

INDIA'S EDUCATION POLICY : A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW¹

Focusing on school education as a Fundamental Right

- Prof. Anil Sadgopal

Let us begin with a question. What is the historical juncture that locates the present discourse on India's education policy and its impact on the lives of her people?

Here is a snapshot emerging from the dominant reports in the Indian media:

BOX 1

Government Schools Under Sale!

•

Government Schools Being Outsourced!

•

Tenders Invited for Setting Up Schools!

•

Education Hubs Being Set Up!

•

**"ONE TEACHER, SEVERAL CLASSES"
(A Powerful Mobile Company's Advertisement.)**

•

Planning Commission consults corporate houses on education.

•

Parents given further tax exemptions for private school fees leading to major revenue losses to the government.

•

Sixth Pay Commission provides special bonus for sending children to private schools.

•

Anti-fee hike agitation but the government unable to regulate fees in private schools.

•

Public Funds & Resources Given to Companies, NGOs & Religious Bodies for Setting Up Schools Under Public-Private Partnership!

•

B.Ed. college in a garage with admission fee of Rs. 5 lacs/year.

¹Published in COMBAT LAW, Vol. 8, Issue 3 & 4, May-August 2009, pp. 14-31. This is an updated and enriched version of the author's paper presented at the Independent People's Tribunal (IPT) on World Bank Group, September 2007, New Delhi which is scheduled to appear in the forthcoming publication by the IPT on World Bank Group.

•
Computer Firms Making Curriculum for the government!

•
Policy Making Handed Over to Corporate Houses!

This essentially sums up the crisis in which the following historical overview is located.

The Constitutional Vision of Education and Its Violation

The Constitution of India directs the Indian State to “provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years” (the *original* Article 45², Part IV). In Article 46, the State is directed to “promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes” As per Article 39 (f) in Part IV of the Constitution, the State shall “direct its policy towards securing . . . that children are given opportunity and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.”

The Article 45 has been interpreted³ to include (a) early childhood care, nutrition, health and pre-primary education (kindergarten, nursery) for children below six years of age; and (b) *elementary* (not *primary*) education of eight years (Class I-VIII) for the 6-14 age group children. Although the Article 45 was placed in Part IV⁴ of the Constitution and, therefore, not enforceable as a Fundamental Right, the sense of urgency attached to its fulfillment “*within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution*” is remarkable. This is the only Constitutional provision with a time frame. *The time frame ended in 1960!* The post-independence history stands witness to the neglect and disdain with which this critical provision has been treated by the State.

At present, more than half of the 6-14 age group children are denied elementary education.⁵ It is noteworthy that, unable to face this harsh reality, the government falsely equates the category of “non-enrolled children” with the ambiguous category of “out-of-school children”. Both of these categories do not include the much larger category of

²Although amended through the 86th Constitutional Amendment (December 2002), the *original* Article 45 still holds since the aforesaid Amendment has not been notified as yet (i.e. as of February 2009).

³See Report of the Committee for Review of NPE-1986 (1990), Govt. of India, Sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.6 and 6.1.1 to 6.1.3 along with the related recommendations.

⁴The Part IV of the Constitution comprises the Directive Principles of State Policy that are not “enforceable by any court” but are “nevertheless fundamental in the governance of the country” and the State is duty bound to “apply these principles in making laws” (Article 37). In contrast, the Part III comprises Fundamental Rights that are enforceable in the courts. However, underlining the criticality of Part IV, the Supreme Court ruled in its Unnikrishnan Judgment (1993) that whereas **the Part IV provides the goals of the Constitution, the Part III provides the means to achieve these goals.**

⁵This estimate is arrived at by adding the government-reported number of children in the “non-enrolled” category to the number of the so-called ‘drop-outs’ by Class VIII (Selected Educational Statistics, MHRD, Govt. of India, 2004-05).

those children (the so-called ‘drop-outs’) whom the State failed to provide elementary education (i.e. up to Class VIII), as required by the *original* Article 45. The data on the provision of early childhood care, nutrition, health and pre-primary education for children below six years of age are too scanty to deserve reference. Here, too, the limited role of ICDS through *anganwadis* in providing some nutritional supplement is misperceived as being equivalent to the afore-mentioned holistic vision emerging out of Article 45 read along with Article 39 (f), as resolved in NPE-1986. The status of such provisions in the case of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and the Scheduled Tribes (STs), noted in Article 46 for ‘special care’, is much worse.

BOX 2

Persistent Violation of Article 45

The Shifting Goals of Elementary Education

1. Constitution of India	-	1960
2. National Policy on Education-1968	-	NONE
3. National Policy on Education-1986	-	1995
4. National Policy on Education-1986 (Modified in 1992)	-	2000
5. DPEP ⁺ * (18 States, 280 Districts)	-	2000/02
6. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000)	-	2010
7. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2007)	-	NONE
8. UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2002)*	-	Not even by 2015!

⁺World Bank-sponsored District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) of the 1990s.

*Limited to only Primary Education of four or five years (Class I-IV/V), as required under the World Bank-UN framework in the Jomtien Declaration (1990).

There are at least two significant dimensions flowing out of the Constitution that elaborate and enrich the vision of education. First, the Preamble to the Constitution provides the overall framework within which the Article 45 has to be envisaged. This means that education must be directed to build citizenship for a democratic, socialist, secular, egalitarian and just society. Second, education must be in consonance with Articles 14, 15(1) and 16 of Part III which respectively guarantee equality before law, prohibit the State from discriminating “against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them” and secure equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Both the Articles 14 and 15(1) have far-reaching implications for education. By reading Article 45 in conjunction with Articles 14 and 15(1), the Right to Education movement inferred more than ten years ago that the State is duty bound to build a system of education that provides **education of equitable quality** to all children without any discrimination whatsoever!

At the time of the commencement of the Constitution, there might have been some validity in the Article 45 being limited to “all children until they complete the age of *fourteen* years”. This limited its scope to education up to Class VIII, while also covering early childhood care, nutrition, health and pre-primary education for those below six years of age. However, the socio-economic conditions have undergone a radical change since then. Under the present conditions, education until only Class VIII leads a child

essentially nowhere since the doors to further education and employment open only after Class XII. This implies that the Article 45 should have been amended at least a quarter century ago to include “all children until they complete the age of *eighteen* years” so that the State is under obligation to provide equal opportunity to all children to study up to Class XII. Such an amendment had also become mandatory as per the international covenants like the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which India became a signatory in 1992 wherein “a child means every human being below the age of 18 years.” More importantly, the lack of this amendment makes a mockery of the Fundamental Right to social justice under Article 16 since essentially no public employment or appointment worth the name is available without a Class XII certificate – the minimum eligibility for pursuing all higher education courses. This means that the benefits of reservations have been limited since independence to a small section (not more than 10%) of SCs, STs and OBCs. The exclusion of the majority of poor Muslims from higher education and public employment also needs to be understood in this context as their social status is broadly equivalent to OBCs (Sachar Committee Report, 2007). The implications of Article 41 in this context will be discussed later.

