuance of equality policy in education hang the life chances of children belonging to segments who are structurally subordinated by the intersecting forces of gender, caste, class, tribe, religion etc. Along with access, the issue of the quality of education receives unprecedented international and national attention and it is now a dominant theme in contemporary educational discourse. Quality is attributed a central place in securing the global goal of "Education for All". The issue is not new to Indian educational debate and concern with 'declining' levels of quality has generated much debate and discussion at various points in our educational history (Naik, 1975). The present discourse however marks a decisive shift. Increasingly the quality of educational systems is being compared internationally (Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002). A global discourse on quality shapes national policy change². India has jumped on the new quality bandwagon and has raised quality as a prime agenda of intervention. 'Poor quality' education is put forth as the main obstacle in achieving the basic constitutional goal of universalisation of elementary education. Globally derived notions of quality are promoted through externally funded quality improvement programmes. Meanwhile however, local problems of quantitative and qualitative inequality in education seem to have intensified. Their roots lie deep in history but they are now being decisively shaped by contemporary trajectories of (distorted) policy

choices and practices. The impact is widely apparent but its systemic nature is not grasped.

The paper is an effort at clarifying the ideological underpinnings of policy changes and examining implications for the national commitment to equality and quality from the vantage point of structurally subordinated groups. They include the poorest of the poor, especially (ethnic) minorities, dalits, adivasis, denotified or nomadic tribal groups, OBCs, Muslims and girls, all adversely affected by ongoing processes of gender and caste oppression, cultural subordination, class exploitation and developmental displacement. The issue of quality serves as a useful case to examine the social import of policy change and illustrates the anti-egalitarian hegemony being constructed by neoliberal discourse. The paper attempts to critically decode changes in notions and practice of equality and quality in national and international policy texts/prescriptions, highlighting ideological contexts, power asymmetries and state dynamics with a view to unravelling the fundamental shifts in egalitarian discourse and intent. It explores the role of the state and the nature of state-societal complicity in policy making and process to argue that neither the concern for equality of educational opportunity nor for social justice found expression in educational terms. Expansionism, not equality, was the main plank of state policy, and inequality in education is more deep seated than we care to acknowledge. Today, neoliberalism has spawned a new expansionism wherein state provision is undercut by new globally inspired strategies of equity and quality which masquerade as measures of equality and social justice. Next, the paper moves to place the new quality concerns and quality enhancement policy in the context of an analysis of sociological patterns of educational inequality, which provide the ideological and empirical ground to argue that any meaningful and sustainable notion of quality education for the poor and subordinated is impossible to attain in the present context. Quality thus is part of the global and national politics of discourse that uses education as a tool of ideological hegemony and social control.

The discussion is organised in four parts. The first two parts locate educational policy in the larger ideological state discourse and take a broad historical overview to examine how

changing notions of equality and quality were articulated in policy documents. Based on texts and discussion surrounding two national educational policies the first part analyses the policy of 1968 and its aftermath. Second part examines policy changes in the context of globalisation starting with the New Education Policy of 1986. It draws upon some key documents related to policy changes under structural adjustment programme (hitherto SAP)³. The third part of the paper lays out in broad strokes the contemporary situation of educational inequality highlighting some glaring inequalitarian consequences of the interactive impact of social stratification and educational restructuring. The final section critically reflects on the ideology and practice of educational quality in the context of changing discourse, emergent patterns of inequality and the politics of quality.

The paper must not be misread as taking an anti-quality position. Quality is crucial to almost anything worthwhile that we do and especially so in matters of public significance. However, a limited, contextualised and specifically defined use of the term is implicitly advocated.

I. Equality and Quality in The First National Education Policy (1968)

Context and Value Framework

The legal structure of the Indian constitution was rooted in liberal ideology. In a segmented, unequal society that had predominantly lived by principles of hierarchy, division and mutual repulsion, it was the task of the democratic, post colonial Indian state to translate the values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity into legislation, policy and action. State commitment to the principle of equality was unequivocal and evident in the enshrinement of "equality of status and opportunity" in the preamble to the Constitution. Equality as a value affirms that all are born equal and the idea is encapsulated in the notion of citizenship. The constitution specifically abolished untouchability — the most perverse traditional form of social inequality that not only condemned people to permanent inferiority but also to polluted and polluting status.

The pursuit of equality was a complex affair. The Indian effort necessitated first of all the synthesis of two divergent principles of equality described as the meritarian and the compensatory (Beteille, 1983). The first is expressed in legal equality which guarantees non discrimination and equal treatment irrespective of ascriptive status based on caste, gender, sex, religion etc. It is also present in the closely linked principle of equality of opportunity which privileges individual freedom, action and mobility, emphasises equal opportunities for all, and opposes the achievement of social position by any other criteria save individual effort and talent. In apparent contradiction the second — the compensatory principle — upholds the granting of special treatment on the very same ascriptive criteria. Grounded in an awareness of deep rooted inequalities and injustices, it recognises as basis for state action, groups/collectivities whose social 'backwardness' stems from a history of oppression and from the cumulative impact of indignities and disabilities imposed upon them. The compensatory principle is underscored by notions of justice, fairness, restitution and reparation that would offset systematic and cumulative deprivation (Galanter, 1984). Both Nehru and Ambedkar, the main architects of India's democratic-egalitarian project recognised it as a violation of the first principle of equal treatment, but saw in the compensatory principle an essential temporary measure to overcome this impact and participate on more equal terms with the rest of society. This broader vision dissolves the perceived contradiction between individual rights and group rights that is inherent in the synthesis.

