



**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

# **Access to Elementary Education in India: Politics, Policies and Progress**

**Angela W. Little**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
Research Monograph No. 44**

**September 2010**



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Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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## List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIES	All India Education Survey
APPEP	Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BRC	Block Resource Centre
CABE	Central Advisory Board of Education
CRC	Community Resource Centre
CTE	College of Teacher Education
DIETs	District Institutes for Education and Training
EBB	Educationally Backward Block
EC	European Community
EFA	Education for All
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
FYDP	Five Year Development Plan
NCE	National Commission of Education
GoI	Government of India
NDC	National Development Council
IASE	Institute of Advanced Studies in Education
KV	Kendraya Vidyalaya
LJ	Lok Jumbish
LJP	Lok Jumbish Parishad
MLL	Minimum Learning Level
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
UEE	Universal Elementary Education
MoHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NCERT	National Council of Education Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCTE	National Council for Teacher Education
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NUEPA	National University of Educational Planning and Administration
NPE	National Policy on Education
NPEGE	National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education
NUEPA	National University of Education Planning and Administration
OB	Operation Blackboard
ODA	Overseas Development Agency (UK)
PoA	Plan of Action
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCERT	State Council for Educational Research and Training
SKP	Shiksha Karmi Project
SSA	Shiksha Sarvi Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SWRC	Social Work Research Centre
TLE	Teaching and Learning Equipment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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I am grateful to colleagues in India who gave of their time so generously to share with me their reflections on the politics, policies and progress of elementary education in India. Unless I am quoting from their published works, I refer to their views as ‘interview with author’.

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## **Preface**

India is home to over a billion people and accounts for more than 15% of the world's population. Over 40% of its population is aged 15 years and younger. Around 70% of its population live in more than half a million villages where the majority of India's children gain access to elementary education. The scale of India's system of elementary education is unimaginable to most education policymakers and planners around the world. So is its diversity across a sub-continent with areas where nearly all children complete secondary schooling to grade 10 and other areas where less than 40% complete grade 5.

In this Research Monograph Angela Little tells the story of how over 60 years patterns of access to elementary education and policies to promote access have changed. India's most important national policy on universal elementary education and the one that continues to underpin policy discussion at the national level was formulated in 1986. She outlines the politics surrounding this policy, including the importance of high-level political will, the dynamics of centre-state relations and resistance in the implementation phase. In the post Jomtien era provision of elementary education has been characterised by an increase in central direction from the federal state, an increase in financial and technical support from a range of international partners, and a decentralisation of some powers to levels of government below that of the state.

Most recently the Right to Education bill, passed in 2009, provides a legal obligation for children to be provided with education up to 14 years of age. While this will stand as an important legal framework for progress, it will not guarantee the desired outcome of universal enrolment, or for that matter completion. A myriad of factors work to drive forward and hold back progress on the ground - both in terms of access to a school place (enrolment) and in terms of what in the CREATE consortium we call 'access to meaningful learning'. The analysis identifies a range of drivers and inhibitors of progress over six decades and extracts insights that have currency wherever Education for All strategies are in place. The political economy of improving participation is a necessary complement to the analysis of planners about what inputs need to be provided, and the insights of social scientists into changing patterns of demand. As is often the case structure and agency interact to shape outcomes and are a reminder that both need to be understood.

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## Summary

This monograph explores the politics and practices of policy-making and policy implementation with regard to elementary education in India in historical context. It addresses four main questions: What progress has there been in access to elementary education over the past 60 years? What policies for access to elementary education have been promoted? What role has political will played in the process of elementary education policy formulation? What have been the drivers and inhibitors of the implementation of reforms in elementary education in recent years?

The monograph draws upon interviews conducted by the author with key actors and observers of the policy processes, alongside documentary sources. The development of ideas about basic education provision and its expansion is traced through the colonial and post-independence periods to the present; with attention to the influence of key political and philosophical traditions, including the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and opposing views rooted in modernisation, 'human capital' and technical-scientific conceptions of development.

An overview of the development of access to and provision for elementary education in the post-independence period is provided and there is a detailed consideration of policy-making during the First Five Year Plan under Nehru and thereafter. Formal commitments to Universal Elementary Education in India appear in policy text and discourse early on; but are arguably not matched either with adequate resource or political will. Prior to 1976, despite the formulation of national level policies, responsibility for elementary education lay essentially with the states, presenting an obstacle to the implementation of a national policy on universal elementary education. This was removed in 1976 and ten years later India formulated what became its most important post-independence basic education policy, the 1986 National Policy on Education. The politics surrounding this policy, including the importance of high-level political will, the dynamics of centre-state relations and resistance in the implementation phase are delineated, including with reference to the Programme of Action and to Operation Blackboard.

The 1990s saw the growth of both central direction in education and of international participation and support. A number of key projects are outlined to illustrate this development, including *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* and its provisions for marginalised groups based on gender, caste, tribe and the extent of local deprivation. The international dimension is considered in terms of the politics of donor (particularly the World Bank) relations with authorities in Indian education and in terms of the role of the global EFA movement. The tensions between education agendas focused on expansion, quality improvement, human rights and economic development during the 1990s led ultimately to a constitutional amendment in 2002, which provided for a legal right to basic education. Nonetheless, it was 2009 before the Right to Education Bill became law. The monograph examines the slow progress of the Bill and proceeds to identify a series of key drivers and inhibitors of educational progress at the elementary stage in India over the entire period under consideration. Among the factors considered, political will is found to be an important driver and corruption, resistance by vested interests and the general condition of poverty in rural areas are among the key inhibitors.

# Access to Elementary Education in India: Policies, Politics and Progress

## 1. Introduction

India gained full political - independence in 1947. The literacy rate at this time was around 16%. Since then access to education has grown significantly. This research explores the policies for educational access and the politics that have surrounded them, with a particular focus on elementary education, currently the first eight years of education, split into primary (1-5) and upper primary (6-8).

Major policy initiatives in Indian education are numerous. Up until 1976, education policies and implementation were determined legally by each of India's constitutional states. The 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment to the constitution in 1976 made education a 'concurrent subject'. From this point on the central and state governments shared formal responsibility for funding and administration of education. In a country as large as India, now with 28 states and seven union territories<sup>1</sup>, this means that the potential for variations between states in the policies, plans, programmes and initiatives for elementary education is vast. Periodically, national policy frameworks are created to guide states in their creation of state-level programmes and policies.

When invited to discuss education policy most Indian policy-makers continue to refer to the 1986 policy as the key - and indeed the most recent - policy text that continues to guide programmes and actions. A second way of viewing policy is to identify the large scale and funded programmes which are implemented in practice. As noted elsewhere, broad statements of goals cannot be taken seriously as policies if resources for their implementation are neither identified nor allocated and if their objectives are infeasible from the outset (Little, 2008:3). As one interviewee explained:

actually our policies are basically our programmes ... Development programmes are determined by the resources that are available and allocated by the planning commission in which we follow the 5 year plan cycle and it's they who actually provide for the basis for what ought to happen ... The Education Guarantee Scheme came like this. The ministry made the proposal and the planning commission allocated money, so the money was utilised and so it becomes a policy to have alternate schools in this country rather than regular formal schools. Programmes often determine policies retrospectively rather than we have a policy and in order to implement the policy we start working (interview with the author).

A third way of exploring education policy in India is through legislation. In the matter of access to elementary education the Right to Education Bill of 2009 is the most recent example of legislation.

Focussing specifically on policies for Education for All (EFA), the authors of India's National Assessment of EFA in 2000 explained how policies and programmes are determined jointly at the central and state levels. National policy and programme formulation are handled by central government with guidance from the Central Advisory Board of Education, from

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<sup>1</sup> Union territories are ruled directly by the federal government from the capital, Delhi, while states elect their own governments.

parliament and from expert committees and commissions. The Planning Commission draws up five year plans in line with the aspirations of these policies and programmes, drawing in turn from the states, specialised working groups of educationalists, administrators and NGO representatives. states then draw up annual plans within the five year framework. The funding of plans is usually shared between the centre and the states on a matching basis (National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, 2000). Centrally-sponsored schemes have become more numerous in recent years, following a recommendation in the 1986 education policy that the initiation of schemes for elementary education be shared between state governments and central governments. Through the 1980s and 1990s the funding of such schemes were shared between central government, state governments and external agencies. External agencies included multi-lateral loan and grant-giving bodies, bi-lateral agencies and international non governmental organisations.

This monograph addresses 4 main questions.

What progress has there been in access to elementary education over the past 60 years?

What policies for access to elementary education have been promoted?

What role has political will played in the process of elementary education policy formulation?

What have been the drivers and inhibitors of the implementation of reforms in elementary education in recent years?

The monograph is based on evidence from primary and secondary sources. These are: (i) interviews by the author with ten senior Indian policy-makers, policy implementers and researchers who have played various roles in policy formulation and implementation in India's education history over the past 40 years (ii) published histories of education in India, research reports, policy documents, commission/committee reports, evaluation studies and conference papers and (iii) the author's participation in a range of education policy conferences and education programmes in India over a number of years.

Within the CREATE framework of analysis, this monograph is most concerned with what CREATE terms 'Zones of Exclusion'. The more particular focus is on Zones 1, 2 and 3 which describe, respectively, those who do not enrol in primary education, those who enrol but dropout before completion and those who enrol but are 'silently excluded' from opportunities for 'meaningful learning' (Lewin, 2007). In this monograph the term access is used in relation to both enrolment and opportunities for learning, to what are often described elsewhere as 'access' and 'quality', and to what, within the CREATE model of access, is termed 'meaningful access'.

## **2. Progress in Access to Elementary Education**

There are many reviews and surveys of progress in elementary education in India. Among those most cited are the All India Education Surveys published regularly by the National Council for Education Research (e.g. NCERT 1965, 1990) and, in more recent years, the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE, 1999), Govinda (2002), Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2007) and Pratham's Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) in rural areas (e.g. Pratham, 2009), annual reports of the District Information System for Education (DISE) produced by the National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) (e.g. Mehta, 2007) and the Education For All Reviews produced for UNESCO (NIEPA, 2000; NUEPA, 2008). Terms used to describe the structure of the education system vary over time, by state and by author. In this monograph the term elementary education is used to describe formal education provision from Grade 1 to 8. This is divided further into primary (Grade 1-5) and upper primary (Grade 6-8).