The misconceived language education policy that we follow has a serious impact on the attainment of the Fundamental Right under Article 19 (a) i.e. the Fundamental Right to freedom of speech and expression. Since 1970s, the language education discourse has been both dominated and distorted by the increasing demand for “English Medium” schools or sections within a school. While the official policies and conditions that led to the demand may be debatable, it is reasonable today to grant that all children must have *equal opportunity* to acquire a reasonable proficiency in English, as part of their broader Right to learn other subjects as well. The question we need to address, however, is with regard to the policy framework that is required to achieve the objective. The knee-jerk policy response assumes that learning of ‘good’ English is best achieved through English medium schools, starting from nursery or kindergarten stage upwards to higher education. Apart from being an unscientific assumption, it fails to take into account the socio-cultural background of the child. This policy discourse also ignores the global research that reinforces the powerful pedagogic role played by the mother tongue as part of multi-linguality (this may include English too) of the majority of the children in plural societies like ours in acquiring subject knowledge as well as learning languages other than one’s mother tongue.⁶ Basically, the policy makers have failed to come to terms with the fact that the most effective way to learn any language (including English) is through the medium of child’s mother tongue as a component of her multi-lingual ambience. The consequence of this misconception and lack of a sound policy is the widespread phenomenon of a rapid attrition of the capacity to articulate one’s thoughts or ideas. The vast majority of the Indian children grow up in the prevailing multi-layered school system without acquiring the capacity to learn and articulate in either the state language or English and, in the process, losing the capacity to do so in one’s mother tongue as well. Apart from violation of Article 19(a), this policy failure has far reaching

⁶The global research on language education, including research in India, is documented in NCERT’s National Focus Group Position Paper on ‘Teaching of Indian Languages’ (NCERT, New Delhi, November 2006) which also makes profound recommendations on how to incorporate multi-linguality as a guiding principle for a coherent and pedagogically sound language education policy in India.

implications for the survival of India as a nation that creates, transacts and applies knowledge for human development.

BOX 3

ARTICLE 19(a) IN JEOPARDY

(Fundamental Right to freedom of speech and expression)



1. Undermining children's languages.
2. Ignoring multi-linguality as a foundation of learning.
3. Destroying mother tongue as a component of multi-linguality.
4. Equating mother tongue with state language.



Children without identity.



Children losing capacity to learn, think and create.



LOSS OF RIGHT TO EXPRESS & ARTICULATE

A historic judgment by the Supreme Court of India in 1993 radically transformed the status of Article 45. In its Unnikrishnan Judgment (1993), the Supreme Court ruled that Article 45 in Part IV has to be read in 'harmonious construction' with Article 21 (Right to Life) in Part III of the Constitution, as Right to Life loses its significance without education. Hence, the Supreme Court declared that **Article 45 has acquired the status of a Fundamental Right**. The years that followed have seen how the Indian State allowed the neo-liberal policies to dilute and distort the notion of Fundamental Right emerging from the Unnikrishnan Judgment. We shall shortly examine the deleterious impact of these neo-liberal policies on access to schools and the quality of school education provided therein. The process of dilution and distortion was also evident in the Ministry's Saikia Committee Report (1997) and the 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill tabled in the Rajya Sabha in July 1997.⁷ The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act (2002) is clearly a result of this neo-liberal assault on the Constitution and designed to legitimize the fault lines introduced by the World Bank policies in India's educational system with consent of the central government.⁸ We shall return to this subject later in this essay.

The Unnikrishnan Judgment went a step further. It ruled that the Right to Education continues to exist under Article 41 (Part IV) *even beyond the age of 14 years* but is limited by the State's "economic capacity and [stage of] development". The Constitution

⁷This phase of the Right to Education discourse has been documented in the background paper presented at the 'Convention on Education as a Fundamental Right', organized by the Department of Education, University of Delhi, Delhi, 18 December 1997 (Dr. Man Mohan Singh represented the Congress Party in this Convention along with the senior leaders of other political parties as well).

⁸For detailed analysis, see this author's papers entitled, 'Political Economy of the Ninetythird Amendment Bill', MAINSTREAM, 22 December 2001, New Delhi, pp. 43-50; 'C for Commerce', TEHELKA, 14 June 2008, pp. 44-45, http://www.tehelka.com/story_main39.asp?filename=cr140608cforcommerce.asp

is clearly directing the State to envisage the entire sector of education – from kindergarten to higher and professional education in a holistic manner. Any policy to *limit, distort or fragment* this vision of education amounts to a violation of the Constitution of India which represents people’s aspirations from the freedom struggle against imperialism!

During the Constituent Assembly debate in 1948-49, a member contended that the commitment made in the draft Article (later to be known as Article 45) to provide “free and compulsory education” to children *up to 14 years of age* should be limited to *only 11 years of age* as India would not have the necessary resources. The dilution would have been made but for Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s clarity of mind that it is at this age of 11 years that a substantial proportion of children become child labourers. He forcefully argued that the place for children at this age in independent India should be in schools, not in farms or factories. This is how an unambiguous commitment to provide *free* education through regular full-time schools to all children up to 14 years of age (including children below 6 years) became an integral component of India’s Constitution. Clearly, the Constitution does not permit parallel layers such as literacy classes, non-formal centres and Education Guarantee Centres for children. This implies that the persistence of **more than half of our children** today in the school going age group of 6-14 years **as out-of-school children**⁹ (at least 5 crores of them being child labourers) constitutes a clear violation of the Constitution. Likewise, the provision of non-formal education in the National Policy on Education–1986 (NPE-1986) as well as the parallel streams of facilities of varying qualities in the World Bank-sponsored District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) of the 1990s and the ongoing Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) violate the basic spirit of the Constitution as all these are designed to co-exist with child labour, apart from promoting inequality through education.

The rhetoric of lack of resources for mass education has continued to dominate policy formulation since independence. In August 2005, the Prime Minister referred to lack of resources as being the chief reason for referring the Draft Right to Education Bill to a High-Level Group of Ministers. In June 2006, the Central Government, claiming lack of resources, decided not to present the Right to Education Bill in the Parliament in spite of it becoming obligatory under Article 21A introduced through 86th Constitutional Amendment in December 2002. Instead, the central government sent a highly diluted and distorted draft Bill to the state/UT governments advising them to get it approved in their respective legislatures. This amounted to blatant abdication by the centre of its Constitutional obligation to give effect to the Fundamental Right accorded to elementary education for children in the 6-14 year age group. Protest by both the state governments and various people’s groups eventually persuaded the government to withdraw its misconceived step. But the rhetoric of resource crunch continued to influence policy decisions. The February 2008 Draft Right to Education Bill, like its predecessor drafts, also could not reach the Parliament on the same grounds. The High-Level Group of Ministers is on record in not only maintaining this stance but also in suggesting that the norms and standards proposed in the Schedule of the Draft Bill be diluted in order to reduce the financial requirement of implementing the Bill. **There is no evidence of any**

⁹See Footnote 5.

data being presented at any of the public forums, including the CABE, to substantiate the government's argument that there is indeed a resource crunch. Also, the rhetoric of lack of resources refuses to address the critical issue of lack of priority in the ruling class agenda for mass education. Ironically, this rhetoric dominated the discourse on Right to Education when the government was boasting of touching 9% economic growth rate and claiming to become a superpower by 2020!

Neo-liberal Policy Trends Before Structural Adjustments

The doors of Indian economy were formally opened to the neo-liberal agenda with Government of India's declaration of New Economic Policy in 1991. However, the global market forces, led by the superpower USA and other G-8 countries and represented by the IMF-World Bank regime, had started operating in India quietly much earlier. From mid-1980s onwards, there are definite signs of the presence of their advocates at the highest echelons of Indian government and their agenda having an impact on the formulation of Indian policies.