The Nehruvian vision of "growth with equity and social justice", designed a development model of capital accumulation, economic growth, modernisation and dirigiste socialist transformation to fulfil economic, social and political aspirations of the new nation. The liberal philosophy of equality and social justice was articulated in the Five year plans (Kaviraj, 2000). However, elementary education remained a neglected aspect of planned development. The Constitution of India was the source of some significant educational directives to the state, most importantly, those of educating all children up to 14 years and the obligation to promote with "special care"

the educational interests of the weaker sections. For as many as twenty years after independence, the contested nationalist visions of educational reconstruction that flowered in the course of freedom struggles did not find resolution or expression in the form of a state educational policy. The first state response to education was to locate it as a 'sector' in its model of development planning. The plans made rhetorical references to education as a fount of equal opportunity and social justice. There was no perspective plan prepared to guide the development of education in terms of constitutional philosophy (Naik, 1965). In terms of investment, elementary education received a substantial share of the educational budget in the first plan but much less than was necessary to fulfil the constitutional promise in subsequent plans. The politically dominant logic of capitalist industrialisation and technological modernisation explicitly controlled economic and educational development as evident in the prioritisation of higher and technical education from the second plan till the sixth. Apparently perceived as peripheral to the dream of an industrial economy, elementary education remained a neglected subject and plodded along more or less according to policy perspectives laid down in regional versions of the Post War Plan of Educational Development, 1944 (Kamat, 1985).

Education, including elementary education, finally received much needed comprehensive attention with the constitution of an Education Commission (henceforth EC) in the mid sixties. The EC was charged with articulating the Indian state's vision for education's role in national development, and for providing the perspective and blueprint for a national system of education. Located within an ideological discourse that privileged modernisation and social transformation, the EC's formal articulations on issues of equality and quality were couched in terms of the liberal meritarian principle of equality of educational opportunity (henceforth EEO), with the aim of fostering a 'just meritocracy'. Education was assigned the responsibility *"to cultivate all available talent, and... ensure progressive equality of opportunity to all sections of the population"* (Government of India [GoI], 1966). Expansion of mass primary schooling was seen essential to the enhancement of egalitarian and democratic access to education. A two

pronged strategy was devised to fulfil the vision of EEO: firstly a massive expansion of free lower and upper primary schools and secondly the establishment of a common school system. The latter constituted a radical policy initiative that sought to bring within the ambit of a common system, all existing schools including those receiving government aid and private schools. The aim was to evolve a public education system of uniform quality that would fully tap the "national pool of ability" which hitherto lay undiscovered in an unequal system that delivered substandard education to the majority. Additionally the EC emphasised the need for attending to the educational needs of constitutionally designated groups in need of special attention.

Quality as a key policy concern was embedded within the concern for equality, and social justice in the context of aspired societal values. The common school system embodied an explicit *equality of quality* approach. Comparable quality was to be ensured among schools in terms of basic infrastructure (not necessarily the same kind but suited to varying environments), teachers, curriculum, content and pedagogy. The concern with 'quality and excellence' is also evident in the strong emphasis on special nurture of talent and creation of opportunities for the meritorious. The EC further engaged with the issue under the rubric of "standards" in education which were to be judged in terms of adaptability, dynamism and international comparability (Gol, 1966, p. 38)¹.

Inegalitarian Orientation, Inegalitarian Impact

The translation of vision into policy was a fraught process. Official deliberations on the report were deeply conflictual and also reflected the political dynamics of a turbulent socio-political environment (Naik, 1982). The post Nehruvian period witnessed a serious setback to egalitarian ideology and socialist politics and was marked by rapid retreat from socialist goals. The reciprocally determining relation between the structure of state apparatus and nature of policies, turned redistributive ideas into rhetoric (Frankel, 2005; Kaviraj, 1997). An essentially capitalist state adopted partial dualist stances and made welfare policies favouring the disadvantaged. In the hands of upper caste-class political, bureaucratic and intellectual elites, including rightwing elements in the ruling

Congress, emerged an educational policy which was actually ranged against equality. The first national educational policy was finally formulated in 1968. It laid down equality of opportunity as a central policy goal. However the policy statement was an incredibly weak reflection of the EC's egalitarian perspective. It was criticised by none other than the Member-Secretary of the EC as "innocuous, non-specific and non committal" with no clear directions towards the attainment of egalitarianism (Naik, 1982).

The idea of a common/neighbourhood school system, the main vehicle for operationalising EEO, was circumvented by ruling political elites in an eminently hostile environment. The common school evoked overt political endorsement but stiff covert resistance. It was both politically inexpedient and socially repugnant to a caste and status conscious society". There were no evident initiatives to establish the idea even in states with socialist/communist governments. The common school existed more by default than design in the form of solitary village schools which perforce catered to socially heterogeneous village populations. However it is common only in the superficial sense of physical integration and not according to philosophical, social and educational principles that are integral to the ideal (Gol, 1966).

The principle of compensation had minimal presence in elementary education. As a social policy, compensatory discrimination included an array of measures and schemes that would bring about economic betterment, social uplift and political empowerment (these included land and housing allotments, school provision, supplies and other services). Strong resistance to the implementation of all redistributive compensatory measures ensured that a fraction of the schemes' meagre budgets were actually spent and only a fraction of the designated disadvantaged groups actually benefited (Galanter, 1984). With respect to school education, compensation was primarily provided in the form of material support for post primary and post secondary education of dalit, adivasi, OBC and economically deprived children. Meanwhile the dream of common schools necessitated the closing down of special schools set up for depressed classes in colonial times. As regard education of girls, the patriarchal state gave short shrift to

gender-equality policy recommendations of two major women's education commissions which challenged culturally conservative assumptions regarding gendered spheres. Ambivalence on the issue of separate vs coeducational institutions resulted in some initial expansion of girls' schools within state schooling. Eventually however the cost factor seems to have exerted the pressure to frame organisational principles that neglected special problems of girls' access and led to under provision of girls schools. On the whole the education of dalits, tribals and girls was almost a non issue in the policy which made no special financial, curricular or pedagogic commitment to their education.