Table 1 presents trends in educational provision and access in the primary stage of education (Grades 1-5) between 1951 and 2011. Participation in primary has grown at a faster rate than the overall growth in population. Over the past sixty years the total population has grown more than threefold. The number of students in Grades 1-5 has grown by more than six times and the numbers of teachers by more than four. The average number of pupils per primary school has almost doubled, from 92 to 171, while the teacher:pupil ratio has worsened (from 1:24 to 1:46). The percentage of girls enrolled has increased from 28% to 44%. Dropout rates at lower primary remain very high at around 40%. Overall however, literacy rates have grown considerably over the same period. The adult literacy rate has grown from 25% to 62% and the rate among persons aged 5+ from 18.3% to 67.6%. Literacy rates in rural areas are less than in urban and are lower among girls and women than among boys and men. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) reports that in 2006 the proportion of women aged 7-80 living in rural areas who could read was 56.6%, with a low of 44.6% in the state of Bihar and a high of 89.3% in Kerala (Pratham, 2009). While the overall population continues to grow, the number of children of primary school age (6-11) appears to be declining while the number of those of upper elementary school age (11-14) will continue to increase for a few more years. The decline in population among the youngest age groups bodes well for a gradual improvement in teacher:pupil ratios and for the quality of education. State governments and local government bodies manage the majority of primary and upper primary schools and the number of government-managed elementary schools is growing. Simultaneously the number and proportion managed by private bodies is growing. In 2005-6 83.13% of schools offering elementary education (Grades 1-8) were managed by government and 16.86% of schools were under private management (excluding children in unrecognised schools, schools established under the Education Guarantee Scheme and in alternative learning centres). Of those schools managed privately, one third are 'aided' and two thirds are 'unaided'. Enrolment in Grades 1-8 is shared between government and privately managed schools in the ratio 73:27. However in rural areas this ratio is higher (80:20) and in urban areas much lower (36:66) (Mehta, 2007).

**Table 1: Trends in Education Provision and Attainment from 1951**

<i>Data Year</i>	<i>1951</i>	<i>1961</i>	<i>1971</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>Most Recent Data</i>	<i>Year of Data</i>	<i>Notes</i>	<i>Source</i>
<b>Schools</b>	209671	330399	408378	494503	566744	638738	772568	2005/6	recognised	MoHRD
<b>Teachers</b>	538	742	1060	1363	1616	1896	2183	2005/6	thousands	MoHRD
<b>Pupils</b>	19.2	35.0	57.0	73.8	97.4	113.8	132.0	2005/6	millions	MoHRD
<b>Teacher-Pupil Ratio</b>	1:24	1:36	1:39	1:38	1:43	:43	1:46	2005/6		MoHRD
<b>Pupil-School ratio</b>	91.6	105.9	139.6	149.2	171.9	178.2	170.8	2005/6		Calculation
<b>Girls %</b>	28.1	32.6	37.4	38.6	41.9	43.7	-	-	%	MoHRD
<b>Drop-out in Primary Phase</b>		64.9	67.0	58.7	42.6	40.7	-	-	Apparent Cohort Method	MoHRD
<b>Child Population 6-11</b>	-		-	-	116,709	118,257	109,131	2011 (projected)*	thousands	Census
<b>Child Population 11-14</b>	-	-	-	-	53,004	74468	62,522	2011 (projected)*	thousands	Census
<b>Total population</b>	361,088	439,235	548,160	683,329	843,388	1,027,015	1,178,889	2011 (projected)*	thousands	Census
<b>Adult literacy rate (15+)</b>		27.8	34.1	40.8	48.5		61.7 <sup>2</sup>	2004/5	%	Census
<b>Literacy (5+)</b>	18.3	28.3	34.5	43.6	52.2	64.8	67.6 <sup>3</sup>	2004/5	Aged 5+ before 1981 and 7+ after	Census

Sources: MoHRD, Indian Census (various years)

<sup>2</sup> Source NSSO 2004-5

<sup>3</sup> Aged 6 and above: Source NFHS-3

### **3. The Pre-Independence Period**

Ideas about and policies for state-supported elementary education can be traced far back in India's history. In the British colonial period the Education Despatch of Charles Wood in 1854 recognised the responsibility of government for elementary education in the vernacular medium. Wood's despatch had most impact on secondary and higher education, reaffirming what Macaulay (1835) had recommended some twenty years earlier: that education beyond Grade 6 primary be delivered through the medium of English, be oriented to Western science and literature and produce 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Macaulay, 1835). Despite the commitment on paper to vernacular medium elementary education colonial government policy in practice concentrated on the urbanised, upper and middle classes. The professional classes 'who belonged to certain higher castes among the Hindus, were more than eager to get English education for themselves to enable them to get comfortable jobs, but showed little enthusiasm for spreading education to the masses' (Basu, 1978:58). In any case the idea that government had a responsibility to provide mass education was far from the top of policy agendas for education in most countries of the world at that time, not least in Britain.

Nonetheless, the Education Commission of 1882 promoted the role of government responsibility for education and in 1911 an Elementary Education Bill - Gokhale's Bill - was introduced to establish compulsory elementary education as a state responsibility. The Bill included provisions for banning the child labour of boys, the enforcement of school attendance and fee exclusions for parents with a monthly income of less than Rs.10. The Bill met with significant resistance from many quarters, including several Maharajas and other 'prosperous Indians', fearful that it would interfere with the employment of children on the land. It was defeated in the Imperial Assembly (Kumar, 2005:118-120).

Subsequently, Lajpat Rai, a Punjabi politician and thinker wrote *The Problem of National Education in India* (1920, re-published in 1966) which outlined efforts in 'national' education, from the *Swadeshi* Movement<sup>4</sup> of 1905 onwards (see Kumar, 2005:160-165). Rai argued for an expansion of the existing colonial system and for greater state responsibility. Primary education acts were passed in 1920 and 1930 in most provinces of India and placed control over primary education in the hands of local authorities.

Education was a site for the nationalist struggle. Independence leaders and thinkers such as Gandhi and Tagore, among many others, believed that expansion of education would lead to the betterment of the Indian population.

Control of educational institutions was one of the key areas in which the urge for self-identity found expression. Administrative control of institutions was perceived by Indian social leaders as a tangible expression of the colonizers' grip on indigenous culture (Kumar, 2005:123).

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of education was intimately bound up with his vision of a civilised and independent India. For Gandhi, education was an essential part of both development and political struggle. Colonial education, based on the medium of English, had, in his view, enslaved India. His radical alternative to colonial education was linked with his equally radical views on development and his rejection of industrialisation and machine-

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<sup>4</sup> Call for the boycotting of British manufactured goods and production of goods within India

production. For Gandhi, development and independence involved the twin principles of self-rule and self-reliance. The role of the village and education in the village were key to both. Villages would be self-reliant republics, capable of meeting the basic needs of all. They would grow their own food crops, grow their own cotton for cloth, manage their own water supply and manage/police their own affairs. Productive handicrafts would form the core of the village school curriculum and would be studied by all children, irrespective of their caste affiliation. Manual skills would be valued as much as mental skills. Teachers would be given considerable autonomy in what and how they taught and would be released from the tyranny of the centrally prescribed textbook<sup>5</sup>. In 1937 Gandhi convened a conference at Wardha, where a plan for basic national education was initiated by a committee under the chairmanship of Zakir Husain. The Wardha Scheme set out a scheme that would see children from all communities educated side by side and with state-funded religious instruction barred. Muslim opposition would thwart its implementation (Oesterheld, 2007)

Gandhi's views on development and education were at odds with those of many other leaders of the independence movement, especially those of Nehru who would come to be India's first prime minister. Shortly after independence in 1948, Article 45 of the 1950 Constitution obligated the state:

to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years'.

Since that time much policy rhetoric and many policy texts have accompanied the notion of free compulsory education, but 'progress in the face of some extremely demanding circumstances has been slower than expected' (Dyer, 2000:11).

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<sup>5</sup> Gandhi's ideas on basic education are spelled out in a series of articles in *The Harijan* newspaper during the 1930s.

#### **4. Post Independence Education Policy 1948-1985**

Industrial development was a key element of Nehru's vision and contrasted markedly with Gandhi's concept of development rooted in villages and local and sustainable technology. Drawing from Soviet experience, a Planning Commission was established in 1950 to oversee the development of Five Year Development Plans (FYDPs) that embraced programmes and funding for economic and social objectives, including education. The FYDP combined submissions from the states with national priorities. Subsequently the states developed annual plans based on the FYDP. Expansion of a Western style education was central to Nehru's vision of industrial development within a socialist, planned economy and society.

The 1950 Constitution established the shape of the post-Independence Federal Republic of India. Article 45 promised free and compulsory education for all up to the age of fourteen within a period of ten years. Ten years was much shorter than the 40 years proposed by the British Government in 1944 in a plan drawn up by the Central Advisory Board of Education and known popularly as the Sergeant Plan, and shorter too than the sixteen years proposed subsequently by the Kher Committee (Naik, 1966).

Post independence education policies were generated via commissions on the one hand and the FYDPs on the other. The first education commission was established in 1948 shortly after independence to examine the development of university education. It became known by the name of its chair, Professor Radakrishnan. A second commission was established in 1952 to consider the development of secondary education. It too became known by the name of its chair, Professor Mudaliyar. It would be a further twelve years before the Kothari commission was established to review education comprehensively including the consideration of the needs of mass and adult education.

Plans for mass education were incorporated into the FYDPs. The FYDPs set out economic priorities and growth targets alongside programmes and targets for other sectors, including education, regarded as a 'social service'. The states played a very important role in the development of these plans through the setting of five year state targets and funding mechanisms and the creation of detailed annual plans. Between 1950 and 1976 education was a 'state subject' managed exclusively at the state level, though some funding was provided centrally .

The first FYDP focused almost solely on the creation of more schools as a means to assure universal provision, and this remained the key preoccupation of policy makers throughout the 1950s. By the mid 1960s, primary school provision was supplemented by alternative schooling arrangements for working children and those who had already dropped out of the formal system, and by adult education programmes. A series of national reviews in the early 1960s revealed that the opening of more schools and programmes had not ameliorated high drop-out and repetition rates. As a result, a number of other measures, including a 'no detention' policy and various incentive schemes, were put into place (Govinda and Varghese, 1993:2-3). Still, the implementation of these policies was inhibited by the general level of poverty across the country and varied greatly as a result of the diverse, and highly unequal, economic and social circumstances of individual states.

Notwithstanding the policy rhetoric, the education of the elite and the expansion of senior and higher education received as much priority as mass education through the 1950s and 1960s. Kumar (2005) claims that the failure to promote mass education was due to the familiar

theme of disinterest on the part of the owners of property and capital in any action that undermined the supply of cheap child labour. But the rhetoric of free and compulsory education for all could not be abandoned.