In the National Policy on Education–1986 (NPE-1986) and its companion Programme of Action–1986 (POA-1986) itself, we can identify several trends that reflected World Bank's thinking. These became evident later in the late 1980s or 1990s when the high profile Total Literacy Campaigns (under the National Literacy Mission), UNICEF-assisted Bihar Education Project, World Bank-funded U.P. Basic Education Project, SIDA/DFID-assisted Lok Jumbish (Rajasthan), and finally the World Bank-sponsored District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 18 states (about 280 districts) became the face of the 1986 education policy. These trends also served the vested interests of the Indian ruling class, apart from being *politically and financially* convenient to the Central Government. Let us briefly list these trends:

- The Education Commission (1964-66), popularly known as the Kothari Commission, conceived education as a critical socio-political process for building citizenship for a democratic, egalitarian, just and secular society. With the onset of the neo-liberal framework, the most significant impact has been on these goals which were diluted, distorted or trivialized. The change of the name of the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 1985-86 marks the beginning of the State's acceptance of the pro-market agenda in education!
- NPE-1986, along with POA-1986, as also their modified versions of 1992, introduced several retrogressive policy measures (e.g. introduction of non-formal education as an inferior parallel layer and Minimum Levels of Learning). These measures paved the way for the neo-liberal agenda embedded in Structural Adjustments and Social Safety Net and were later echoed in World Bank's interventions in 1990s as well. Some of these ideas also flowed from the Jomtien Declaration (1990) to which we shall come to in the next section.
- Education was increasingly viewed as literacy and numeracy 'skills'(often reduced to functional literacy), rather than a process of unleashing the human potential and enriching the consciousness in all its dimensions. This trivialization went to the extent that (a) the *literacy* campaigns became synonymous with *educational*

campaigns; and (b) the literacy rate became the dominant (often the sole) parameter for measuring or assessing educational progress (*it is like turning the parameter into the goal itself!*). The literacy campaigns diverted political attention away from both school and higher education through the 1990s.

- Advocating a mechanistic view of curriculum fragmented into numerous market-oriented competencies, the Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs) were introduced by the Ministry of HRD¹⁰ in 1990 in the most *undemocratic and secretive* manner. This was among the earliest instances, later to become a practice, of policy changes being introduced without democratic consultation or debate at legitimate forums like the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) or even NCERT¹¹. The MLL concept was steeped in anti-child behaviorist approach, de-linking of the cognitive (related to thinking and knowing functions) from the non-cognitive (related to emotions, values and psycho-motor skills) domains.¹² The advocacy of MLLs by World Bank's DPEP from 1993-94 onwards was endorsed by European Commission, DFID and UN-funded primary education programmes. MLLs continue to define the framework of curricular planning and testing in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) as well. The MLL story tells us why we must not underestimate the neo-liberal agenda of *influencing the character of knowledge* in school curriculum designed to undermine critical thinking and orient public mind in favour of consumerism.
- The most visible structural distortion of the school system comprised the introduction of a non-formal (NFE) stream of educational *facilities* (not *school!*) of inferior quality for more than half of the nation's children *below* the school system. The 1986 policy also introduced a layer of expensive residential Navodaya Vidyalayas *above* the school system for a handful of children (about 80 children per district per year). The government sought to justify the Navodaya Vidyalayas, among others, on the untenable ground of acting as 'pace-setting schools' for the ordinary government schools in its neighbourhood – an objective that turned out to be entirely misconceived.¹³ The policy shift also introduced the *under-qualified, untrained and under-paid 'instructor' appointed on short-term contract* in the NFE centres. The 'instructor' of the 1986 policy became the 'para-teacher' of World Bank's DPEP in the 1990s, providing the major basis for fragmenting (and finally almost demolishing) the cadre of school teachers.

¹⁰This exercise was pushed by a retired Director (a NRI) of the UNESCO Institute of Education, Hamburg, Germany.

¹¹Although the NCERT was made to publish the Ministry's report on MLLs, it did not advocate this idea until the National Curriculum Framework was re-written in 2000 under the NDA government. By this time, the neo-liberal agenda had started dominating the thinking of the India Inc.

¹²*DPEP Guidelines*, Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India, Ch. III, p. 21, May 1995; Dhankar, Rohit, *Seeking Quality Education: In the Arena of Fun and Rhetoric*, in *Seeking Quality Education for All: Experiences from the District Primary Education Programme*, Occasional Papers, The European Commission, June 2002 and *Lessons to Learn*, Seminar, No. 436, December 1995.

¹³See Report of the NPE-1986 Review Committee (i.e. Acharya Ramamurti Committee), Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India, Ch. IV, Section E, p. 100, 1990.

- The above shift towards institutionalizing *multiple parallel layers* within the school system contradicted the 1986 policy resolve to build a National System of Education rooted in the Constitution. This shift, however, made a farce of the policy statement that “effective measures will be taken in the direction of the Common School System recommended in the 1968 policy (Section 3.2).” During the 1990s, the World Bank and its associated UN and other international funding agencies, as we shall see shortly, made strategic use of this fault line of *multiple parallel layers* in the 1986 policy **to first weaken and then to destroy the credibility of the school system altogether!**

World Bank-UN Framework of Education: Examining its Premises

In March 1990, India signed the ‘*World Declaration on Education For All*’ and ‘*Framework For Action To Meet Basic Learning Needs*’ adopted at the ‘World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs’, held at Jomtien, Thailand under the joint sponsorship of three UN agencies (UNDP, UNESCO & UNICEF) and the World Bank. The twin documents together known as the Jomtien Declaration have since become the chief strategic instrument of the neo-liberal forces in school education. It laid the foundation for the World Bank intervention by advocating international aid for *primary* (not *elementary*) education in the developing countries, making it ‘*unnecessary*’ for them to mobilize resources by re-prioritising national economies. The call for external financing of primary education was part of the IMF-World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and Social Safety Net. The Social Safety Net Adjustment Credit, however, turned out to be a minimal compensation against the substantial withdrawal of state funding under SAP (see Tables 1a,b below). A detailed critique of the Jomtien Declaration is separately available.¹⁴

The pre-condition of SAP meant, among other things, that the Indian government was *obliged to steadily reduce its expenditure on the social sector*, particularly health and education. This was a rather enigmatic pre-condition in a country where the vast majority of the people did not have access to quality health or education. In education, it made even less sense as it was imposed by those powerful capitalist economies, led by the USA, who were *apparently* advocating the much-proclaimed ‘Education For All’ (EFA) programme along with the move towards the so-called ‘Knowledge Economy’. One can’t, therefore, avoid asking the question: **What was the hidden agenda?**

The central thesis of the Jomtien Declaration in the Indian context was five-fold, viz.,

- **First**, the State *must ‘progressively’ abdicate* its Constitutional obligation towards education of the masses in general and *school-based* elementary education (Class I-VIII) in particular, become dependent on external aid even for primary education (Class I-V) and work in partnership¹⁵ with NGOs, religious bodies and corporate houses¹⁶;

¹⁴Sadgopal, Anil, *A Post-Jomtien Reflection on the Education Policy: Dilution, Distortion and Diversion*, in *The Crisis of Elementary Education in India* (Ed. Ravi Kumar), SAGE Publications, New Delhi, pp. 92-136, 2006.

¹⁵The agenda of privatization and commercialization of education inherent in this innocuous looking notion of ‘partnership’ has after the passage of 17 years appeared in India’s XI Five Year Plan in the form of

- **Second**, the people *neither have a human right* as enshrined in the UN Charter *nor a Fundamental Right* to receiving *free* pre-primary and elementary education (from kindergarten to Class VIII) of *equitable* quality as implied either by the Constitution under Supreme Court's Unnikrishnan Judgment (1993) or even the much diluted 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002);¹⁷
- **Third**, education is not aimed at building a conscious citizenship for a democratic, socialistic, egalitarian and secular society; instead, it is *synonymous with literacy-numeracy and life skills* (mostly confined to sexual behaviour) required for social manipulation, mind control and regimentation for advancing the market economy;
- **Fourth**, the school system may comprise parallel layers of inferior quality education for various sections of society, thereby becoming *a multi-layered school system*; this conception will directly amount to denial of quality education to the under-privileged masses lacking capacity to pay¹⁸; and
- **Fifth**, *education is a commodity* that can be traded in the global market and offered for WTO negotiations.

The Jomtien Declaration dominated policy formulation and educational planning in several developing countries throughout the 1990s. A decade later, the Dakar Framework (2000) further elaborated and reinforced the basic premises of the Jomtien Declaration. The Indian government kowtowed to continue the neo-liberal agenda. As the DPEP was about to end within the next 3-4 years, this implied that **the Indian government was ready to carry forward the DPEP package, along with its lacunae and failures, into the then emerging Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**, thereby ensuring that the neo-liberal framework will continue to determine the future policies.