The only egalitarian notion that seemed acceptable to polity and elite society was the development of a free state system of elementary schooling and its expansion. Thus for the longest stretch of the post independence period the great constitutional commitment to EEO amounted to not much more than *gradual expansionism* that would cover vast tracts of unserved rural and urban areas and populations. However as is well known, the State's distribution of resources was grossly inequalitarian and unfair. Limited and declining budgetary allocations by the central government to elementary education, the unequal federal relations of finance that resulted in the inadequate transfer of resources to states, have all seriously affected basic provision and expansion. Most significantly inequalities in educational funding failed to make primary education truly free (Tilak, 1990, 1996). The pursuit of even limited educational goals faltered badly in several states and regions. The social structuring of policy was further reflected in the state's pro elite and pro middle class policy that subsidised their secondary schooling and robbed the rural poor of resources that were rightfully theirs. The widely prevalent hierarchical ideology ensured a caste and class differentiated schooling. Urban conglomerations in particular witnessed the development and institutionalisation of horizontally and vertically stratified schooling systems that mirrored local systems of class, status and caste/ethnic privilege and hereditary social honour (Velaskar, 1992). Additionally, both single sex and coeducational schools were gender differentiated in terms of structures, norms and practices that reflected gendered local milieus.

As prime providers of education, State governments were charged with the primary responsibility of marshalling adequate finances for expanding mass elementary schooling. Capacities for this mammoth task were determined by social structural changes, developmental levels, political dynamics and levels of political commitment to mass schooling. Shaped by electoral politics and the quest for political and economic power, the education system was subject to systematic political manipulation and caste-class appropriation of scarce educational resources. The political class which held the power to shape policy implementation was also strategically placed to distribute patronage and exploit the system for personal gain (Kaviraj, 1997). School expansion shaped and controlled by vested interests including orthodox belief systems of the bureaucracy resulted in distorted growth, skewed availability and unequal access (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1972; Kamat, 1985; Acharya, 1985; Weiner, 1991; Velaskar, 2006). Especially in caste-feudal strongholds which saw little impact of economic development, land reform or social movements, state policy was geared to restricted, controlled expansion. The Indian capitalist state, oriented to demands of a rural and urban elite, fell far short of even a truncated EEO. Its political obligations to liberal expansion produced sharp imbalances in diffusion of basic educational provision as also great absolute and relative deprivations. As in other developing nations which saw the convergence of spatial and social disadvantage, geographical inequities were linked to patterns of caste and ethnic differentiation (Foster, 1977). Dalit and adivasi dominated areas suffered gross discrimination and that permitted their sustained exclusion or piecemeal inclusion (Velaskar, 2006). Overall school expansion patterns took widely divergent paths resulting in inequality, imbalance and unevenness⁶. Inadequate expansion, however did not stop the disadvantaged from waging local struggles in specific socio-historical circumstances to forge entry in education⁷.

Quality policy and practice reflected the lines of inequality and stratification in provision and access. The notion of quality was predominantly conceptualised and used in relation to standards of academic excellence which in turn were measured

in terms of scholastic attainment of students, namely marks/scores attained at examinations. The prevalence of parallel public and private systems and wide variety of ideologies, cultures and educational philosophies that characterised the field of education fostered multiple notions and renderings of standards, excellence and quality that reflected class and gender inequality and ethnic diversity. Children learnt widely variant things and attained different learning levels. Fundamentally however, and underlying the diversity, the school system organised for unequal and differential educational quality with an unswerving focus on examination results and scores. Conflicting with notions of equality of quality articulated in the EC's proposals and with homogenised conceptions of "child and children" that abound in educational theory, the stratified system structured differential treatment and differential education for children of different social strata, based on intersections of caste, class, gender and ethnicity. It thus reinforced problematic assumptions regarding 'natural' differences between them in intelligence, talent, and capacity. Consistent with *inegalitarian* philosophy, was the general neglect of standards of government schooling and scholastic attainment of disadvantaged children. The issue was rarely voiced, and never high on the political agenda. Not surprisingly the only assurance regarding it in national policy was the glib assertion that "strenuous efforts" would be made towards improving the standard of education in general schools (GoI, 1968).

Since the quality issue is closely tied to the ideal of meritocracy, it is important to underscore that the organising principles of hierarchy and division that underlie our school system deeply violate the basic premise and condition of meritocracy: equal opportunity. The system is brazenly committed to privilege and nurture the merit of middle and upper caste/class children and actively denies same standards and development of merit, in the case of poor and historically excluded and subordinated groups. The outcomes are predetermined in that the disadvantaged have lower chances of completing basic levels, attaining equal levels of academic success, and of passage to further stages of education.

In conclusion to this section it may be observed that for most part of the Seventies and for the better half of the eighties, a policy of piecemeal and gradual expansionism governed the development of elementary education. Equality goals of education were blatantly short changed for elitist, modernisation goals. Widespread educational inequality and the failure to achieve universalisation of elementary education (henceforth UEE) became established truisms. The latter came to be defined as a chronic national 'crisis' that no one seemed in a hurry to end. UEE remained the focus of policy and public attention, along with underlying problems of enrolment, drop out and retention. State 'action' became conveniently limited to a mechanical fixation of targets towards attainment of universalisation.

II. Globalisation and Policy Shifts: 1986 and After

In the context of an advancing global capitalism since the mid eighties and the ensuing structural changes in national economies, political systems and ideologies, equality and quality policies in education have undergone further change. An ascendant neoliberalism and retreating egalitarianism in the context of the failure of state socialism, constituted the ideological terrain that legitimated anti-equality changes in economic and social policies across the globalising world (Callinicos, 2000). Education is inexorably geared to new knowledge and skill requirements of globalising economies (Brown et al., 1997; Carnoy and Rhoten, 2002; Burbules and Torres, 2000). An international discourse holds sway that articulates new philosophies of education and influences national frames of public discourse. The cultural ideology of globalisation is inscribed in these discourses (Olssen et al., 2004).

In India, we may distinguish two phases in ideological and policy changes in education. The first was inaugurated with the launch of a new national education policy (henceforth NEP) in 1986. The second, conditioned by economic liberalisation of the early nineties, is closely linked to systemic intervention and change in national education under the impact of global intervention and funding⁸.