Mention of this aim in the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy had made it an article of public faith. The government did nothing visible to undermine this faith, but it subtly accepted a change in the role of education. The constitutional position was that national development required the potential of every child to be nurtured. This position did not contradict the view common among propertied Indians, especially the urban bourgeoisie, that a select few institutions should deal only with 'talented' students (Kumar, 2005:192).

With its emphasis on building a cadre of educated national leaders for national (industrial) development, through the nurturing of talent, Nehru government's *de facto* education policies ran counter to Mahatma Gandhi's ideas about the role of basic education and mass literacy in building a literate polity for participation in a democratic system. From the 1960s:

educational planning had taken the full plunge towards realizing Nehru's dream of a system of advanced institutes of scientific and technological research and training. Major investments, mostly subsidized by foreign aid, were made in this direction, and they exacerbated the disbalance that already existed between mass illiteracy and cheap access to higher education. The government did open new primary schools at a rapid pace, but failed to care for the material and pedagogical conditions prevailing in them. Once the 'basic education' experiment was over in all by name in most states by the mid-1960s there was no perspective left in primary education to stop it from drifting. Expansion continued, for it testified to the government's commitment to the Constitution, but there was no idea or method to make universal elementary education a coherent project (Kumar, 2005:193-194).

In any case universal elementary education sat uncomfortably within the overall national development plan oriented towards industrial development and modern technology. Mass education was not easily integrated into an industrial development model and was viewed as a social service or as consumption rather than as an investment. There was a tension between education's role in building human capital for industrial development and its role in social transformation through contributing to the declared values of democracy, national unity and equality. Although each successive FYDP speaks of the importance of achieving universal elementary education, the financial allocation patterns 'cast doubt on the political will to spend enough money on elementary education' (Dyer, 2000:20). With respect to that part of total expenditure contributed by plan allocations Varghese and Tilak (1991) record that between the First and the Sixth Five Year Plans, plan allocations to elementary education as a percentage of total plan outlay declined from 7.86% to 2.58%, rising to 3.55% in the seventh plan period.

In a lecture delivered in 1963, the well-known Indian educator J. P. Naik bemoaned the slow progress in elementary education.

At one time we all felt that the proposal of the Sargeant Plan to provide free and compulsory education for the age-group (6/13) by 1984 was 'anti-national' and 'fantastically slow'. Today, we have come to a stage where the implementation of

even the Sargeant Plan will be regarded as a 'progressive, bold and ambitious target'! (Naik, 1966:5).

The tragedy lay not only in the failure to implement Article 45 of the Constitution but also in the absence of a target date for reaching the goal. Why is it, Naik went on to ask, 'that the progress of elementary education is so slow and why is it that we are unable to implement the *only* directive principle of the state policy in education?' His answer lay in the socio-economic structure of Indian society at that time. Specifically he identified nine factors - a high birth rate and explosion of the school age population; a shortage of finance; 'apathy' to education of the illiterate masses; traditional resistance to girls' education; the existence of 'backward' groups such as scheduled castes and tribes and nomads; household poverty and the need for child labour; small and scattered habitations; forests and inaccessible areas; and the absence of a machinery to enforce compulsory attendance.

Taken together these physical, social, cultural, economic and administrative handicaps make the problem of providing universal elementary education extremely difficult and costly, if not impossible (Naik, 1966:5).

Naik was deeply committed to the expansion of elementary education. As a former member of the national liberation movement, he had served a prison sentence before working in rural education, running primary schools and literacy, adult and basic education programmes inspired by Gandhian philosophy and ideals.

#### **4.1 The 1964 National Commission on Education**

Naik would subsequently become the member-secretary of the 1964 National Commission of Education (NCE). In contrast with the 1948 and 1952 commissions on the university and secondary education sectors respectively, the 1964 commission was charged with examining education comprehensively across primary, secondary and tertiary and with proposing a national system of education. The chairman of the commission was Dr. D. S. Kothari, a physicist from Delhi University. Of the sixteen commission members all were education experts, including five foreigners from France, Japan, Soviet Russia, the UK and the USA. Essentially this was an expert committee, with the technical expertise of the majority of members lying in higher education, especially in science and technology. The commission travelled and consulted widely, held conferences, interviewed 900 persons and received letters and memoranda from 2,400 individuals and groups. Twelve task forces and seven working groups laboured for two years and reported in June 1966 (GoI, 1971; Mathur, 2001).

The commission had been established during Shastri's Congress government and continued its work under Indira Gandhi who became Prime minister on Shastri's death in 1966. Gandhi was Nehru's daughter and no relation to Mahatma Gandhi. The tenure in the cabinets of both Shastri and Indira Gandhi of M. C. Chagla as Education minister ensured a degree of continuity of effort. The commission's report was sent to the Vice Chancellor's Conference, the Central Advisory Board of Education and members of both Houses of Parliament as well as to state governments. The announcement of elections in early 1967 delayed the consultation processes. Unemployment, economic stagnation and a shortage of food were beginning to compromise the popularity of the Congress Party and although it was re-elected in March 1967, their majority was much reduced. The new Minister of Education, Dr. Triguna Sen, the Rector of Jadavpur University, was already a member of the NCE. Though dedicated

to the implementation of the report's recommendations through the creation of a national policy, Sen:

lacked political base; therefore he found it difficult to carry the state governments and others with him, particularly when he ceased to command the confidence of the Prime Minister. Undaunted ... Sen proceeded to appoint a Committee of Members of Parliament, which represented all the different political parties (Mathur, 2001:230).

The discussions of this parliamentary committee and subsequently of the Vice-Chancellors' conference and the Central Advisory Board of Education were far from harmonious. The issues that attracted most debate and dissent were threefold - the medium of instruction, the choice of universities for special funding and 'selectivism' in admissions (to university). As a result, the policy text that emerged in 1968

was a very watered-down version of the Kothari Commission Report. Subsequent Education Ministers, all of whom belonged to the Congress party, through assurances of implementation, kept the recommendations of the Commission alive, but even this pretence was dropped as the country moved to more immediate concerns of the 1970s (Mathur, 2001:231).

Elementary education was viewed as contributing to agricultural modernisation. The English-speaking policy elites at that time were keen on propagating 'the US-inspired strategy of agricultural modernisation based on modern technologies' (Kumar, 1996:2367). To the extent that elementary education attracted policy attention it was an education oriented to a scientific outlook in support of agricultural modernisation rather than 'basic education'.

By the early 1970s the macro political environment overshadowed the policy environment for education. Indira Gandhi was still in power but in 1969 the Indian National Congress had split. In 1971 Gandhi and her new Congress Party (I) was returned to power with an increased majority and a mandate to pursue a series of socialist policies with new force. Indira Gandhi led India into a third war with Pakistan, in response to East Pakistan's struggle for independence. India's support for East Pakistan led to the creation of an independent Bangladesh and a growth in Gandhi's popularity. India aligned herself with Soviet Russia through a 20 year friendship treaty and in 1974 India became a nuclear power.

A worsening economy, growing social problems and allegations of corruption led to political disorder and the declaration of a state of emergency in 1975. Many called for Indira Gandhi to resign. Civil liberties were curtailed, strikes and protests outlawed and non-Congress governments in the Indian states dismissed. Gandhi lost the elections of 1977 to a coalition of opposition parties led by Morarji Desai. This coalition was to crumble in 1979 and by 1980 Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party (I) were back, with a large majority. But the early 1980s were plagued by insurgencies and communal violence. The death and destruction at the Golden Temple in Amritsar inflamed communal tensions with the Sikh community and led, in 1984, to Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards. Her son, Rajiv, was chosen by the Congress party as the country's next prime minister.

In the meantime progress on implementing the 1968 National Policy on Education was slow. In 1971, the Second All India Educational Survey included a full counting of all habitations with schools irrespective of their population size. Based on the findings of the survey, distance norms – requiring a school within one kilometre of each habitation with a population

of 300 or more – were taken up by the national government which continue to be the guiding framework for expansion of the school system in the present day (NCERT, 1965).

Access to elementary education increased. Like predecessor reports and plans for education, the 1968 policy had set ambitious objectives. Education should promote national progress, develop a common citizenship and culture and strengthen national integration. It called simultaneously for an expansion of opportunities, an improvement of quality at all stages and more attention to science and technology. As a subsequent secretary of Education would reflect:

the adoption of the 1968 policy gave a fillip to linear expansion of educational facilities and the establishment of a uniform pattern of primary, upper primary, secondary and tertiary education and science and mathematics figuring uniformly for everyone and a three language formula for education in all parts of the country. However, its qualitative impact was not in consonance with the needs and aspirations of the country (Sarup, 1986:124).

A common structure of education, following a 10+2+3 model, was adopted country-wide. Science and mathematics were deemed compulsory subjects of study. The policy set out ideas for a ‘common school’ system. But as one senior government official commented:

Unfortunately this has never materialised. For some people the common school refers to a school where the ‘common people’ send their children ... the core obstacle is caste. Caste is so deeply engrained in our society that it is very difficult to overcome that barrier (interview with the author).

During the 1970’s the private school sector mushroomed, especially in metropolitan areas and at the upper secondary level. The establishment of upper secondary schools was followed by that of the ‘feeder’ elementary classes. These proved to be very popular among the middle classes and among those who could pay. From then on, but with two exceptions, the government school system began to cater to the children of the poorest in society. The exceptions were the *Kendraya Vidyalayas* (KVs) funded centrally for the children of the armed forces and the civil servants, and the *Narvodaya Vidyalayas* introduced after the 1986 policy for talented students in rural areas.

#### **4.2 Reflections on the National Commission on Education report and the 1968 Education Policy**

Some years after completing its work, the NCE’s member-secretary, J. P. Naik, offered a sobering set of reflections on the politics of its policy analysis and recommendations. The commission had fought shy of specific recommendations. It avoided analysis of the reasons for the failure of earlier programmes for universal elementary education. The centre avoided controversy with the states because it was the states which were responsible for implementation, not the centre. The centre could guide and give advice: it could not mandate. In his book *The Education Commission and After* Naik (1982) lamented that no political party was seriously committed to a radical reconstruction of elementary education, that radical action lay only in the realm of populism and populist slogans and that elementary education was not ‘a political reality in the sense that the country has yet to understand the price to be paid for it’ (Naik, 1982:44). For Naik, educationalists and politicians needed to work together more closely.