Here is a comparative presentation of India's Constitution and the Jomtien Declaration with regard to the goals, concept and scope of education under the two frameworks.

'Public-Private Partnership' (PPP) wherein the Indian State will transfer public funds and other critical resources (e.g. land), apart from legitimacy and credibility, to the private capital for commoditization of education. This is now the central theme of the XI Plan. In a subtle endorsement of PPP, a suggestion has even been made to set up "10 IIT-IIM level national institutes of teacher education" in PPP mode (Krishna Kumar, *Partners in Education?*, EPW, 19 January 2008, p. 11). See this author's detailed interview in Hindi entitled, *Sarvajanik-Niji 'Saajhedaari' Ya Loot*, SHIKSHA-VIMARSH, Jaipur, Rajasthan, January-April 2008, pp. 68-96. See also Footnote 27.

¹⁶For instance, the Karnataka state government has constituted a World Bank-assisted body under Wipro's Azim Premji Foundation chairpersonship to advise on policy matters and also invited the same corporate group in 2007 to set up SIEMAT, a formal institutional structure for policy formulation relating to educational governance and teacher training - a move presently stalled due to public protests. See also Footnote 28.

¹⁷In contrast, USA provides entirely free education from kindergarten to class XII which includes free textbooks, stationery, teaching aids (including computers), tests, co-curricular activities, games and sports, bus transport and lunch. Several other G-8 countries also provide free education.

¹⁸The 'alternative modes of finance' for primary education suggested by the World Bank-UN collective in its Background Paper (Annexure 2, p. 146) on the Jomtien Declaration include **private schools** and **user charges**; <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000975/097552e.pdf>

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA (1950)	World Bank-UN JOMTIEN DECLARATION (1990)
<i>Elementary Education</i> of 8 years guaranteed.	<i>Basic Education</i> limited to <i>Primary Education</i> of 5 or less years.
<i>Children up to 14 years</i> of age have a <i>Fundamental Right</i> to education, including those below six years of age; the Right continues to exist under Article 41 <i>even beyond the age of 14 years</i> but is limited by the State's "economic capacity . . ." (Supreme Court's Unnikrishnan Judgment, 1993). All sectors of education – kindergarten to higher/professional – <i>envisioned holistically</i> .	Only a <i>symbolic reference</i> to Fundamental Right in the Preamble and that, too, limited to <i>6-11 year age group</i> children; early childhood care and pre-primary education included in the scope of Basic Education, though not as a universal entitlement – <i>a myopic and fragmented</i> vision.
Guarantee of <i>free</i> education.	No reference to <i>free</i> education.
Education aimed at building <i>citizenship for a democratic, socialist, egalitarian, just and secular society</i> .	The definition of Education as "basic learning needs" allows its reduction to <i>literacy-numeracy, life skills and behaviourism</i> .
The State is obliged to ensure <i>reprioritisation</i> of <i>internal</i> resources in order to provide for education.	State's obligation substituted by <i>external</i> assistance and <i>partnership</i> with NGOs, religious bodies and the corporate capital.
<i>Equality</i> in and through education in all its dimensions.	Equality normally limited to " <i>opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning</i> ."
Guarantee of education of <i>equitable</i> quality – a Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools implied.	No such guarantee – allowing space for a multi-layered school system of inferior parallel layers.

At the September 2000 Millennium Summit, the IMF-World Bank, along with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UN agencies, devised a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In line with the Jomtien-Dakar Framework, one of the eight goals directly relating to education reiterates the agenda of "achiev[ing] universal primary education." The comparison between the Constitution and the Jomtien Declaration presented above equally applies to the MDGs, if not even more. Yet, the Indian government has circumscribed educational planning and financial allocations within the highly diluted norms set by the MDGs, as indicated below:

“. it is imperative to give good quality elementary education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Policies and programmes in this direction are also necessary for honouring the **country's commitment to the 'Millennium Development Goals' and 'Education For All'** for increasing public expenditure on education to 6 per cent of GDP and for universalizing elementary education at the national level. (emphasis added)¹⁹

¹⁹Economic Survey 2007-08, Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Section 10.25, p. 249.

What is worse is the stance of the internationally funded and high profile NGOs who are eager to substitute the EFA-MDG framework in place of the conceptually far more powerful founding document of the Indian Republic!

Structural Adjustment: The Hidden Agenda of Privatisation

What the country needed in 1991, when the New Economic Policy was announced, was a firm resolve to first rapidly fill up the **cumulative gap** resulting from continued underinvestment since the Kothari Commission (1966) and then maintain the investment level of 6% of GDP. To be sure, this was just about beginning to take place, as is evident by the steady rise in educational expenditure as % of GDP soon after the 1986 policy, as a result of the public pressure (see Fig. 1 below). Yet, what the World Bank persuaded the Indian State to do in the 1990s was precisely the opposite. The long-awaited **agenda of systemic transformation** in education in the 1986 policy, though only partial and hesitant, **was given up after 1991 and replaced by a set of un-researched, untested and arbitrary schemes or projects** assisted and sponsored by the World Bank, UN agencies and a host of other international agencies. The undeclared but operative strategy in such schemes and projects was to *let the vast government education system (from schools to universities) starve of funds and, consequently, deteriorate in quality*. As the school quality would decline, resulting in low learning levels, the parents, even the poor among them, would begin to withdraw their children from the system. A sense of exclusion from the socio-economic and political space would prevail.

When the children are either ‘**pushed out**’ of the schools or decide to ‘**walk-out**’ in protest against the poor quality and irrelevance of education (**no child ever drops out**, the official or World Bank claims notwithstanding!), two possibilities would emerge. First, low fee-charging unaided private schools (recognized or unrecognized) would mushroom to meet the new demand. Second, the government would have an *alibi* for closing down its own schools. The consequent low enrolment in government schools would be claimed as the ground for declaring them ‘unviable’. The school campuses could then be converted into commercial ventures such as the fee-charging elite private schools or the shopping malls, especially in urban areas, as is the emerging phenomenon all over the country. Yet, closure of government schools would be unabashedly termed “rationalization” of the school system in the official reports²⁰.

Let us summarise the hidden agenda of privatisation. The World Bank-UN strategy essentially comprised three sub-strategies, viz.,

- i) convert the school system into a multi-layered system with several inferior quality parallel layers;

²⁰In 1999, the District Collector of Indore (Madhya Pradesh) in his report to the state’s Chief Minister used the term ‘**rationalisation**’ to justify the closure of 30 government schools in the Indore city which were later turned into commercial ventures or police stations. Neither the Collector nor the Chief Minister expressed any concern about where had the children gone who had either entered low fee-charging private schools in the neighbourhood or given up on education altogether!

- ii) dilute norms and standards in the government schools pertaining to infrastructure and other such essentials of quality education (see Table 2 below); and
- iii) close government schools under the pretext of ‘rationalization’.

World Bank’s DPEP: The Assault

Although claiming to be located in the 1986 policy, the DPEP was in fact embedded in the Jomtien Declaration. Beginning in 1993-94 with 42 districts in 7 states in Phase I, the DPEP had steadily spread its coverage to almost half of India’s districts in 18 states (about 280 districts) by the time its third and the last phase was initiated in 2002-03.