The Ideological Orientation of NEP, 1986

Anticipating a major role for India in the emerging global economy, political leadership and educational policy makers visualised the need for educational change that would be capable of "dynamically handling the imperatives emerging out of a rapid technological revolution" (GoI, 1986). In the race for a share of global economic power especially of the knowledge economy, there was national embarrassment about the rise in number of illiterates and the failure to attain UEE. Caught between economic imperatives of responding to an expanding high tech market and political implications of the unfinished task of UEE, the new state policy walked this tight rope and attempted to resolve competing claims in its policy frame. In the process it reneged on and also redefined national egalitarian goals. While noble educational aims that emphasised knowledge with a sense of purpose, equity, social values, and social cohesion were overtly expressed, the policy marked a significant but undebated and relatively unnoticed shift in the *formal* commitment to equality: from the universalist principle of EEO to what are referred to as the 'second' principles of equality namely equity and compensation. Equity as an ideological construct / ideal rests on notions of needs and justice and makes value judgements about fair distributions/apportionment of resources and representation. In recasting the constitutional ideological synthesis, the NEP articulates a curious merger of EEO and equity: "[T]he new policy will lay special emphasis on the removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far" (GoI, 1986, p. 6). Compensatory discrimination earlier meant as a support to realise EEO is now emphasized as the main strategy that would lead to equitable representation (GoI, 1992a). Further, the policy recommended differential provisions for the three disadvantaged groups of dalits, tribals and girls. For the former two, the compensatory package is now expanded to rectify decades of neglect and infrastructural deficits especially in areas inhabited by them. A direct commitment is also made to material support, curricular and linguistic reform. Regional and area specific provision, school mapping, decentralised planning are some of the strategies

employed. Mid day meal schemes respond directly to poverty situations, under-nourishment and ill health of children belonging to the above groups. For girls however equity is primarily defined in terms of cultural change through curricular and textbook reform and training of teachers and educational bureaucrats etc. toward development of an egalitarian gender culture.

The NEP responded to the ecology of under provision by a substantive commitment to provisioning by prioritising general capital intensive provision and programmes for upgradation of existing schools (viz. Operation Blackboard). Financial allocation was augmented from the seventh to ninth plans. Simultaneously however, the NEP laid the ground for external dependence. Eventually, however allocations did not match the rhetoric and were inadequate for the huge backlog in provision. They continued to fall short of the First Plan and though central government outlays to states increased, the latter continued to meet the bulk of educational expenditure (Tilak, 2003). Inadequate funds had a direct effect on the nature of infrastructural provisioning for the dalits and adivasis. It took the form of a system of alternate schools. For displaced and working poor children the remedy lay in non-formal education. Significantly the latter was also recommended as a strategy for provision in dalit and adivasi hamlets (GoI, 1992a). Thus, the abandonment of EEO and adoption of equity and compensatory principles under liberalisation provided the space and official rationale for the institutionalisation of a parallel, second rate, discriminatory system of schools and the revival of the failed and discredited strategy of non-formal schools. Ironically, the historical state of neglect became the very grounds for sanctioning compromised principles and a compromised system of public education meant for those very subordinated people for whom opportunity was to be 'equalised'.

The NEP prefigured the overwhelming interest that was to internationally arise regarding educational quality. Finding no contradiction between its new diminishing model of public provisioning and the desire to enhance quality, it inscribed quality as an important goal: "all children must be given access to education of comparable standard" (GoI, 1986). Rhetorical advocacy of quality and the common school continued to be

contravened in practice. The establishment of model district schools with the purported aim of talent nurture of poor and disadvantaged rural children indicated that a concern for "quality for some" gained precedence over that of "quality access to all" in an educational action that seemed oriented yet again to elite demand (Kumar, 1985). More specifically the measure was aimed at appeasing aspirations of emergent rural elites. A new strategy for improvement of quality with equity in government schooling namely Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) was devised, the focus of which is the development of competency-based teaching and learning (GoI, 1992b)".

Structural Adjustment Programme and the Swing to Neoliberal Educational Reform

The second more drastic phase of educational restructuring occurred after the onset of the debt and fiscal crisis of the 90's. The crisis triggered economic policies of structural adjustment and liberalisation of the national economy in conformity with IMF and World Bank orthodoxy that was rooted in neoliberal ideology (Nayyar, 1998).

In an antithesis to notions of socialist collectivism of Nehruvian times and varied populisms of post Nehruvian era, neoliberalism spelt a celebration of self interested individualism and a conscious turn against the ideal of social justice. Private enterprise and the market now viewed as the key to prosperity and progress, were to be free from the clutches of the state. Thus despite the massive failure to fulfil hitherto its very modest welfare obligations, the Indian state was compelled to downsize itself and adopt a pragmatic, post welfare stance. Synchronising with the opening up of markets, the period saw a major redefinition of the relations between state, market and schools. The state in collaboration with global actors engineered a new political economy of education and gave shape to an educational reform package comprising ideas and strategies, arbitrarily borrowed from the Western neoliberal educational paradigm. The move served to effectively displace whatever egalitarian pretensions that existed in the NEP.

With its extensive network of schools and its central role as controller of internal and external educational funds, the state

retained its pre-eminent position as chief administrator and has considerable normative, allocative and regulatory powers. However it undermined its own role as main provider and sought to share its responsibility for the delivery of mass elementary education with a host of non-state educational actors: a commercial for profit private sector, a not-for-profit non governmental sector and the amorphous entity of 'community'. Despite the boom in national economy there is great reluctance on its part to step up investments in public education to required levels, a trend that evoked sharp indictment from economists who are clear that it is "unmitigated nonsense that the state cannot afford" (Sen, cited in Tilak, 2004; Sadgopal, 2001)¹⁰. Given that foreign funds did not make a notable addition to the national educational budget, the era of liberalisation saw sharp decline in real expenditure and unit costs of education and minimal spending on capital accounts (Tilak, 2003, 2004). The new assortment of cost effective strategies and institutional mechanisms included: decentralised governance, greater scope for private sector in educational (including public) provisioning, lay-off of regular teachers and their substitution with para teachers, enhancing professional management systems etc. The ideological and practical outcome has been to delegitimise the state system and discredit its functionaries especially the school teachers, its most powerless link.