A widely shared view is that education is meant for academics only and that politicians should keep their hands off it. When the Education Commission was appointed, Mr M.C. Chagla boasted that it consisted only of academics and that he had not appointed a single politician on it. But this isolation makes educationists blind to many aspects of the educational reality which are basically political ... On the other hand, politicians remain largely ignorant of basic educational problems because of this very isolation so that when they interfere in education - which they often do - they do more harm than good. In other words the educationists desire full political support without any political interference (which is their concept of autonomy); and politicians interfere too frequently with education (which is their concept of responsibility for the legislature) without committing themselves to provide any support (Naik, 1982:239)

Adiseshiah (1997) stressed the interaction between the political and the technical in matters of policy formulation and implementation.

The political economy of education has remained a dominating factor in determining educational programmes. The Education Commission presented a model based on sound technical, pedagogical and ethical principles. However the decisions on the model were made by the political leaders of the country. But that is how ultimately the country's educational system derives its political legitimacy ... More often than not educational propositions are turned into grist for the political mill from which emanates ultimate power. There have been instances when the political economy of education has caused deadlocks in the reshuffling of the portfolios in State cabinets. At times ministers have found education portfolios no longer lucrative, politically speaking, because of the 'most profitable transaction', the sanctioning of new schools, having been completed and there being little further chance of its contributing to the concerned minister's political power (Adiseshiah, 1997:viii).

These observations have a much wider resonance and, for example, chime well with those of Grindle (2004) writing about policy reforms in Latin America in the 1960-1970s and the 1980-1990s. Grindle (2004:6) suggests that the political agenda surrounding access to education and quality in education involve different sets of interests and sources of resistance. Access reforms such as the building of new schools provide politicians with tangible resources to distribute to their constituencies. They also involve building contracts over which politicians may have some influence. Political agenda surrounding reforms designed to promote improvements in the quality of education provided politicians with fewer resources to distribute to constituencies and for the enhancement of their power.

### **4.3 Education Moves to the Concurrent List**

Constitutional change in 1976 moved education from the 'state' list to the 'concurrent' list. Under the 1968 policy, responsibility for the implementation of education policy lay solely with the states. With its move to the concurrent list education became a responsibility shared between the state governments and the centre. This meant that the central government was expected to provide leadership, guidance and financial resources for education programmes. This constitutional change remains in place today and explains how it has been possible for major national initiatives such as *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for All) to be launched and for funding by central government to increase.

After Indira Gandhi's defeat in 1977 a fresh attempt was made to reformulate education policy by a civil society group known as Citizens for Democracy founded by Justice V. M. Tarkunde and J. P. Narayan. Narayan was prominent among those politicians who, in the early 1970s, had called for Indira Gandhi's resignation and the upholding of civil liberties. Followers of Gandhi, Tarkunde and Narayan were joined by J. P. Naik, another adherent to Gandhian education ideals, and who, as we have seen already, had served as the Member secretary of the NEC between 1964 and 66. With over forty eminent Indian educationists they led the production of *Education for Our People: a policy frame for the development of education over the next ten years (1978-87)*. This called for:

a radical reconstruction of education under the auspices of a social movement, which would take away the state monopoly and compel it to work towards reforming the system in favour of the poor and deprived (Mathur, 2001:231).

Although the report was adopted by the government of the day and was used to draft the Draft National Policy on Education in 1979, the government fell shortly afterwards and the draft was consigned to oblivion.

## **5. The 1986 National Policy on Education and the 1992 Amendment**

### **5.1 Policy Context**

When Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980 she set about modernising the economy and society and about changing education policy to enhance the role of technology. In this thinking she was assisted and influenced by her western and science-educated sons Rajiv and Sanjay, neither of whom held formal office at that time. How India could keep abreast of modern technology and how all people could share in social transformation through technology became their overriding concerns. While the majority of the nation's children now had access to an elementary school, literacy rates were still very low.

Educationally, substantial progress had been achieved in the provision of elementary school facilities since 1950. Recorded achievements included an increase in the number of primary schools from 209, 671 to 537,399 between 1950 and 1986, an increase in student enrolment in Grades 1-5 from 19.2 million to 89.9 million, and in Grades 6-8 from 3.1 million to 28.8 million. The gross enrolment ratio (including large numbers of over-age children) increased from 42.6 to 95.9 over the same period. Recorded dropout rates however were extremely high. Out of every 100 children enrolled in Grade 1 about 40 survived to Grade 5 and 25 to Grade 8. Factors inhibiting progress were recorded as increasing population, financial and human resource constraints and 'socio-economic compulsions' among families in the 'weaker sections of society' (NCERT, 1988:16-18).

Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. As Rajiv Gandhi took over his mother's mantle, religious revivalism and regionalism continued to threaten national cohesion. A still growing population posed a major challenge to food self-sufficiency, unemployment was widespread and the role of education in promoting national integration was increasingly called into question.

From the time Rajiv Gandhi took over as Prime Minister... he began to refer to the need for a new education policy. In one of his first radio broadcasts after the assumption of office, he said that 'our educational system needs to be reconstructed as a dynamic force for national growth and integration. I intend to initiate a comprehensive review of the system and to build a national consensus on reform' (Mathur, 2001:232).

### **5.2 Policy Formulation**

The 1986 National Policy on Education is regarded by most education commentators to be the most important post independence education policy. It continues to underpin education in India to the present day. From its beginnings, the process of formulating the 1986 education policy attracted political will at the highest level. Rajiv Gandhi was internationally oriented, well aware of the technological changes going on in the world beyond India and wished to see India's manpower compete on the international stage. Early in his period of office he changed the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, reflecting a broadening of the role of education. In his speech to state ministers of education in 1985 he called for a 'solid grounding' in education for all as the means for India to keep abreast of progress in the world at large and to meet the challenges of new technology as and when these arose. In the eyes of some civil servants, Rajiv Gandhi's ideas for education were:

rather elitist. His own education background was in a public school fashioned after British public schools and he thought that if somehow most Indian children could have access to that kind of education. That would be the most marvellous thing (interview with the author).

The Minister of Education, K. C. Pant, was an engineer by background. In their discussions about how a new policy would be formed Gandhi and Pant felt that the process that had resulted in the 1968 education policy had been too prolonged (interview with the author). Instead of a commission the ministry would establish a committee and a widespread consultation process whose work would be delivered in a much shorter of time. The initial request from the Prime Minister's Office was for the production of a draft policy *within a month*. Senior policy makers and officials were stunned by this deadline, recalling the time it had taken for the 1968 policy to be formulated and the fact that the implementation of the 1968 policy had not been evaluated. A former joint director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training reflected:

Take universal primary education and literacy for example. What is its status? Some kind of target was fixed. Second was restructuring of school education 10+2+3 which was to have been completed in 1975. (But in 1984 we were) nowhere near completion of that task. (We had not raised) science education up to Grade 10. Still (by 1984) science education stopped in Grade 9 in many states (interview with the author).

The one month timetable was relaxed to six. Twenty two years later the then secretary of education recalls being asked by Gandhi to prepare the policy within six months.

I looked at him and I just kept looking at him, He was talking and I was looking at him. So after a while he said '...you are not saying anything'. I said what I had to say. 'I can't produce a policy in six months'. In fact I cracked a joke. I said 'look here. I was a victim of the partitioning of India and I came from Lahore ... and there used to be a magic stick in the house. So now I don't have the magic stick, I can't produce the policy in six months time. So I request that I go on leave immediately, you find another person who can make this policy in six months (interview with the author).

The secretary explained to Gandhi that his view that education policy was not the business of the central government alone. All states and a wide range of stakeholders needed to be involved in its construction (interview with the author). Without a national debate and discussion of the problems already being faced in the implementation of the 1968 policy, a demand for a new policy cannot be created (interview with the author). In January 1985 Rajiv Gandhi announced that a new National Policy for Education would be developed. The secretary gained the agreement of the prime minister for a timetable of work on the formulation of a national policy of eighteen months.

To this end the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the National Institute of Educational Planning (NIEPA) provided technical input to a committee chaired by the secretary of Education. An initial document *Challenge of Education* was issued by the Ministry of Education in August 1985 (GoI, 1985). The secretary of education was a key player in its drafting, based on discussions on a wide range of topics with a core group of academics and hand-picked others.

Like its predecessor policy, *Challenge of Education* set out multiple and interdependent goals for personal, economic, social, political and cultural development (GoI, 1985:4). While the initial drafting was the work of a few, its subsequent discussion involved many. After the initial draft was discussed with the education ministers of the state governments, over half a million copies were released to the public in English and a further half million in each of the regional languages. Debates in the upper and lower Houses of Parliament, 11 national seminars and 17 sponsored seminars were accompanied by conferences and workshops of legislators, teachers, trade union leaders, students and local authorities. The responsibility of 'grass roots' discussion lay with the state governments. In a retrospective on the formulation of a new education policy the former all-India secretary wrote:

The 'challenge' document was discussed in practically every educational institution between educational managers, teachers and parents. Some state Governments went so far as to discuss the contents of the document and its implications for the new policy in cabinet meetings as well as state legislatures. Hundreds of knowledgeable and interested individuals wrote at length in newspapers and literally thousands of letters (which were documented later in 14 volumes) poured in from citizens. These urged the government to take radical measures to universalise elementary education and eradicate illiteracy on a priority basis, reorient education to give it greater relevance to societal needs and ensure that education would nurture human values and, besides strengthening the integrative elements in the pluralistic Indian society, also prepare society, through research and well deigned programmes of manpower development, to face up to the challenges of the coming decades (Sarup, 1986:126).

The process of policy formulation attracted the highest levels of political will throughout. The prime minister was keen that a new education policy be produced and placed a great deal of trust in his ministers of human resource development. Every political party was consulted. NCERT and NIEPA continued to be involved in the process. They received, collated and analysed the myriad responses to the *Challenge of Education* document. The wide-ranging discussions on the lengthy *Challenge of Education* led to the production of a relatively short (29 pages) document titled *National Policy on Education -1986* (GoI, 1986a). This was presented in April 1986 to the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the topmost authority on education, comprising union and state government ministers, educationists and voluntary organisations) and to the National Development Council (NDC), comprising the prime minister, the chief ministers of state governments, the National Planning Commission and key ministers of the union government. The policy was officially presented to both houses of parliament in May 1986.

The authors of the policy acknowledged the significance of the 1968 National Education Policy and the considerable expansion of educational facilities since then. They asserted that by 1986 more than 90% of the country's rural habitations had schooling facilities within a kilometre. A common 10+2+3 structure for education had been adopted in most states, a common curriculum scheme had been laid down, science and mathematics were included as compulsory subjects and work experience 'assigned a place of importance' (GoI, 1986a:2, para 1.6).