During this short period, the DPEP was able to inflict a major damage to the school system. The following is a list of the outstanding damages that can be identified:

- Reduced the holistic goals of education to literacy-numeracy and questionable life skills;
- Diluted the commitment of the Constitution as well as the 1986 policy for early childhood care, pre-primary education and eight years of elementary education (kindergarten to Class VIII) to five (or less) years of primary education (Class I-IV in several states or I-V in others), with a major adverse impact on the policy norms of locating an elementary school in proximity to a habitation²¹;
- Dissociated curricular and pedagogic planning of the lower primary education from that of the upper primary, secondary and senior secondary education, thereby leading to fragmentation of school education and its knowledge framework;
- De-linked, both conceptually and operationally, the issue of access to education from quality of education, thus distorting educational planning;
- Introduced parallel layers (parallel to the mainstream formal schools) of relatively inferior quality such as the Alternative School, Education Guarantee Centres and a variety of non-formal ‘facilities’; this resulted in a **multi-layered primary education system** wherein each layer was meant for a separate social segment;
- Systematically replaced the regular teacher with an **under-qualified, untrained and underpaid person appointed on short-term contract** – called a para-teacher; this led to fragmentation of the teacher cadre, lowering of status, demoralization

²¹The 1986 policy norm for elementary school (Class I-VIII) would require this to be established within three km of each habitation, while also ensuring that every habitation would have access to a lower primary school within one km. More than half a dozen states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam have primary schools ending at Class IV, thereby denying rural children access to Class V within one km of their habitation. This critical issue of school mapping was entirely ignored by the DPEP. In contrast, the Report of Bihar’s Common School System Commission (2007) examined this issue and worked out its implications in terms of the **size of the elementary schools, the primary:middle school ratio and the consequent increased financial allocations** in order to ensure Fundamental Right to elementary education. This policy gap in Bihar noted in the Commission’s report in 2007 is despite the implementation of the UN-assisted Bihar Education Project since 1990 and the World Bank-assisted DPEP since 1997.

and weakening of teachers' democratic movements (now being substituted by ICT-based NGO-managed and internationally funded teachers' networks!);

- Violated the 1986 policy Operation Blackboard norms of 'at least three teachers and three classrooms per primary school' (along with a verandah and separate toilets for girls and boys) by introducing the dubious notion of **multi-grade teaching** wherein *one teacher is trained to perform the 'miracle' of teaching five classes simultaneously in one classroom!*;
- Diluted the infrastructural, teacher-related, curricular and other norms and standards, approved under the 1986 policy, pertaining to quality of education (see Table 2 below);
- Institutionalised discrimination against the SCs, STs, most OBCs (Other Backward Classes) and Muslims²², particularly the girls among them, since the introduction of parallel layers, para-teachers and multi-grade teaching adversely affected these sections of society;
- Promoted a money-oriented culture, quite alien and also undesirable to the education system, by lavishly paying hefty honoraria and consultation fees to all and sundry, including the questionable Joint Review Missions (JRMs); this has caused irrevocable damage since all such academic contributions were invariably made during the pre-DPEP phase either on official duty or on an entirely voluntary basis (with reimbursement of only travel and contingent expenses); it would be quite difficult, if not impossible, to reverse this mal-practice, once the project-based external assistance is withdrawn;
- Rendered the Departments of Education in state governments *superfluous* by setting up parallel NGO-type structures for channeling finance and governance of DPEP (and later SSA) and diverting political and administrative attention away from not only the publicly-mandated Departments but also SCERTs, DIETs and other state-level institutions of educational research, curricular planning and textbook development, teacher training and innovation; this has caused much confusion in governance, planning, budgeting, assigning personnel and public accountability;
- Undermined the in-built systems of accountability, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes and projects. A farce of high profile and expensive Joint Review Missions (JRMs), with participation of foreign experts²³, was built up during DPEP whose cost was also charged to the loan account, payable by India, but whose

²²Considered as being largely equivalent to the poorer sections among OBCs, as per the Sachar Committee Report (2007).

²³The basis of selection of foreign experts for the JRMs and their academic credentials have been solely in the domain of the World Bank or their allied international funding agencies. Even more importantly, the value of the contribution made by the foreign experts to JRMs is highly questionable in light of their rushed visits, absence of scientific planning, unfamiliarity with the complex local conditions and lack of transparency of their findings or reports.

methodology and reports have never been subjected to public scrutiny.²⁴ Several Indian experts in JRMs have reported that their reports were ‘doctored’ by the ‘debriefing’ authorities in the state capitals, ignoring their protests. At the end of the project duration, both the World Bank and the governments (Centre and/or state) would quietly move on to the next project (in this case, SSA) without ever publicly assessing how far the original targets have been achieved and, in case of failure, without objectively analysing the causes thereof.

The above story of DPEP is hard to believe. An independent academic assessment of DPEP by a collective of university-based academics led them to make the following observation:

“Behind the smokescreen then is a vivid story of the rollback by the state, of contracting commitments for formal education, of the dismantling of the existing structures of formal education, proliferation of ‘teach anyhow’ strategies, a thrust on publicity management, and a neo-conservative reliance on community.”²⁵

This story did not end with DPEP but continues to date, by being internalized in Government of India’s flagship SSA programme. The common link between DPEP and SSA is of course the World Bank and its allies such as DFID, European Commission and others which together contribute 35-40% of the SSA plan.

Impact of World Bank’s Policies on the Education System

The following *retrogressive* policy changes relating to the entire education system (including secondary and higher and technical/professional education) under the influence of the World Bank-UN intervention may be listed:

A. General and Conceptual Impact

- i) The goal of education excludes building a democratic, egalitarian, just, secular and enlightened society. Instead, education has become an instrument for only improving productivity, promoting consumerism and establishing market control over knowledge and the public mind such that every human being becomes a ‘useful’ resource for the global capital.²⁶
- ii) Knowledge is not a heritage of humankind meant for optimizing human welfare but a saleable commodity for profit, subjugation and hegemony in the hands of the capitalist class.
- iii) Educational development is not guided by the framework of either Universal Human Rights or Fundamental Rights under the Indian Constitution but by the global market framework.

²⁴Even the MoU signed between the World Bank and Govt. of India has never been made public.

²⁵Krishna Kumar et al, 2001, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36 (7), 560-568.

²⁶In this instrumentalist paradigm, in the case of women, education is primarily expected to lower infant and child mortality rates, reduce fertility rates and improve household nutrition and health (see *Primary Education in India*, World Bank, Allied Publishers Limited, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 30-31, 39).

- iv) Democratic structures of policy formulation and decision-making are either being by-passed or dismantled altogether.²⁷
- v) The State is steadily abdicating its Constitutional obligation towards education and letting market become the unregulated “service provider” of education from pre-primary to higher and technical/ professional levels.
- vi) Schools, colleges and universities are becoming “service providers” and students their “consumers”. In this “Provider-Consumer” relationship, every student must eventually pay “user charges” which implies payment of the full cost of the “educational service”.
- vii) In contradiction of the Constitution, education of equitable quality is no more the objective of educational planning. Instead, the quality of education shall be determined by the paying capacity of the student.
- viii) A common space for children from culturally diverse and economically disparate backgrounds to socialize and grow together is no more considered either desirable or feasible. This shift violates the logical foundation of publicly funded free and quality education system that has been the basis of capitalist development of the advanced countries.
- ix) Using the questionable rate of return theory, primary (or elementary) education is juxtaposed against higher education while allocating public funds. This undervalues as well as negates the critical role of higher education in creation and transaction of knowledge, thereby making developing countries dependent on the advanced countries for their ‘knowledge economies’.
- x) In higher education, only those disciplines will be supported through public funding which, at present, do not have any market value. The disciplines which have a market value shall receive no public support whatsoever as the market is expected to promote such disciplines. This implies that profit will determine the character of knowledge.
- xi) Jomtien Declaration’s insistence on developing only “observable and measurable targets” have been used to trivialize the goals of education and distort the curriculum, pedagogy and testing in violation of the spirit of the Constitution. This behaviourist prescription reflected in the MLLs is what has adversely impacted upon DPEP and SSA.
- xii) In the name of social participation, the Jomtien Declaration has provided for the State to ‘devolve’ responsibility to NGOs, private companies and even religious bodies.²⁸ Keeping in mind the fund-driven nature of NGOs, profit-motivation of

²⁷The proposal of school vouchers and Public-Private Partnership in education entered the XI Five Year Plan without such recommendation by either the CABE or any of its seven sub-committee reports in July 2005, in spite of the CABE being the highest democratic consultative structure (with representation of all state/UT education ministers, central educational authorities, academicians, writers, artists and social activists) for policy advice in education. See also Footnote 15.