A direct outcome of economic liberalisation was the influential entry of the World Bank in the education sector, rationalised on grounds of protecting key social sectors and in the wake of deregulation providing a social safety net (Robertson et al., 2007). Following a sprinkling of bilaterally funded projects, the District Primary Education Programme (henceforth DPEP) constituted the first national level manifestation of a primary education programme funded by a World Bank loan (Kumar et al., 2001). It was conceived as a time bound programme aimed at achieving equitable access and quality in educationally backward districts across the country. The DPEP adopted a multi pronged strategy of quantitative and qualitative provisioning (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 1998; Kumar et al., 2001). Equity was defined as reduction in gender and caste disparities in access

and achievement to tolerable limits of less than five per cent (Kumar et al., 2001, Ramachandran, 2004). However an insidious move to reduce the constitutional mandate from eight to five years of primary schooling (Sadgopal, 2001) quickly belied any egalitarian pretensions. Currently, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the state's new UEE campaign advocates similar strategies while setting new targets and deadlines. Both the DPEP and SSA emphasised special provision in favour of disadvantaged groups as a preferred equity strategy¹¹.

Public private partnership (PPP) is increasingly advocated as a mode of implementing government programmes/schemes in partnership with the private sector. The voucher scheme a known failure in societies with a longer and stronger history of egalitarian reform, is being tried out with a view to grant 'choice' to the poor. An enlarged educational space is made available for material exploitation by new business type of educational providers. Their private schools are now preferred vehicles for delivery of quality education to the poor. The deregulating state generally turns a blind eye to their unrecognised status and internal (mal) functioning. At the same time, the new sovereign principles of equity and compensation are sought to be given a new life through highest forms of state action. At the peak of neoliberal reform in 2002, the nation witnessed the passage of the 86th amendment to Constitution which made education a fundamental right. On the anvil today is a bill to provide the right to free and compulsory education that marks further deflection towards neoliberal reform¹². Whatever the equity rhetoric, the underlying unifying principle of reforms is the market. And underscored by human capital theory, a new philosophy of instrumentalist, skill based knowledge and market oriented values of efficiency, accountability and performavity, distort the educational process (Ball, 2006).

The new global emphasis on the quality of education and its emulation by developing nations must be located in this changed context. The World Bank focussed on specific notions and strategies of quality enhancement in its funded programmes. Global campaigns (for example Jomtien, Dakar) decried the singular focus on quantitative aspects of EFA and affirmed that quality was at the "heart of education". More recently, UNESCO attempting to concretise world

declarations, assumed the task of defining the term quality and suggesting policy changes for international application. The effort to define quality drew attention to two principles. The first identifies learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems and sees the success with which the latter achieve this as one indicator of their quality. The second emphasizes the role of education in promoting commonly shared values, and creative and emotional development — objectives whose achievement is declared as much more difficult to assess (UNESCO, 2005, p. 5)¹³.

In India, World Bank sponsored DPEP defined quality as its core and underscored the national concern with learner achievement of the poor. Its guidelines do not define quality as such but there is a whole discourse of quality improvement which is concerned with various dimensions of schools: classroom processes, teacher competencies, teaching-learning materials, learning competence, professional and managerial capacities of educational functionaries etc. It holds a pedagogic vision of an active child centred classroom, where experiential, activity based teaching learning would help achieve MLLs (MHRD, 1998). Capacity building workshops of education personnel have been a key strategy of quality enhancement and innumerable programmes and activities are conducted. The most recent national campaign, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) reiterates the resolve to bring about substantial quality improvement and like the DPEP, is committed to a holistic and comprehensive approach encompassing all educational aspects. On instructions from the MHRD, state governments have developed instruments to monitor quality¹⁴.

The actual practice of MLL however seems to be characterised by dilutions and dualisms. Contravening the formal ideational discourse which emphasises cognition and context, the entire thrust of the quality effort in state schooling seems to be on the traditional, narrow outlook of enhancing learner achievement scores (Kumar, 2004). Operational learner goals are not those rigorously spelt out on paper. There is a great diversity in the tests devised to assess MLLs that reflect the diverse views of monitoring and evaluating agencies (Yadav and Bharadwaj, 2002). Essentially however in keeping with

poor conditions of teaching and learning in vast numbers of schools (described in the next section) they are largely pitched at minimalist levels. Though touted as a quality enhancement measure, MLLs rather than upscaling standards of learning, have come to symbolise minimalist levels. MLL as a curriculum scheme has also been criticised as conceptually and epistemologically flawed (Dhankar, 2003).

To summarise, the ideology of educational equality and quality underwent fundamental shifts in the context of the new global and national political economies of growth. New educational strategies aimed at new equity goals dislodge earlier efforts of gradual state sponsored expansionism. Old liberal idealism that sought to infuse egalitarianism into quality seem utterly incongruent in times when instrumentalist notions are the key to private and public educational decision making. The impact is evident in contemporary educational reality.

III. The Current Problem of Educational Inequality

We now take a quick overview of the fate of the new equity goals under the present dispensation and decipher its policy links. Based on evidence from recent macro and micro studies we highlight reform outcomes in terms of five significant inequalities and injustices that have intensified under the impact of state withdrawal and new expansionism. Thus we see: 1) persistence of iniquitous access; 2) worsening levels of basic provision; 3) polarisation of systemic hierarchy under privatisation; 4) persistence of internal processes of domination and; 5) accentuation of inequalities in attainment. Sociological perspectives provide the insight that the roots of educational inequality lie complexly located in the interaction between historical processes of caste, class, ethnicity and gender stratification and state policies that institutionalises particular forms of education systems (Velaskar, forthcoming). Structural constraints are still formidable to overcome for significant proportions of the population. The research studies cited here provide ample corroboratory evidence on the continued salience of social class, patriarchy and ethnic origin. The focus in this section however on pinpointing how the restructured elementary school system shapes and cements processes of inequality and domination.