While these achievements are impressive by themselves, the general formulations incorporated in the 1968 Policy did not, however, get translated into a detailed strategy of implementation, accompanied by the assignment of specific responsibilities and financial and organisational support. As a result, problems of

access, quality, quantity, utility and financial outlay, accumulated over the years, have now assumed such massive proportions that they must be tackled with the utmost urgency (GoI, 1986a:2, para 1.8).

While educational opportunities had certainly expanded, the conditions under which teaching and learning took place had not improved. The Fifth AIES revealed conditions of serious overcrowding (with as many as four or five classes operating simultaneously in either one or two classrooms) in almost two-thirds of government primary schools, and found that almost half of all children to enrol in primary school failed to complete the first five years of schooling (NCERT, 1990).

Points of tension in the formulation of the policy emerged between those who promoted higher education and those who promoted elementary education, and between those who promoted elementary education and the *Navodaya Vidyalayas*, schools for talented students. One who was centrally involved in the discussions recalled:

There are a whole lot of people in this country who thought that these *Navodaya Vidyalayas* (require) a lot of money ... and that is something which we must not do. You cannot from one district where the average population is about 1.5 million just select 40 or 50 children and call them talented. We all felt this was very superficial. OK it was possible to say that the persons who will be selected would be bright but it doesn't mean that there aren't 100 times more kids who are bright. You really need to upgrade the whole system of education (interview with the author).

Another interviewee emphasised the under-utilisation of resources, political resistance and the issue of the medium of instruction.

I raised a large number of issues of non-utilisation and non-implementation, resistance, political interference, political resistance to making primary education compulsory ... The aversion to have statutory measures is the political culture that has to be fought ... the language issue was also debated. Every state wanted to have its own language to be the only language taught. So we came up with a three language formula for national integration. Hindi should be compulsory in all the states, but most of the states were not very happy. Tamil Nadu said they would not teach Hindi as a compulsory subject. (Others said) how can we have a common system of education with no common language and no common curriculum? Can there be a common curriculum for everybody in such a big and diverse country? (interview with the author).

The process of policy formulation was also subject to the micro-politics of relations between ministers and civil servants and between civil servants themselves.

### **5.3 High Educational Politics**

In a path breaking work on the social origins of education systems in Europe in the nineteenth century Archer sets out three types of politics that surround education policies and system change in education (Archer, 1981). A first type is 'broad' educational politics. These refer to the conscious and semi-organised attempts to influence:

the inputs, processes and outputs of education, whether by legislation, pressure group or union action, experimentation, private investment, local transaction, internal innovation or propaganda (Archer 1981:29).

A second type is the 'high educational politics' of interpersonal relations at governmental level and the third the 'politics of aggregation' which refers to the sum of unorganised actions of primary actors, which may or may not translate into interest group or corporate action.

While the body of this monograph addresses the broad politics of policy formulation and legislation, 'high educational politics' are also important. The 'high educational politics' of relations between the politicians and the civil servants within the ministry meant that the dynamics of political will in both formulation and implementation would fluctuate. The secretary of education was deeply involved in the writing of the initial document, *Challenge of Education* (GoI, 1985), as were the heads of the NIEPA and NCERT. They identified with it and were committed to its implementation. While the text attracted widespread support it was also by its nature provocative and implicitly critical of the government's previous attempts in education. Although the government had agreed to its publication it wanted subsequently to distance itself from it (interview with author). This 'distancing' may have influenced the course of direction of the subsequent document, the national policy itself.

Minister Pant was succeeded in 1986 by Narasimha Rao (later to become prime minister in 1991). It was Rao who headed the production of the next two policy texts that would move initial policy ideas into action - the *National Policy on Education* (GoI, 1986a) and the *Programme of Action* (GoI, 1986b). Rao was not simply a minister. He was intimately involved in the writing of those texts.

During a day's work he used to chair several groups which made contributions to the preparation of the policy and he would ask us all to prepare our respective drafts. Then he used to sit after his dinner on his computer to work on the draft and then bring it back to us in the morning to critique it and look at them. And then after we had critiqued and made our suggestion, he would consider them again late at night and what he did was finalise till it went to the prime minister and the prime minister gave about 20 hours for a series of discussions around policy and that's how it was formulated (interview with the author).

The secretary and the new minister did not always see eye to eye. According to the secretary:

He said you have left no scope for me. You have already put everything in the programme of action and the programme of action has been approved by parliament ... we both went to Moscow to attend a meeting and he didn't speak to me one word either on the way to Moscow or on the way back. But then after a while, when he realised how sold Rajiv Gandhi was on it and he wanted to be in the good books of Rajiv Gandhi, he started taking an interest (interview with the author).

A new additional secretary of education had been brought in to work exclusively on the policy sequel to *Challenge in Education*. He recalled his differences of view with the new minister and the close relations between the new minister and Rajiv Gandhi.

I think Mr Rajiv Gandhi mentioned to Mr Narasimha Rao that he wanted every rural district to have a special school - not in the sense of a school for persons with

disabilities, but special in the sense of a school for talented persons with due weightage being given to economic considerations. These were the *Navodaya* schools. Some of us were not very supportive of the idea but Narasimha Rao was clear that this had to be brought in (interview with the author).

There were personal tensions too between the secretary and new additional secretary. While the former was taking credit for, and being credited with, the country-wide national debate on education and the production of *Challenge of Education* (GoI, 1985), the new additional secretary was known to be a radical and began to play a larger role in the drafting of the subsequent *National Policy on Education* (NPE).

#### **5.4 The Policy Content**

The NPE was structured around the themes of education for equality, educational re-organisation, technical and management education, reorienting the content and process of education, the teacher, management of education and resources and review. With respect to elementary education it gave greater attention on the need for improvements to school environments (including building conditions, and the availability of drinking water and toilet facilities for both girls and boys), instructional materials, and teacher training. As the former additional secretary for education said: ‘I am particularly proud and happy about the emphasis given to primary education and gender equity in that policy’ (interview with the author).

The NPE called for a ‘child-centred’ approach and the establishment of minimum levels of learning – an agreed set of learning outcomes and competencies for each grade level – in an effort to encourage both equity and quality in primary teaching and learning (Raina, 2002:177). The policy called for the removal of disparities in education and programmes for the education of girls and women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other educationally ‘backward’ sections and areas, minorities, the handicapped and adult education and for decentralisation of education management to District Boards of Education and local communities (GoI, 1986). The policy called for the creation of a legal framework for regulating and improving the standards of teacher education through the formation of a National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). Hitherto the training of teachers was in the hands of the private sector and had left much to be desired. With respect to elementary education, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) were to be established to organise pre and in-service training for elementary teachers.

The policy proposed a national system of education. Acknowledging the difficulties of creating a national curriculum the policy proposed instead a national curricular framework which:

contains a common core along with other components that are flexible. The common core will include the history of India’s freedom movement, the constitutional obligations and other content essential to nurture national identity. These elements will cut across subject areas and will be designed to promote values such as India’s common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy and secularism, equality of the sexes, protection of the environment, removal of social barriers, observance of the small family norm and inculcation of the scientific temper. All educational programmes will be carried on in strict conformity with secular values (GoI, 1986a).

The draft policy was submitted to CABE and NDC. They accepted its content and recommended an enhancement of plans for implementation. The policy text needed to be accompanied by a detailed Programme of Action (PoA) in order to spell out recommended actions in more detail.

### **5.5 The Programme of Action**

The request for a PoA was a strong indication of high-level political will, in the sense that senior policymakers and advisers wanted a policy that would be put into action rather than one that would amount to little more than politically expedient rhetoric and ritual. Part of the process of translation from the NPE to the PoA involved the production of a *Work Book for Evolving a Program for Action for Policy Implementation* in which every policy objective and strategy was noted and commented on. By now there was considerable tension between the secretary and new minister, Narasimha Rao. They exchanged written notes and comments on each and every policy objective and, unusually, it was the bureaucrat secretary who posed the questions for the political minister rather than the reverse (interview with author).

The role of teachers in the implementation of this ambitious policy was underplayed in the policy itself and became part of the PoA only as a result a question in parliament.

Although the appearance of the Programme of Action was a new departure, it was closing the door on a horse that had already bolted. The policy itself had failed to consider a vital aspect of implementation, which was noted in the PoA only as a result of a pointed parliamentary question: how would teachers be kept abreast of this latest educational development? The then Education Minister, Narasimha Rao, committed himself to the financing of a programme which would orient teachers to the content of the policy – the Programme for the Mass Orientation of School Teachers. That this apt question had to be asked at all indicated that policy-makers had still not internalised the notion of making teachers central to any process of educational reform (Dyer, 2000:35).

Not all agreed with this view. One who had been centrally involved in the consultation process that had accompanied the production of the initial *Challenge of Education* text recalled that ‘thousands of teachers and teachers’ unions were involved in the discussion of the *Challenge*’ (interview with author).

The PoA was issued by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD) in November 1986 (GoI, 1986b). A lengthy, 200 page document, it presents a mix of policy objectives, policy rationales and sets of actions accompanied by targets. Paragraphs 20-24 for example describe the Operation Blackboard Scheme designed to:

Ensure provision of minimum essential facilities in primary schools - material facilities as well as learning equipment. Use of the word ‘Operation’ implies that there is an urgency (*sic*) in this programme, that goals are clear and well-defined, and that Government and the people are determined to achieve those goals within a predetermined timeframe.

OB envisages (i) two reasonably large rooms that are usable in all weather; (ii) necessary toys and games material; (iii) blackboards; (iv) maps; (v) charts; and (vi) other learning materials (GoI, 1986b:15-17).

An annex listed the specific items to be provided. Provisions were made for the construction of essential buildings for primary schools and village education committees were to be established to maintain buildings. Procedures for planning, funding, and procurement were outlined. Targets were set for the provision of at least one extra teacher in one-teacher schools, one of whom should be a female teacher during the Seventh Plan Period (1985-1989) and the provision of one teacher per class during the following Eighth Plan Period.

According to government servants working in the ministry at that time, there was extensive consultation with all political parties, a process that resulted in a high degree of national consensus over the policy and clarity over priorities (interview with the author).

## **5.6 Policy Implementation**

In the early years of implementation there was high level political will from the centre. But implementation of the 1986 policy was slow. The main bottlenecks lay in the lack of political will in the states and in the administrative service.

we were not able to create a similar conviction in the states, among political leaders. They really did not bother. And the bureaucracy, India's general bureaucracy, the Indian Administrative Service people, and the educational bureaucracy, they were just not bothered about this ... I was a strong protagonist for reviving the Indian education service. But that was rejected by people who believed strongly in the autonomy of the states. They are privileged to decide what kind of administrative apparatchiks would there be (interview with the author).