²⁸In June 2007, the HRD Ministry engaged the Global E-schools & Communities Initiative (GeSCI), a conglomerate of Ireland, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland and Finland, to prepare the draft ICT policy for schools. In turn, GeSCI roped in the Centre for Science, Development & Media Studies (CSDMS), a Delhi-

corporate houses and rising religious fundamentalism, this stance of the Jomtien Declaration has dangerous implications.

B. Specific Impact On School Education

- i) A multi-layered school system is being built-up through a **series of arbitrary and short-lived schemes and projects** instead of building a publicly funded Common School System functioning through Neighbourhood Schools.²⁹
- ii) The public expenditure on education as % of GDP has been declining steadily since 1990, except for a two-year period from 1999-2001 (Fig. 1). The level of expenditure as % of GDP in 2005-06 was as low as it was before the 1986 policy. This decline took place *despite the levying of 2% educational cess³⁰ by the UPA government and almost one-third of funds for SSA coming from international agencies, including the World Bank*. Clearly, the SAP displaced both the 1986 policy and UPA's National Common Minimum Programme which had resolved to raise educational expenditure to at least 6% of GDP.
- iii) In Fig. 1, attention is drawn to the rise of educational expenditure as % of GDP during the two-year period of 2006-08 – i.e. from 3.5% of GDP to 3.7%. This rise is definitely not due to any rise in expenditure on SSA (i.e. elementary education) as during 2007-09 the central government allocation for SSA *declined in absolute terms*, a trend that is also evident successively in the third year (2009-10 interim union budget presented before the General Elections). The rise noted above during 2006-08 period can be explained on the following three grounds:
 - a) Increasing the number of seats (along with all the contingent facilities including faculty) for the upper castes in professional institutions as a compensatory measure for the reservations provided to OBCs in these institutions;
 - b) Providing for a set of high profile central universities, IIT, IIMs, IIITs and IISERs for the selected elite to serve the global market while the majority of higher educational institutions shall continue to be in poor shape due to paucity of funds; and
 - c) Opening 6,000 model higher secondary schools (2,500 of which shall be in PPP mode) for the selected few at the Block-level (a continuation of the Navodaya Vidyalaya model) without ensuring education of equitable quality for all at the secondary level.

based NGO which works in collaboration with Microsoft and others corporations (Outlook, 24 November 2008). See also Footnote 16.

²⁹A publicly funded school system, similar to the proposed Common School System, exists in USA and other G-8 countries.

³⁰The education cess, introduced in 2004-05, is a special cess or surcharge levied at the rate of 2% on all major central taxes viz. income tax, corporation tax, excise duties, customs duties and service tax. The revenue from this cess is meant for elementary education. While the overall budgetary support is the source of funding for most developmental sectors, this is not the case with elementary education which receives substantial resources through this earmarked educational cess. From 2007-08 onwards, 1% additional cess is being levied to raise funds for secondary and higher education as well.

Interestingly, the afore-mentioned rise exposes the so-called ‘inclusive’ agenda of the XI Plan wherein only those will be included whose inclusion will be in the interest of the neo-liberal capital and the global market.

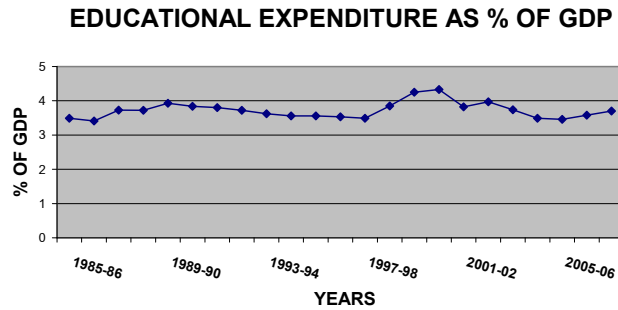


Figure 1

[Source: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education for Various Years,
Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India]

- iv) Declining public expenditure in school education implies gradual deterioration of infrastructure, poor pupil:teacher ratio, attrition of curriculum, lack of textbooks and teaching aids and also fall in the standards of teacher training institutions. This will predictably result in low learning levels which the World Bank and internationally funded NGOs (see PRATHAM’s ASER Report, Mumbai, January 2006) have promptly documented as if they were waiting for the evidence of poorly functioning government schools to appear.³¹ This deterioration in the quality of government schools provides the essential groundwork for privatization and commercialization of school education.
- v) In order to promote privatization, the government resists public pressure for legislative action to set minimum norms and standards or for instituting credible systemic reforms in the government schools. This must be the logic behind the central government’s considerable delay in passing the law for implementing Fundamental Right to Education as required under Supreme Court’s Unnikrishnan Judgment (1993) or even the diluted Article 21A of the 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002). The norms and standards proposed in the Schedule of ‘The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008’ (placed in Rajya

³¹None of these reports analyse the systemic issues, documented in this paper, that are responsible for such deterioration of quality, lest the neo-liberal framework is deconstructed. This is also true for the World Bank-sponsored research on teacher absenteeism and James Tooley’s study of Shahadara’s low fee-charging private schools in Delhi which tend to present privatization as a panacea for educational backwardness.

Sabha on 15th December 2008) are a major compromise with the quality of education – not an unsurprising consequence of World Bank’s neo-liberal assault.³²

BOX 4

‘Dirty Dozens’ of the Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008 in Rajya Sabha

- Fails to guarantee entirely FREE education even in government schools; those compelled to go to private schools due to lack of good quality government schools will also be denied FREE education.
 - Legitimises inequality and discrimination through a multi-layered school system.
 - Excludes children below six years from their Fundamental Right to nutrition, health and pre-primary education.
 - Denies right to secondary and senior secondary education.
 - Shifts public funds to private unaided fee-charging schools to exacerbate commercialisation, exclusion and inequality.
 - Misperceives the ‘neighbourhood’ principle by replacing the *Neighbourhood School* by the *neighbourhood of the child*; permits violation of the ‘neighbourhood’ principle by the government-run elite and private schools, allowing them to charge fees and exclude children.
 - Continues discrimination against government school children as their teachers will still be deployed for census, elections and disaster relief duties, apart from being assigned tasks other than teaching children.
 - Does not include the regulation of private unaided schools among the duties of the state/UT governments, leaving such schools free to indulge in arbitrary fee hikes, profiteering, anti-child practices and other violations.
 - Does not guarantee child’s mother tongue as medium of education, even at primary stage (for children of linguistic minority groups, this violates Article 350A.)
 - Contains subtle provisions that exclude disabled children from schools, thereby confining them to either special schools or ‘home-based’ education.
 - Lacks guarantee of dignified salaries, professional development, promotional avenues and social security for teachers and prevention of fragmentation of teachers’ cadre; allows the state/UT governments to continue to appoint para-teachers.
 - Lacks Financial Memorandum to compel the State to provide adequate funds.
- vi) The existing school regulation laws are being gradually diluted or withdrawn all together, as also implied in the aforesaid Bill in Rajya Sabha wherein the duties of the State do not include regulation of the fee structure and other aspects of the functioning of private schools.