Persistent Inequalities in Access and Participation

The combined effect of multiple programmes, strategies and interventions by state, private and NGO sectors described above and the pumping of huge resources, personnel and activities have had a visible quantitative impact. Enrolments have escalated in the context of better availability of schooling and greater participation of underprivileged groups. Enhanced access, a growing and unprecedented demand for education and an enhanced awareness of the value of education are reported in study after study across the country¹⁶. All this has led to claims of near full enrolment at primary level in many states, including those considered educationally 'backward'. The reality however is that some quantitative enhancement notwithstanding, regular attendance, retention and satisfactory completion of primary schooling are still major problems even in some advanced states. Careful analysis of data by region, caste, economic background, religion and gender reveal that disparities have not reduced to acceptable levels. The most subordinated and poorest ethnic groups still experience gross forms of educational deprivation. Gender and class differentiations among them are sharp. Thus, the problems of access is mitigated only partially and in a restricted sense by the new policy interventions and increase in the size of the educational system.

The Poverty of Public Provision

Despite the expansion and extension of the state system aided by NGO outreach, non provision and inappropriate attention to special needs still afflict dalit, adivasi, especially the denotified and nomadic tribal groups and girls, not to speak of the even more alienated groups such as the disabled. What is worse is that the tens of thousands of new learning centres opened up in the areas inhabited by the subordinated are in the form of cheap alternatives, both under resourced and under equipped. An expanded but diminished state system of primary schooling is typically characterised by a dysfunctional school, which is based on *officially sanctioned*, diminished norms of teacher provision and qualification, teaching-learning conditions and learning achievements that do not meet basic requirements of

an institution called a school. This is the crux of the problem created by the new expansionism. A number of studies have testified to such conditions prevailing in this expanded, alternate system (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2005)¹⁶.

Some sterling work by NGOs, especially those specialised in education, has served disadvantaged populations well in small enclaves (Nawani, 2002). However, experience suggests that it is difficult to structurally and politically expand or replicate such work. NGO effort moreover proves difficult to sustain for various reasons. Economic dependence makes it vulnerable to manipulation and control. The larger component of a rapidly multiplying and depoliticised NGO sector is simply ill-equipped for the task.

Privatisation and its (Un) Equalising Effects

As a result of opening up of the education sector, the past decade has seen a rapid though uneven growth of unaided primary schools in the service of poorer, rural populations (De et al., 2002; Kingdon, 1996). We shall refer to this as the new privatisation. Its scale of operation and patterns of geographic spread seem linked to enhanced demand and greater affordability among better off and mobility seeking sections of the poor. The growing demand for private schools is part of the penetration of capitalist logic in the countryside and a political awareness which rightly perceives education as vital tool of entering the non agricultural, urban job market and gaining some leverage. New privatisation responds to educational needs of beleaguered parents who can muster up the purchasing power to seek better occupational futures for their children. Private schools especially English medium schools are perceived as a viable and affordable solution to the current crisis of non-availability of state schools with comparable features. Going by utilisation rates and parent opinion elicited by research it appears that the new private schools do produce better results than at least the dysfunctional government schools¹⁷.

Meanwhile neoliberal capitalist logic relentlessly operates to intensify market forces and privatisation at all levels of the educational structure, accentuating both class divisions and

mobility struggles. The outcome is the consolidation, differentiation and polarisation of the systemic hierarchy. Schools in the uppermost ranges, the so called 'best' schools are the exclusive preserve of wealthy elites. They offer a choice of exclusive curricular packages, embellished with prestigious, international credentials, which are delivered amidst luxurious opulence. 'Higher standards' get continuously set and scaled here. At the bottom end are the two layers described above: the diminished system of state schooling and somewhere above this bottom is located the new privatisation. The former is now associated with the most poverty stricken core of rural and urban global economy. They are burdened, besides educational deprivation, by issues of livelihood, housing, hunger, ill health, social discrimination. They cannot afford to pay any more than they already do for the schooling of their children and their only real 'choice' is the closest free educational service available. They are the prime victims of state withdrawal.

Internal School and Classroom Processes of Dominance and Discrimination

Schools both state and private are not the democratic equal spaces that they were meant to be. If not openly exclusionary, several mechanisms of exclusion, discrimination and domination operate in social relations, classroom practice and curricular forms (NCERT, 2005). Caste, class, religion, language, gender powerfully shape everyday life of schools, through cultural values and common sense meanings. The processes have visceral emotional, cognitive and pedagogic effects on children. The assault launched by the forces of cultural majoritarianism on secular egalitarianism further contaminates the value framework of the education system. Unfettered privatisation facilitates greater entry of neo-right elements.

Inequality in Achievement

A direct outcome of the situation of structured inequality is the sharp difference in attainment levels between classes and types of schools and abysmally low attainment levels of children. Research evidence from a large number of micro studies has established the relationship between social origins and learning achievement.

For obvious reasons, successive governments have shied away from the systematic collection of achievement data. Early evaluations of learner achievement of DPEP initiatives show that the impact has been limited and gains marginal (Kumar et al., 2001). An effort to bring together findings of studies made across several states reveals improvement in some states but also that mean achievements are much below the level. Studies also misconstrue the concept of MLL, using restricted definitions and measures. The focus of attention is language and maths, and the value component of MLL is never studied (Yadav and Bharadwaj, 2002). On the whole it is observed that the big schemes floated by the state for achieving even minimal prescribed levels are having a minimal, scattered and in all probability a transitory positive impact. The magnitude of the effort has not fetched desired results (ibid., 2002)

IV. The Equality Quality Conundrum: Discussion

We now debate the issue of quality, in the contemporary context of persistent and aggravated educational inequality and diminished notions of equality in policy, principle and practice. The contemporary educational situation must serve to destroy any lingering hopes of moving towards greater educational equality or justice. On the contrary, there is a clear oppositional movement towards greater polarisation, greater relative inequality of quantity and quality in education and persistent deprivation. Consequently, the crucial locus of inequality still lies in the realm of access and completion of primary education.