Resistance to the implementation of the reforms was neither active nor visible. From the perspective of central government:

we did not really encounter any opposition as such to what we set out to do. But people would not oppose anything that you say or anything that you do, but would still ensure that none of that happens (interview with the author).

Inevitably there were differences between the states in the degree of policy implementation. The states that adopted the reforms most enthusiastically were those that had valued and provided education in the past such as Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. These were also the states that were industrialising rapidly and required education personnel.

The 1986 policy comprised many elements, only some of which were evaluated systematically. The component of the 1986 policy that came to be known as the Operation Blackboard (OB) scheme has been well documented in Dyer's (2000) case study of its implementation in 30 schools in the Baroda district of Gujarat.

Although there is an overarching, unifying policy intention of moving towards UEE, there was dissent among key stakeholders as to what the route to achieve this should be, and to who should set the direction and pace of change – a political subtext (Dyer, 2000:147).

The OB scheme had three main input components – rooms, teachers and teaching-learning equipment. Single room schools were to be provided with an extra classroom to provide more

learning space for children and separated teaching space for teachers. While the policy intention was sound, not all stakeholders, especially state-level officials, shared the intention. State-level officials were faced with limited resources and extra classrooms were not always a priority.

The scheme's insistence on more physical space, however, was not very successful at countering the view at state level that an extra schoolroom is not a priority if numbers attending school are small. State officials had a different set of priorities: the State wished to allocate room funds to completing full coverage of the last villages and more difficult hamlet settlements, which still had no facilities at all (Dyer, 2000:149).

OB recommended that every elementary school should have a minimum of two teachers. Single teacher schools were extremely common in rural India and had been the subject of government-commissioned reports since independence. Little action had been taken since then. Moreover the OB proposals met with only limited success, mainly because the quality of the second teacher as well as the first was the critical element in what goes on in classrooms. In Dyer's assessment of the schools in the Baroda district of Gujarat:

More was not, therefore, necessarily better, and the real issue with regard to teachers was not their numbers, but their quality. Although the addition of a second teacher was seen as an essential input for quality improvement, the needs or characteristics of such teachers were ignored ... The majority of teachers saw their work in terms of their own teacher, rather than children learning (Dyer (2000:150).

Across the country 200,000 new posts were created for an additional teacher to be placed in one teacher schools. However in more than 50% of cases teachers were placed in schools where there were already two teachers or more. The one teacher schools were mostly in remote areas in small habitation and 'nobody wanted to stay there' (interview with the author).

The third component of OB was the provision of teaching and learning equipment (TLE) to supplement the textbook and reduce the teacher's dependence on it. A list of teaching aids was drawn up at the centre. The kits were drawn up at the centre and reflected New Delhi ideas of what an elementary school should look like. There was no consultation with practicing teachers across the country. The kits were not accompanied by training and the level of teacher capacity was overestimated. The teachers in Dyer's study:

could never make full use of the appropriate items in the kit, and some teachers made use of virtually nothing ... the blanket national scheme did not allow for local adjustments to fit the TLE within existing and projects levels of teacher capacity, and the local circumstances of schools... schools in different contexts had quite dissimilar requirements and most of them needed less complex aids than those provided (Dyer, 2000:151).

Although teacher training was not mapped out as a key component of OB it was an important part of the broader 1986 policy. In the policy rhetoric the teacher was placed at the centre of 1986 policy.

The status of the teacher reflects the socio-cultural ethos of a society; it is said that no people can rise above the level of its teachers. The government and the community

should endeavour to create conditions which will help motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines. Teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of and the concerns of the community (NPE, 1986:25).

The policy included a comprehensive programme of pre service and in-service training as well as an orientation programme for all teachers from Class 1 to Class 12. The scale of the training was enormous - half a million teachers were being trained each year on the same day(s) of the year. Initially this training was of a rather general nature and over time a second 'special orientation' programme, intended to give stronger orientation to classroom dynamics, was introduced. Four hundred District Institutes of Education and Training were established in each of India's 400 districts to conduct training.

A former director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) summed up the findings of various formal evaluations of the DIETs:

While the philosophy of the DIETs was brilliant, the implementation had suffered. The DIETs essentially were for elementary education but in order to undertake that work, the DIETS needed to collect basic data from their respective districts on teachers and students and this was supposed to form a basis for the preparation of the teacher education programme. The DIETs were supposed to do pre-service training, in-service training and refresher courses. They were supposed to develop instructional materials and undertake action research. In practice, they focused their attention on the two year pre-service training course. Why this happened was partly to do with fact that the people who staffed the DIETs were not oriented to the policy. Moreover, many of them had been sent to the DIETs by their respective states sometimes as a punishment. If the state didn't know what to do with people they sent them to the DIETs. Thirdly, almost without exception, those who were in the faculty in the DIETs had themselves being trained in secondary education. Very, very few had any experience at all in elementary education (interview with the author).

A comprehensive structure of other institutions, intended to support the improvement of the quality of teaching, was established above the level of the DIETs. This included 250 colleges of teacher education (CTEs) to train secondary teachers, of which 50 were to be upgraded to institutes of advanced studies in education (IASEs). The IASEs were intended to oversee and link up with the CTEs and DIETs. The state councils for education and training (SCERTs) were created in 1964 prior to the 1968 NPE and mirrored at state level the functions of NCERT. The SCERTs were intended to 'link up' with the IASEs, the CTEs, the DIETs and also with NCERT.

The vision set out in the NPE for these institutions failed to be realised in practice. In the view of a former director NCERT, the SCERTs became support bodies to the state government departments of education. They have not performed the academic research role anticipated by the NPE. The hoped-for synergy between the various institutions noted above did not materialise (interview with the author).

While the synergy between 'support' institutions for teacher training and educational research was slow to develop, political relations between the centre and the state bureaucracies were also fraught. Explaining the tension between the central Ministry of Human Resources Development and myriad state governments, Dyer (2000) describes how the centre trod a fine

line between 'suggesting' and 'prescribing' in an environment in which financial allocations from the centre to the states for educational expenditure were known to be constrained. OB, designed by the centre, and functioning as a 'vehicle of expression for the concurrent amendment' (Dyer, 2000:161-162), was additional to the regular workload of the state. Despite this apparent 'understanding' by the centre of the predicaments felt by the states, the centre was still critical of slow implementation by them. Although the constitutional amendment of 1976 had identified education as a concurrent subject and OB had the potential to give force to this 'concurrency', in practice the centre did not trust the states, thus ruling out the possibility of an equal partnership.

In the implementation of OB a great deal more than educational quality improvement was at stake; successful implementation of the scheme would legitimise the Ministry's new role. 'Successful', however, was implicitly not defined in terms of quality improvement but in terms of visibly getting States to achieve the numerical targets set. This tended to involve coercion more than support. The OB scheme thus reflected a dual and irreconcilable agenda. There was the overt agenda of educational changes; and there was also a more covert agenda of political manoeuvring. The presence of the second jeopardized the intention of the first, and was an important dynamic of policy implementation (Dyer, 2000:162).

To cite one case the State Government of Gujarat regarded OB as a central scheme. Rather than adopting the scheme into its state policy, it appointed an extra officer to be in charge of centrally sponsored schemes and it resented the centre's lack of consultation about needs and its dictation of the location of new buildings. Even though the aims of the centrally-designed scheme and those of the state for elementary education converged, an underlying political agenda of the state was to limit intrusion into what it considered to be its preserve. Centre-state tensions submerged the common objective of actions to achieve universal elementary education in dissent over how to execute the programme. The implementation of OB became a technical issue, its policy objective was lost and it failed to give expression to a more equal and 'concurrent' partnership between the centre and the state (Dyer, 2000:163).

A more hard hitting analysis of slow progress in the implementation of programmes of mass education in India since independence through to the late 1980s, when OB was being implemented, is offered by the political scientist, Myron Weiner (1991), whose focus of enquiry is stasis and continuity in mass education, rather than change. Why, he asks, has the Indian state *not* removed huge numbers of non school-going children from the workplace and required them to attend school? To answer the question, Weiner uses a comparative analysis of India in relation to other countries where progress in access to education has taken place, where children have been removed from the labour force and where legislation has supported increased enrolment in school. Weiner (1991) rejects the thesis that educational progress follows a rise in incomes of the poor or the demands of employers for a more educated labour force, and that reductions in child labour are a function of overall government expenditures in education and a rapid expansion of the school-age population. In contrast, he suggests that the attitudes and agency of key policy actors offer an important explanation. The stance taken by state officials, politicians, trade union leaders, voluntary agency workers, religious figures, intellectuals and the influential middle class towards child labour and compulsory education are of central importance in explaining why progress in mass education has taken place in many countries, and why, with the exception of the state of Kerala, it has not in India. He goes on to suggest that this belief system is embedded in the political culture of a society, not in economic conditions, a belief system based on the role of education in maintaining

difference between groups in a hierarchical social order, and a clear division between those 'who work with their minds and rule and people who work with their hands and are ruled' (Weiner, 1991:6). Weiner suggests that policies are constrained by neither resources, nor interest groups, nor interests of the state, but rather 'by the beliefs and values of elites that shape their political actions, that is, in India's political culture' (Weiner, 1991:6). More recently Pal and Ghosh (2007) have explored whether the strength of 'elite dominance', as measured by land holdings, explains investment and underinvestment in mass education in various states over the period 1960-1992. They suggest that a higher share of land held by the top 5% of the population was associated with lower levels of spending on education as well on total development spending, and with increased levels of total non development spending. Moreover a greater proportion of political representation by females and low caste persons in the ruling parties of state governments was not associated with increases in development and education expenditures.

A slightly different - but equally hard hitting - analysis of the reason for failures in implementation of the 1986 policy was offered retrospectively by the former secretary of education at the time the NPE and the POA were developed. He points to the tension between political and technical imperatives at the time the programme of action was drawn up.

when the 1986 National Policy of Education was drafted, the Ministry of Education brought out such a paper under the caption, 'Challenge of Education' which became the basis of discussions and the eventual formulation of the National Education Policy. When the then recently appointed Secretary of the Department of Education was pressed to prepare the policy within six months, he pleaded inability and asked to be moved elsewhere because he did not feel competent to undertake the task involved without consulting Central and State Universities, Research Institutions and also the states etc., about what could be accomplished by them. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi saw the point of the objections raised and straightaway announced that the date of the formulation of the policy was being extended by one year and that the policy would be finalised in three stages: a) Preparation and issue of the document on Problems and Prospects of Education; b) Formulation and adoption of the National Policy; and c) Preparation and issuance of a Programme of Action. It was understood and agreed that the preparation of a new policy is not enough. It must be accompanied by a detailed and practical Programme of Action (POA) by agencies who would be responsible for its implementation. The present National Policy of Education has failed to deliver the goods because when the time came for preparing a POA, the then Minister of Human Resource Development, who knew of the issues involved, decided to shirk this responsibility and allowed an ineffective POA to be prepared and issued ... We must resist the tendency to please those in power deciding a pace of policy preparation which is neither practical nor appropriate in the situation (Sarup, 2008)

Widespread consultation on policy content as well as high quality technical work at the stage of policy implementation was as important back in 1986 as it is now.