³²See Sadgopal, Anil, *C for Commerce*, TEHELKA, 14 June 2008, pp. 44-45.
http://www.tehelka.com/story_main39.asp?filename=cr140608cforcommerce.asp; *Education Bill: Dismantling Rights*, THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS, 09 November 2008,
<http://www.financialexpress.com/news/education-bill-dismantling-rights/383177/>

- vii) In the case of urban government schools, located on land carrying high market value, a policy of Public-Private Partnership is already in place in order to transfer their assets to the private capital, even without waiting for the pretext of deterioration of their quality and consequent fall in enrolment.
- viii) Primary Education of five years or less is increasingly being viewed as the desired end objective for the children of the masses and this should replace Elementary Education of eight years, guaranteed under the Constitution, to be followed by skill development courses for serving the global market.
- ix) Only those children who are either high ‘performers’ or ‘achievers’ in competencies needed by the market or those whose families can afford the cost of education shall be allowed to proceed beyond primary education. For the rest, access will be confined to vocational skills so that they can serve the needs of a hierarchically controlled market-driven economy. The XI Plan proposal of setting up 6,000 model schools is precisely in fulfillment of this purpose, so that the high ‘performers’ or ‘achievers’ from among the poor could be identified by screening and then honed for the global market.³³
- x) Parallel layers of education of varying quality shall be the only educational facilities provided to more than half of India’s children. SSA, patterned after World Bank’s DPEP, is designed to achieve this purpose.
- xi) Public-funded teacher training institutions are being allowed to deteriorate and be replaced by private institutions. Well trained teachers shall be available only for private schools. Regular trained teachers in government schools shall be replaced by ‘Para Teachers’. This, too, is the guiding theme of SSA. The financial estimates for implementing the ‘The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2008’ are also based on this logic.³⁴
- xii) Programmes like Bridge Courses and ‘Back-to-School Camps’, as provided for in SSA, shall be encouraged for the present as sops for the masses, even though they hardly provide access to functioning schools.
- xiii) In the name of ‘English-medium’ schools, the majority of the children will be deprived of the power to articulate their thoughts in either their mother tongue or English, thereby resulting in lack of subject knowledge, critical thinking, creativity and, therefore, also general democratic consciousness. Given the inferior quality education, the only option for them will be to acquire some marketable vocational skills and join the hierarchically exploited skilled work-force in the global market.
- xiv) Those who manage to cross the barrier of senior secondary education will be able to access higher and technical/professional education in private institutions only with bank loans subsidized through public funds. This is yet another camouflaged form of Public-Private Partnership. In order to be able to return the loan following

³³See Sadgopal, Anil, *The ‘Trickle Down’ Trick*, TEHELKA, 29 September 2007, http://www.tehelka.com/story_main34.asp?filename=Ws290907The_Trickle.asp

³⁴See Sadgopal, Anil, *Education Bill: Dismantling Rights*, THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS, 09 November 2008, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/education-bill-dismantling-rights/383177/>

completion of education, these specially selected ‘high achievers’, too, will be compelled to mechanically contribute to corporate growth without ever being able to reflect upon the contribution they would be making to enhance the capacity of the neo-liberal capital to further exploit the global resources. The market objective of having an ‘intellectually vibrant, creative and technologically competent’ elite segment of society but entirely subservient, regimented and ideologically co-opted could not have been better achieved!

- xv) Parallel institutional structures for financing and managing education are being created *outside* the government such that the State’s role may be made superfluous.³⁵
- xvi) Using the rhetoric of decentralization and ‘community’ participation, the legitimate functions of the government are being hurriedly ‘devolved’ to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and other local bodies without ensuring that (a) the government’s obligation for adequate financing of education is fulfilled; (b) the local bodies have the necessary vision, administrative acumen or the legal powers to meet even the minimum challenges; and, more importantly, (c) the caste-ridden, patriarchal and generally retrogressive character of these bodies will not be counter-productive. While resisting legislation to guarantee Fundamental Right to education of equitable quality and to institute a Common School System, the State shall have no hesitation whatsoever to legislate to transfer its Constitutional obligations to the local bodies for which World Bank shall make available both direct and indirect funding. The real agenda behind all this is to dilute the role of the State and to enable the local bodies to *directly* negotiate and sign MoUs with World Bank. An identical process has already begun in several states by paving the way for privatization of natural resources like land, forest and water. The next is the turn of about 1.2 million government schools when the local bodies in urban/rural areas shall be persuaded by the World Bank to transfer their assets for privatization.

Miniscule Investments and Disproportionate Influence

In spite of the high profile character of the externally assisted projects such as DPEP, the finance provided by them is miniscule, if not just outright ridiculous. From 1999-2000 to 2001-02, for example, when external assistance to DPEP was at its peak, the external assistance ranged between 0.039% and 0.053% of GDP respectively. For all externally assisted educational projects put together, it was only marginally higher (see Tables 1a,b). Even as percentage of the total expenditure incurred on education by the Centre and the states together, the external assistance ranged between 0.9% and 1.5%. Yet, we have seen in the preceding sections how the World Bank and other international agencies managed to dilute and distort both the Constitutional vision of education and the 1986

³⁵The central government went to the extent of even setting up a private company called Ed.CIL in mid-1990s to manage certain key aspects of the World Bank and other internationally funded programmes in education. Likewise, SSA depends upon a host of ad-hoc schemes introduced by corporate houses, NGOs and religious bodies.

policy passed by the Parliament.³⁶ **What further evidence is required for the steady attrition of India's sovereignty that has been taking place since 1991?**

Table 1 (a)
External Assistance to DPEP

Years	National GDP (Rs. in lakh crores)	Total Exp. on Education (Rs. in crores)	External Assistance (Rs. in crores)	External Assistance as % of GDP	External Assistance as % of Total Exp. on Education
1999-2000	17.62	74,816	682.8	0.039	0.91
2000-01	19.18	82,486	858.3	0.045	1.04
2001-02	20.82	79,866	1,100.0	0.053	1.38

Table 1 (b)
Assistance to All Externally Aided Education Projects of MHRD*

Years	National GDP (Rs. in lakh crores)	Total Exp. on Education (Rs. in crores)	External Assistance (Rs. in crores)	External Assistance as % of GDP	External Assistance as % of Total Exp. on Education
1999-2000	17.62	74,816	729.1	0.041	0.97
2000-01	19.18	82,486	947.6	0.049	1.15
2001-02	20.82	79,866	1,210.0	0.058	1.52

* 'All Externally Aided Projects' of the Ministry of HRD include DPEP, Shiksha Karmi (Rajasthan), Mahila Samakhya (Gujarat, U.P., Bihar & Karnataka), Lok Jumbish (Rajasthan) and GoI-UN Programme (Selected Blocks) as well as others.

Source:

(i) Economic Survey 2002-03 to 2004-05, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India.

(ii) Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, 1999-2000 to 2001-02 and the next two years, Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India, Analytical Table Nos. 1.

(iii) Tilak, JBG (2003), A Study on Financing of Education in India with a Focus on Elementary Education, South Asia EFA Forum, NIEPA, New Delhi, May 2003, Table 31.

The above disproportionate influence exercised by the World Bank and its allied agencies required a two-fold strategy. First, the quality of school education was made to deteriorate by diluting the norms relating to various critical parameters. The following comparison of the norms, as per the 1986 policy, recommended by the Govt. of India's Expert Group (1999) and the SSA norms (one-third of SSA funds come from World

³⁶ Since 1991, more than a dozen policies measures and/or schemes of education (including DPEP and SSA) have been instituted in the country which violate either the Constitution or contradict the 1986 policy or both. Yet, such programmes/ projects and their violative elements have not been formally and explicitly debated and approved by the Parliament. It is part of the neo-liberal agenda promoted by the World Bank to either weaken, bypass or demolish democratic structures and processes in order to allow the neo-liberal capital unregulated and unquestioned space for profiteering.

Bank and allied agencies) shows how SAP conditionalities were dictating terms for educational planning and allocations.