Ideological and Material Shifts

Ideological formations working outside and above a weak welfare state ensured that the constitutional principle of equal opportunity was not implemented in what was to be its most crucial domain of application: education. Unlike countries which saw massive state effort towards comprehensivisation, we witnessed the failure to make liberal egalitarianism a part of the political culture of India. EEO was reduced to and replaced by UEE as almost an ultimate goal for the subordinated sections. As basic provisioning was influenced more by politics

of region, ethnicity, gender, class and caste hierarchy, than by egalitarian ideology the school system was oriented to inclusion, not equal opportunity or even equity. Even these limited notions were curtailed by practices of social discrimination and oppression within precincts of the educational system. The goal of 'equality' became increasingly blurred.

The dual character of the Indian state made it omnipresent both as a protector of dominant interests as well as chief arbiter of welfare policy. However state education policy predominantly embedded in elitist and hegemonic interest violated all notions of justice and fairness in terms of representation and resource distribution. The deeply hierarchical system guaranteed inequality, and made the notion of an Indian meritocracy little more than a contradiction in terms. Ascription not merit is its foundational principle which segregates, tracks, channels and selects. This fact cannot be overemphasised in the context of the great Indian debate on meritocracy vs reservation.

Today the hierarchical value system that governs people's lives lends itself effortlessly to superficial and selective adoption of the tenets of neoliberalism. The consequence is the intensification of the unjust pattern of greater enrichment at the top and greater impoverishment at the bottom. The state's educational innovations enables the economically and socially subordinated to get a toe-hold in the system but continues to exclude them from attaining educational levels that count. Favourable trends of expanding coverage are undermined by diminishing notions of school, diminishing notions of quality and diminishing expectations of learning. Thus while the probability of entering substandard 'schools' has gone up for the subordinated classes, that of a meaningful learning experience has undoubtedly gone down. Strangely the compensatory principle is being overstretched to fulfil basic undone tasks. Most notably, compensatory provision while reflecting a positive change in the sense of special attention for the disadvantaged, also marks a negative change in thinking on the source, type and amount of schooling that is appropriate for them. Evidently prevalent conditions are incongruent with even minimal notions of quality. The assumption that quality enhancing measures can be implemented despite structurally

deficient conditions is deeply flawed. There is not merely a logical contradiction but more importantly a moral contradiction between constructing finer notions of quality in educational discourse and providing substandard schools. Quality is compromised by the nature of the existing system and is fundamentally a class issue in an unequal society.

A response to reducing class inequality is beyond the mandate of the neoliberal State. Having failed to restructure the system fifty years ago in the direction of equality the Indian state is now all out for a radical restructuring of the education system in favour of maintaining and strengthening class structures. Always neglectful of public schooling, it is now under no compulsion to improve it at all under the current dispensation. At the same time, EFA ideology and its nationalist incorporation through high visibility state led campaigns, and legislations allows the state to maintain a tenuous, populist relationship with old values and keep afloat the mythology of the 'concerned state'. The political agenda is clear: to demonstrate concern for legitimate demands, rights and entitlements of the poor and oppressed while continuing to steer the system based on market principles in which provision of any free service is anathema.

Privatisation, Choice and Quality

Thus, the state promotes the construction of new educational markets and orchestrates innovative packages of 'choice'. The poor are extended the 'choice' of private education via a voucher scheme or quotas in elite/middle class schools. How do we assess the viability of these measures? Private, cost effective education is apparently focused on surpassing performance levels of government schools with the motive of attracting a larger clientele. The educational practices adopted by such schools may not compare perhaps with principles of a sound education. However whatever little they offer is good enough from the point of view of parents whose aspirations are frustrated by the state. The fact of the matter is that the poor tend to pay for substandard education whether state or private. Neither state nor society seem to really care about the quality of their education. In the face of an acute shortage of good schools

for the poor and the palpable hostility of privileged schools to their inclusion, the notion of choice underlying new policies is not only absurd but also makes a mockery of their education.

As for the debate over the policy of new privatisation, it does appear that if accepted as a general principle across classes there is little ground to reject it at least for those at the bottom. Contrary to perception new privatisation has not created the problem of poor provision or educational inequality. It merely adds another layer to an already existing hierarchy. Given the reality of sharp inequalities of quantity and quality that exist both within and between the private and public schooling systems, it seems rather pointless to debate whether quality of private schools is better than that of state schools. It is more important to debate the logic of global capitalism and its economic and social policies. And pay heed to their social consequences. Despite the great debacles in education, developmentalists, economists and even educationists unfailingly prescribe education as a the key to address a range of economic, social, and political problems. They ignore the fact that both education and economic policy is determined and implemented by the same politico-economic forces. The concern for the education of the subordinated and for saving the public schooling system cannot be divorced from a commitment to strike at those structures that breed exploitative and oppressive conditions.

It is true as the case is often made that only the state is capable of the massive effort required to attain UEE and equality goals. However it would be extremely naïve to expect the Indian state in its present neoliberal avatar to make this commitment. We are all witness to its increasingly anti people, violent and repressive actions that have not fought shy of crushing people's struggles with a heavy hand. Only a recovery of welfare state and society committed to democratic egalitarianism would be able to transform structures towards attaining higher levels of justice and equality in education and society.

Politics of Quality

The present educational discourse is but a part of the larger one that is employed to engrave the shift in official state ideology from liberalism to neoliberalism. The emphasis on educational quality serves some crucial political purposes. First, the way it is posed in global discourse, the quality issue attempts to subsume equality under quality and divert attention from the central issue of equivalence in quantitative provision and from the deeply inequalitarian effects of educational restructuring that we have outlined above. Token efforts at quality improvement such as those that have largely occurred in India, legitimise both elitism and minimalism. Hiding behind powerful international organisations, the Indian state joins the international discourse to make a fetish of quality even as basic provision sinks into a deeper abyss. Second, quality enhancement programmes of national campaigns seem directed at mollifying those hurt by ill effects of economic and educational reform. The slogan 'quality education for all' has an intrinsic cross class appeal and is used to demonstrate that something crucial is being done for those who happen to be on the wrong side of development. Third, quality as merely a euphemism for testing achievement levels serves the objective of legitimising labour allocation patterns in which subordinated groups may be assigned their 'rightful' place in poorly paid, 'low status', exploitative sectors of the economy. Educational policy plays a role in the perpetuation of unequal labour markets and in the legitimisation of widening economic inequality. Finally, homogenised, pragmatic conceptions of quality which are narrowly focussed around instrumentalist learning goals may well serve to forge global ideological consensus on the nature of education and society, while containing broader egalitarian and social transformatory political philosophies. The new instrumentalism needs the exercise of tight curricular control, so that it may come to be globally and hegemonically 'shared'.