### **5.7 Towards the 1992 policy**

As the 1986 policy and OB were being implemented across the country, support for the incumbent government was waning. Rajiv Gandhi lost the elections in 1989 to a coalition government led by V P Singh. The new government appointed a committee to review the 1986 policy in 1990, one year earlier than was required by the regular policy review process.

The urgency reflected the nature of the coalition in power, which had the support of backward and minority communities and had on its agenda a contentious 'reservation policy' recommended by the Mandal Commission (Mathur, 2001:234).

The 1990 review committee was chaired by Acharya Ramamurti, an associate of J.P. Narayan whom, as we saw earlier, had opposed Indira Gandhi in the mid 1970s. The member-secretary was an additional secretary in the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The majority of members had links with higher education. Three were connected with non governmental organisations that were running schools. Mathur (2001) explains how the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi re-surfaced in the policy discourse, repeating the tension in the late 1970s and described earlier.

Acharya Ramamurti was part of the Sarvodaya movement of Mahatma Gandhi and ran large number of schools on Gandhian ideas. He was part of a group that was critical of the elitist bias in the 1986 education policy and also was one of those that promoted the integration of work and education from the primary level itself. Another influential member of the committee was Anil Sadgopal who had considerable experience in running schools for poor tribal children and had initiated several innovative methods. He shared the vision of a decentralised community based education system where the people will assert and make the system accountable to them. The ... report bore the imprint of the ideas of these two who aimed at correcting the 'elitist' aberrations of the 1986 policy (Mathur, 2001:234).

The review committee adopted a by-now familiar policy consultation process of sub-committees, co-opted members, widespread consultations, seminars, workshops and technical inputs from national research organisations. Its work was constrained by the instability of the government in late 1990. The report was tabled in both Houses of Parliament in December 1990. The government fell in 1991 and Congress was elected back in to power. The new Prime Minister was P. V. Narasimha Rao, the former minister of human resource development during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure in the 1980s. Not surprisingly the themes of the 1986 policy, in whose writing Rao had been so involved, were about to be re-emphasised. In contrast with previous committees appointed for a similar purpose, which had comprised largely educationists, especially those working in higher education, this new committee was a mix of political leaders, experts and administrators. Chaired by the chief minister and education minister of the State of Andhra Pradesh, the committee invited comment on Ramamurti's report from state governments, the Department of Education, from CIBE and from a range of officials and non-officials. The Reddy committee reported in January 1992 and found that the concerns of Ramamurti's report did not have implications for major changes in policy.

Subsequently the Adiseshiah Committee was established and reported in April/May 1992. A slightly revised National Policy on Education was produced in 1992, giving similar emphasis to the need to provide quality education to all sectors of Indian society in order to decrease social and economic inequality, and to provide adequate school facilities and improved learning environments (GoI, 1992). The 1992 National Policy is regarded by most as a minor extension of the 1986 policy and indeed is titled 'National Policy of Education 1986 with modifications undertaken in 1992'. There has been no revision to the 1992 policy since then.

The concerns with improvements in the quality of education for all sections of Indian society would also come to be highlighted within the Tenth FYDP (2002-2007) which outlines a series of ambitious goals for education. These include: enrolment of all children in schools or alternative education centres by 2003, universal completion of five years of primary schooling by 2007, universal completion of eight years of schooling by 2010, a focus on provision of elementary education of satisfactory quality, bridging of all gender and social disparities at primary stage by 2007 and upper primary stage by 2010, and universal retention by 2010 (GoI, 2002:30).

## **6. The Growth of Centrally Directed Projects**

As we have seen, the national policies of 1968 and 1986 were developed through processes led by the Government's Ministry of Education and subsequently its Ministry of Human Resource Development and involving widespread consultation at the state level. While the centre always contributed funding to the states through the planning commission process and annual incremental plan allocations, implementation responsibility lay squarely with the state authorities until 1976. From 1977, implementation responsibility lay jointly *de jure* with the state and the centre and through the 1980s and the 1990s central government became gradually to play a much more directive role in programmes for primary, through the modality of *projects*. Up to the 1980s there had been little or no foreign involvement in the planning and funding of programmes in basic education. But from the 1980s, and some years before the production of the 1986 national policy on education, a small number of foreign-funded projects, designed to improve access to and the quality of primary education, were initiated in various states. These would become the forerunners of the more expansive District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) of the 1990s and the country-wide *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) programme of the 2000s.

### **6.1 The Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project**

One of the first projects was the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (APPEP) started in 1984 through a programme funded jointly by the Government of India, the UK government and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh. Starting in eleven districts and 328 primary schools the project was planned to reach all 48,000 schools in the state. A large scale construction programme designed to increase access to schooling was accompanied by a comprehensive human resource development programme for teachers, teacher educators and education administrators, the provision of materials to support activity-based learning and professional support for teachers on a continuous basis through teacher centres (Ravi and Rao, 1994).

### **6.2 The Shiksha Karmi Project**

In the state of Rajasthan, the *Shiksha Karmi* Project (SKP) commenced in 1987 through a collaboration between the Governments of India and Sweden and the Government of Rajasthan. Literacy rates were lower than in Andhra Pradesh, especially among girls and women, and the SKP sought to counter teacher absenteeism in remote schools, increase enrolment, especially among girls, and reduce dropout. An innovative strategy was the substitution of frequently absent primary school teachers by a two resident *Shiksha Karmis* (educational workers). This approach was inspired by a small scale project run and funded locally during the 1970s by an NGO, the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), in which three experimental primary schools were run by village youth trained as they worked as teachers. Between 1978 and 1986 the experimental programme was expanded gradually to new sites with support from SWRC and other NGOs and the government of Rajasthan. The success of the small scale projects prompted the desire to expand the *Shiksha Karmi* idea on a larger scale. In 1987 foreign involvement and funding was formalised through an agreement for a 'six-year' joint venture between the governments of India and Sweden (Methi and Jain, 1994).

### **6.3 The Lok Jumbish Project**

Shortly afterwards, in 1988, the first draft of an even more ambitious project in the same state - the *Lok Jumbish* (People's Movement) Project - was drafted. With three core components - the quality of learning, community involvement and the management of education - it sought to transform the mainstream system in Rajasthan by building from it and interacting with it. Involving a politically radical strategy and complex design, the leaders of LJ saw it as 'developer, demonstrator, catalyst and transformer of the mainstream education system from the outside' (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993). Many of its ideas were drawn from SKP and its predecessors, and, like SKP, it attracted financial support from the Government of Sweden, but on a much larger scale. Like the large scale Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project before it LJ was another example of a three way relationship between the central government, the state government and a foreign agency. LJ gave substance to the 1992 National Policy of Education's declaration that the Government of India:

will, in addition to undertaking programmes in the Central sector, assist the State Governments for the development of programmes of national importance where co-ordinated action on the part of the States and the Centre is called for (GoI, 1998:45).

LJ also gave substance to the framework evolved in 1991 by the Central Advisory Board of Education for the availing of external assistance for basic education projects (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993:74-76). In the case of LJ however, the partnership involved a fourth agency - the Lok Jumbish Parishad (LJP) - a non-governmental agency based in Jaipur, Rajasthan that worked alongside the state government. Indeed, were it not for the work and drive of those who established LJP, the Lok Jumbish project would probably never have materialised, nor would some radical elements of the programme have emerged. LJ had three major components - community involvement, the quality of learning and the management of education. The component envisaged for improvements in the quality of learning was not especially radical, even if it posed implementation challenges. It involved the training of teachers and teacher educators, a curriculum and pedagogy reform led by the framework of minimum learning levels (MLL), and a system for professional support. The Programme for Community Mobilisation was more radical and involved the mobilisation of the community through public debate, the sharing of information and knowledge to create informed decisions and village household surveys to establish the numbers of children not attending schools and the reasons for non-attendance. Mobilisation involved the establishment in the village of a core group who became an activating agency for the village, the involvement of women's groups in education decision-making and the involvement of male and female adults in the design of school buildings, construction and maintenance (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993:15).

### **6.4 The District Primary Education Programme**

Already by the early 1990s the government had decided to launch the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) across seven states with support from a range of foreign donors. From an educational planning perspective DPEP represented a shift from removing supply side constraints to a greater focus on quality improvement. In 1994 DPEP was launched in the 42 mostly educationally disadvantaged districts in seven states.

The DPEP strategy was drawn in tune with the national objectives of universal access, retention and achievement of minimum levels of educational attainment with a focus

on girls and children belonging to socially deprived and economically backward sections of the society. Besides the achievement of the quantitative and qualitative targets within the stipulated period, the major thrust of the DPEP is to promote the decentralised management with active involvement of stakeholders that will have a considerable impact on the sustainability of the project beyond its life cycle (Aggarwal, 1998).

A senior administrator recalled the growing political will for basic education around this time. In contrast to some other sectors, education, and in particular universal elementary education (UEE) enjoyed consensus with respect to its value and to its need for financial investment. Since the early 1990s there has been a sustained approach from parties of all political hues in their support for UEE and the states themselves 'have been trying to outdo each other' (interview with the author). Barring some issues of governance in one or two states there has been a clear shift in the level of support for UEE. Political relations between the centre and the state are generally good, reinforcing an underlying push for reforms in UEE. Rarely are there any discordant views about how to move forward on the 'easy' elements of provisioning e.g. infrastructure. Discord revolves around how fast or slow state governments proceed (interview with the author).