Table 2
Dilution of Norms and Standards in Elementary Education
the neo-Liberal strategy for demolition of the government school system

No.	Norms	Expert Group	SSA
1.	Pupil:Teacher Ratio	1:30	1:40
2.	Av. Monthly Salary of Teachers	Primary – Rs. 5,000 Upper Primary – Rs. 6,000	Rs. 3,000
3.	Enrolment in Private Schools	NIL	15%
4.	Parallel Layers of Inferior Quality Schools	NIL	A major role for Alternative Schools & EGS Centres
5.	No. of Additional Teachers Required	35.6 lakh (minimum of 3 teachers in each primary school)	11.5 lakh (minimum of 2 teachers in each primary school)
6.	Total No. of Classrooms Required	43 lakh (minimum of 3 rooms in each primary school)	11 lakh (minimum of 2 rooms in each primary school)
7.	Free Uniforms, Scholarships, DIETs	Provision made	Not provided
8.	Integrated Education Development: Cost per Disabled Child	Rs. 3,000	Rs. 1,200
9.	a) Grant per School	Primary – Rs. 3,000 Upper Primary – Rs. 5,000	Rs. 2,000
10.	b) Grant per Teacher	Primary – Rs. 500 Upper Primary – Rs. 700	Rs. 500
11.	(a) + (b): Financial Implication	Rs. 670 crores	Rs. 395 crores
12.	c) Teaching-Learning Equipment:	Rs. 1,029 crores	Rs. 402 crores

Source: Tilak, JBG (2003), A Study on Financing of Education in India with a Focus on Elementary Education, South Asia EFA Forum, NIEPA, New Delhi, May 2003, Appendix A.1 and A.2.

The second strategy emerges out of the ‘knowledge agenda’ of the global market. For this purpose, the World Bank has carefully funded research, project evaluation and appraisal, consultancy, publications and international exchange of academia in order **to co-opt intellectuals in its neo-liberal project, prevent generation of counter-knowledge and thereby subtly modulate the political economy of knowledge. The market control over generation, character, content and distribution of knowledge is certainly the most powerful method of manipulation and regimentation of the public mind, policies and critique, thereby maintaining the hegemony of the global capital over world’s natural and human resources.** The people’s movements need to decipher this epistemic challenge of the global market forces and imperialist globalization with a view to not only resist it but also to build **a political programme of emancipative knowledge** dedicated to human welfare and peace.

An Alternative Vision of School Education

The only known option for the people of India is to struggle for establishing a **fully publicly funded Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools (CSS-NS)**. Such a system exists in several of the advanced economies of the world, including the G-8 countries. However, while envisioning such a system, we have to be careful that the Indian version is not a poor carbon copy of what exists in the advanced economies. For this, one has to ensure that *it is conceived in consonance with the socio-economic, cultural and historical conditions of each geo-cultural region of the country*, while sharing a broadly common vision of education rooted in the Constitution.

The CSS-NS implies a heterogeneous classroom representing the diversity (along with disparity) prevailing in the neighbourhood. Only then, all sections of society, including the post powerful, will have a vested interest in improving the government school system. The neighbourhood school needs to be envisioned as *a common public space where children of diverse backgrounds can study and socialize together*. This is a pre-condition in a society like ours for *forging a sense of common citizenship*. Therefore, the CSS-NS has the potential of becoming a powerful means of promoting solidarity in the working class for undertaking democratic struggles for social transformation.

Also, **can there be a Fundamental Right to education of unequal and inferior quality education?** Does the Constitution permit a Fundamental Right to education that violates the principles of equality and social justice enshrined in Articles 14, 15(1) and 16? Naturally, not. Given this, **do we have any option other than the CSS-NS that will be in conformity with the vision of education emerging from the Constitution?**

Some of the salient features of the CSS-NS could be spelt out as follows:

- The entire school system is to be conceived such as to guarantee through an unambiguous legislation entirely **Free Education of Equitable Quality from kindergarten to Class XII**.
- All schools shall have a **common set of minimum norms and standards** pertaining to infrastructure, quality of teachers, teacher recruitment, pupil:teacher ratio, educational aids, ICT facilities, libraries and laboratories, facilities for music, fine and performing arts and sports; in the present circumstances, for want of a better model, we can say that no school shall have norms and standards lower than those of Kendriya Vidyalayas, while striving for even better norms.
- Each school, state-funded or otherwise, shall be required by law to act as a **genuine Neighbourhood School** such that all children residing in its neighbourhood, irrespective of class, caste, religion, gender, language or disability (mental or otherwise), shall be admitted therein and study and socialize together without any discrimination whatsoever.
- While delimiting the neighbourhood, the inviolable guiding principle for the prescribed authority shall be **to optimize socio-cultural diversity**.

- Although CSS-NS shall be entirely state-funded, the **governance shall not be state-controlled**. The role of the State shall be **limited to policy-making, legislating, guaranteeing adequate funding and monitoring**.
- CSS-NS shall have a system of governance that will be **decentralized, democratic, flexible, transparent and accountable to the public, particularly to the parents**. A carefully **balanced and incremental devolution of powers** will have to be undertaken while keeping in mind the role of the local bodies under the **73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments**. A structured space for adequate participation in decision-making will have to be ensured through legislation for **women, SCs, STs, OBCs and other sections** in proportion to their representation in the body of parents as well as the community.
- Within a broadly common National Curriculum Framework, clusters of schools at the level of a District/Block or even sub-Block level shall have a **structured and negotiated space for flexibility to innovate** at the level of curriculum, texts, pedagogy and evaluation parameters, as long as this is periodically reviewed in a democratic manner.
- All schools shall follow a **common language education policy based on a set of linguistically and pedagogically sound principles and aimed at optimizing the child's capacity to think, learn and articulate**. The CSS-NS shall recognize the powerful **pedagogic role of mother tongue as part of multi-linguality** of the Indian child in acquiring knowledge and learning languages other than one's mother tongue. This of course **includes learning of the state language** at an appropriate stage but does not permit the prevailing assumption that the state language is the mother tongue of every child living in the concerned state (Article 350A must also be respected). **Equal opportunity for learning good quality English** and ability to use it as a means for acquiring higher knowledge will certainly have a legitimate space within this framework but not for imposition, discrimination or substitution of the child's cultural identity and historical ethos.
- All schools shall provide **equitable infrastructural and pedagogic space for the disabled children to study and socialize in common classrooms**, irrespective of the nature of disability. All necessary support systems and educational aids will have to be guaranteed in each and every school as a Fundamental Right of all disabled children. Capacity to fulfill this objective is to be viewed as a test of the pedagogic and cultural sensitivity of the CSS-NS. Special classes/ schools or home-based education will be sought as only the last options.
- The entire **epistemological (related to the genesis, sources and character of knowledge), cultural and pedagogic framework of teacher education needs to be critically reviewed, radically restructured and creatively re-synthesized** in order to meet the challenge of building the CSS-NS. A new vision of teacher and teacher education is long overdue. This indeed is to be envisaged as a pre-condition for moving towards CSS-NS and, therefore, allows no compromise whatsoever.
- **Private schools can exist as long as they act as Neighbourhood schools and accept all other aforesaid obligations**, in the same manner as do the state-funded

schools. IN CSS-NS, there is **adequate space for philanthropy, flexibility and creativity** but not for hegemony (cultural or otherwise), subjugation or profiteering.

- **Critical Pedagogy** to guide the transformation of the present multi-layered hierarchical school system into CSS-NS, since it implies much more than structural change; it implies an education that liberates the child's mind, enabling her to *resist injustice, deconstruct capitalism and neo-liberalism and struggle for social transformation.*

Concluding Remarks

There is adequate ground for contending that the Fundamental Right to Education can be gained only through a publicly funded Common School System based on Neighbourhood Schools as envisaged above. Resisting commoditization of education and its inherent knowledge is integral to the agenda for moving towards this goal. Further, changes in school education are envisaged organically as part of changes in the entire education system, including higher, vocational and professional. In this sense, the struggle for building the Common School System is simultaneously a struggle for epistemic and social transformation as well. To be sure, this struggle is also a part of the growing movement in the country against imperialist globalization and for redeeming India's democracy, sovereignty and role of productive labour and knowledge in creating an egalitarian and just society.

21 February 2009

Revised on 09 July 2009

E-8/29, Sahkar Nagar

Bhopal 462 039

Tel.: +91755-2560438

Mo.:+919425600637

Email: anilsadgopal@yahoo.com