In conclusion, it may be emphasised that we must critically engage with global discourses but not allow them to dislodge autonomous academic and political agendas. The dangers are potent especially with big funded research which pre-define and prioritise research themes and policy issues. It is important

for academics and all those seriously engaged with deeper analysis and engaged practice to autonomously define epistemological, theoretical and value frameworks of educational research that are relevant to our educational realities and practices. We can ill afford to lose sight of the real issues and problems confronting Indian education today.

Notes

¹I thank Ramila Bisht for many discussions on the theme of this paper. I am grateful to the late V. N. Shenoy and Shweta Shetty for help with the bibliography and to Susheela Ashok for typing assistance. I thank two reviewers of the paper for their valuable comments.

²Two landmark world conferences were convened at the initiative of UNESCO and World Bank. The first held at Jomtien in 1990, led to a World Declaration of Education for All and the second at Dakar in 2000 resulted in the Dakar Framework for Action. The resolutions made at these conferences were endorsed by several nation states of the South. India has also been a signatory to these international pledges and declarations.

³The analysis is based on policy documents and select secondary sources. The main documents consulted are the following publications of Ministry of Education/MHRD, Government of India: 1. Report of the Education Commission 1964–66, Education and National Development (GoI, 1966), 2. National Policy on Education, 1968 (GoI, 1968), 3. Challenge of Education — A Policy Perspective (GoI, 1985); 4. National Policy on Education 1986 (GoI, 1986), 5. National Policy on Education—1986 (With Modifications undertaken in 1992) (GoI, 1992a), 6. Programme of Action 1992 (GoI, 1992b); 7. MHRD, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan — A programme for Universal Elementary Education, (MHRD, 2000); 8. DPEP Guidelines (GoI, 1995); 9. DPEP Moves On (MHRD, 1998); 10. Approach to the Eleventh Five Year Plan, 2007–2011 (Planning Commission, 2006); 11. Report of the PPP Subgroup on Social Sector: Public Private Partnerships in the Social Sector (Planning Commission, 2004).

⁴The improvement in quality was sought in several institutional curricular, and pedagogic aspects: physical inputs, teachers, teacher education, curriculum renewal, teaching learning transaction, cognitive development, curricular materials etc. Standards were to be judged in terms of adaptability, dynamism and international comparability. Based on these criteria, it was felt that standards in Indian education were unsatisfactory, and higher levels need to be set and achieved both in terms of higher quantum and greater mastery of knowledge.

⁵Naik (1982) provides a detailed insider's account of the deliberations. Also see Velaskar (2008).

⁶For some regional accounts of post independence educational expansion see: Tharakan (1984); Nagaraju (1998); Acharya (1985); Dreze and Harris (1997); Vaidyanathan and Gopinathan Nair (2001).

⁷Accounts of dalit struggles for education are available in Bhattacharya (2002), Velaskar (1998) and Geetha and Rajadurai (1998).

⁸See documents related to the New Education Policy, 1986 and DPEP and SSA related documents cited in endnote no.3.

⁹Minimum Levels of Learning specify recognised and measurable learning outcomes in the form of competencies or levels of learning in language, mathematics and environmental studies for each stage/grade of elementary education (GoI, 1992b). The strategy also prescribes the adoption of measures that will ensure achievement of these levels by children both in the formal schools as well as NFE centres. MLL supposedly arrives from/stems from concern to impart education of comparable standard MLL strategy for comb equity with quality.

¹⁰See Upendranadh (1996); Tilak (1997, 2003).

¹¹A number compensatory programmes and schemes have been designed to target SC, ST, girls and children in other difficult circumstances. For instance: National Programme of Education for Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL); Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, both focus around needs of girls from rural deprived backgrounds in educationally backward regions.

¹²See for example: Tilak (2004); Balagopalan (2004); Lalvani (2007); Sadgopal (2001); Athreya and Rao (2006); Tilak (2007); Das (2007); Sadgopal (2008a, 2008b).

¹³The Global Monitoring Report on Quality, 2005, focused exclusive attention on the issue of educational quality. It suggests a framework to map quality and makes policy recommendations to attain better quality.

¹⁴For the detailed framework of implementation under SSA, including of quality improvement, see MHRD, 2000 (cited in note 3 above). Along the lines suggested by the MHRD, the state of Maharashtra has developed an instrument to measure quality of primary education. At the district level quality enhancement programmes and workshops have also been conducted and bureaucratic machinery activated to deal with quality issues. The state has developed a comprehensive inventory for assessing quality across several areas: schools, children's overall development and teacher development which add up to a combined quality index of 100 points.

¹⁵Several recent studies, secondary analysis, surveys and field investigations have established sizeable differentials in educational

access and attainment terms of region, caste, class, religion, gender and tribe. See Govinda (2002); Mehrotra et al. (2005); Vaidyanathan and Gopinathan Nair (2001); Jha and Jhingran (2002); Velaskar (2005); For an overview of the DPEP impact see Ramachandran (2004); for SSA impact see Singh (2007); Das (2007).

¹⁶See for example NCERT (2005); Vaidyanathan and Gopinathan Nair (2001); Jha and Jhingran (2002); Velaskar (2006); PROBE (1999); Bhatti (1998); Leclercq (2003).

¹⁷James Tooley is the major proponent and ideologue of private schooling for the poor. See Tooley (2003).

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