Evaluations of the impact of DPEP on a range of education performance indicators suggest that disparities in enrolment and retention were reduced the most in those districts with the lowest female literacy levels. In all 42 districts the percentage increase in female enrolment was 12.9%. In the districts with very low female literacy rates the gain was 13.2% and in districts with low female literacy rates it was 16.2%. Positive change in the share of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe enrolment to total enrolment was also highest in those districts with the lowest female literacy rates. These enrolment gains were accompanied by reductions in the pupil:teacher ratio, in the pupil:classroom ratio and in repetition rates (Aggarwal, 2000)

While the centre promoted the DPEP programme, states also continued to innovate and to launch major programmes designed to support improvements in access to education. One example was the Midday Meal Programme for children in the lower primary grades introduced in Karnataka in 1995. The programme involved a dry ration of three kilograms of rice per month for each child enrolled in the school. The idea grew out of a huge grain surplus that was going to waste. Although the surplus did not continue, the scheme, once introduced, would continue. Inspired in part by a popular midday meal programme in the state of Tamil Nadu some 25 years earlier, the Karnataka scheme would become a central government initiative in 2004. Dry rations were replaced by a cooked meal and central government funding of 1.5 rupees per child per day were matched by 0.5 rupees by the states. In principle the fund covered cooking costs, fuel, pulses and vegetables, salt and *masala*<sup>6</sup>. In 2008 the programme was extended to the upper primary grades country-wide. Some 120 million children were fed on a daily basis in one million schools. Analysis of evidence generated from the PROBE survey conducted in the Northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in the late 1990s indicated the positive impact of midday meal programmes on school participation in rural areas, especially among girls (Drèze and Kingdon, 2001).

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<sup>6</sup> Spice mix

## **6.5 Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**

The generally positive perception among many stakeholders of the results of DPEP across seven states led on to an even larger nationwide programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Translated from Hindi as 'education for all movement', SSA describes itself on its official website as:

an effort to universalise elementary education by community-ownership of the school system. It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country. The SSA programme is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities to all children, through provision of community-owned quality education in a mission mode (SSA, 2010a)

In terms of the international discourse, SSA is the Government of India's main programme for the delivery of Millennium Development Goal 2, the achievement of universal primary education by 2015. In terms of the national discourse it gives substance to the 2002 constitutional amendment on elementary education as a fundamental right. Its aim is to universalise by 2010 an improved quality of education for all children in India aged between the ages of 6 and 14 (Ward, forthcoming).

Interestingly SSA's self-description on the web employs the concept of 'political will'. It describes itself as 'an expression of political will for universal elementary education across the country'. SSA has certainly enjoyed 'will' and push from the centre. A senior bureaucrat commented that since SSA was a centrally sponsored scheme, the centre was pushing it very strongly. But political will and ownership at the level of the state is also important. The source of funding is key to will and ownership at state level. During the time of earlier DPEP the centre funded 85% of expenditure and the states 15%. SSA has introduced a tapering formula such that by the end of 2011/12 the ratio should be 50-50 (interview with the author)

SSA is further described as:

- A programme with a clear time frame for universal elementary education.
- A response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country.
- An opportunity for promoting social justice through basic education.
- An effort at effectively involving the Panchayati Raj Institutions, School Management Committees, Village and Urban Slum level Education Committees, Parents' Teachers' Associations, Mother Teacher Associations, Tribal Autonomous Councils and other grass root level structures in the management of elementary schools.
- A partnership between the Central, state and the local government.
- An opportunity for states to develop their own vision of elementary education

(SSA, 2010a)

In 2001 its performance targets (on the website described as objectives) were defined ambitiously as:

- All children in school, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternate School, 'Back-to-School' camp by 2003;
- All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007
- All children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010

- Focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life
- Bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary education level by 2010
- Universal retention by 2010

(SSA, 2010a)

The Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) referred to in the first target was introduced originally in 1977 under the title of the Non Formal Education Scheme. That scheme enjoyed only limited success and was re-launched in 2000 (GoI, 2002:29). Its aim was to provide further coverage in small habitations with no schools within a one kilometre radius. The current scheme targets out-of-school children in the 6-14 age group and uses strategies such as bridge courses, back-to-school camps, seasonal hostels, summer camps, mobile teachers and remedial coaching (GoI, 2002:29). For the last several years, many of these EGS centres have been upgraded to the full status of primary schools, but concerns remain about the quality of education which they offer as well as their long-term sustainability (see Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2007:12-14).

### **6.5.1 Gender Equity in SSA**

Girls' education has been a controversial subject since at least the colonial era. Citing Sen (2002), Kumar (2005:110-111) discusses the 'easy consensus between the English officers socialised in Victorian ideals and the Indian men who articulated the logic of appropriateness of knowledge for girls' from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The education of girls received some mention in the 1968 National Education Policy 1968. 'The education of girls should receive emphasis, not only on grounds of school justice, but also because it accelerates social transformation' (NPE, 1968, Section 4). It did not, however, provide details of how this would be achieved. The NPE 1986, on the other hand, provided specific instances in which girls should receive assistance in order to stay in school, including provision of day care facilities so that older girls may be relieved of childcare duties, non-formal education programmes for girls who cannot attend whole-day schools, and emphasis on encouraging girls, who were listed for special attention alongside Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children, to attend secondary school.

The education of girls received an added boost through SSA. On the whole, initiatives for girls seem to be embedded in national programmes with other aims (midday meal, smaller distance norms for schools, etc.). Additionally a National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Education (NPEGEL) was launched as part of SSA in July 2003 to reach the 'hardest to reach' girls (SSA, 2010b). NPEGEL provides support for enhancing girls' education over and above the investments for girls' education through normal SSA interventions. Initiatives include development of a "model school" in every cluster, gender sensitisation of teachers, development of gender-sensitive learning materials, and provision of need-based incentives like escorts, stationery, workbooks and uniforms.

The scheme is implemented in 'educationally backward blocks' (EBBs) where the level of rural female literacy is less than the national average and where the gender gap is above the national average, as well as in blocks of districts where at least 5% of the population comprises Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), where the female literacy rate of these groups is below 10%, and in selected urban slums. Many states also operate incentive

schemes to increase girls' enrolment (including special scholarships, free university education, etc.). As with other state initiatives, these vary widely from state to state.

According to the most recent estimates, nearly 95% of children in the 6 to 14 age group are enrolled in school. Completion figures are difficult to estimate since cohorts entering school together are not tracked through the system and while promotion from grade to grade is, in principle, automatic, some children repeat, some drop-out and some are overage at admission. Moreover, enrolment does not tell us about daily attendance and learning achievement. In 2008 only 56.2% of Standard 5 rural children could read fluently a Standard 2 level text. Only 37% of Standard 5 rural children could recognise numbers, subtract and divide three digits by one digit (Pratham, 2009).

### **6.5.2 The Activity-Based Learning Programme in Tamil Nadu**

SSA has spawned a very wide range of initiatives for the promotion of access and quality in elementary education. One of the most promising is the Activity-based learning (ABL) programme in the state of Tamil Nadu, designed for the first four grades of elementary education. Inspired by many years of research and development in the NGO Rishi Valley programme (Rappa, undated) ABL is based on a pedagogy of graded learning materials, self-paced learning and frequent assessment by student and teacher. Starting from a modest base in 13 urban schools in Chennai in 2003 it has, since 2007, been implemented in every elementary programme across the state. It encourages increased access and retention through the quality of provision and is able to cater to the learning needs of children who are absent from school for various reasons. It encourages improvements in the quality of education through intensive teacher training, a curriculum model of graded learning, learning ladders and frequent assessment of learning, and teacher involvement in the design and production of graded learning materials (Anandalakshmy, 2007). NCERT is currently undertaking a formal summative evaluation currently<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Further information, interviews and notes from a CREATE seminar given by ABL's founding director are available at [www.lidc.ac.uk](http://www.lidc.ac.uk).

## **7. The Right to Education Bill**

The most significant change in national policy on access to elementary education in recent years was the Right to Education Bill. Although a number of states have had compulsory education acts on their statutes for many years, some from before independence, these acts had not been formulated in a way that rendered them 'justiciable' i.e. no-one could be prosecuted if those rights were not met.

In 1992, the Indian government signed the International Convention of the Rights of the Child. An important legislative spur came in 1993 when the Supreme Court ruled in the *Unnikrishnan vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* (1993 (1) SCC 645). The Supreme Court ruled that Article 45 of the Constitution which asserted the obligation of the state to provide free and compulsory education up to age of 14 should be read along with the fundamental right which asserts that everyone has the right to live life with dignity. Arguing that no one can live with dignity without education, the Supreme Court judged that it followed that education should be treated as a fundamental right. Debate and action by civil society groups gained momentum a few years later. Intellectuals mounted conferences at apex institutions and involved senior members of the judiciary, the state governments and the national government. A constitutional amendment was placed in the upper house in 1997 but the then government fell shortly afterwards and it did not progress. The subsequent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government also formulated a central legislation bill, but it was 2002 before it was debated in both Houses of Parliament (interview with the author).

In 2002, the Eighty Sixth Amendment to the Constitution provided for an act for free and compulsory education of all children in the age group six to fourteen years. Despite the constitutional provision, it took a further seven years for the act to be drafted and finally passed by parliament. In 2004, when the Indian National Congress returned to power, the task of drafting the legislation was given to the apex body, the Central Advisory Board of Education. The Bill was approved by cabinet in July, passed by the Rajya Sabha in July 2009, and by the Lok Sabha the following month. It received presidential assent on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. Under the bill, education is now the fundamental right of every child in the age range six to fourteen years. In addition, 25% of places in private schools are reserved for children of the poorest, unrecognised schools are proscribed, no donations or capitation fees may be charged by schools and schools may not conduct child or parent admission interviews. The bill gives legal force not only to the constitutional provision of 2002, but to a resolution for free and compulsory education moved in the Imperial Legislative Council by Gopal Krishna Gokhale a hundred years earlier.

The Bill's significance lies in the fact that the provision of free and compulsory education is now a legal requirement. The failure to so provide can now be contested in law. Although it remains to be seen who might be taken to court and on what grounds, these could, in principle, include parents, *panchayat* bodies, municipal bodies, district bodies, state authorities and the central government.

Several drivers lie behind this bill. A former secretary of education described them in the following terms. Democracy has enabled all people to demand education. Education is both a demand and a need. People demand education; the economy and society need education. Moreover India signed up to the Education for all (EFA) Framework of Action in Dakar, Senegal (2000) and has an obligation to it. Momentum for elementary education has been generated by the generally positive experience of the long list of experimental programmes

such as Operation Blackboard in the 1980s, DPEP in the 1990s and SSA in the 2000s. UEE enjoys commitment from all stakeholders, including political parties (interview with the author).

SSA shares the same goals as the bill, and might be described as the executive policy action that preceded and has supported the legal policy. The major difference between SSA and the Bill is the legal compulsion attached to the latter that makes education from Class 1 to 8 compulsory. Another difference is the greater level of financial resource required for the implementation the Right to Education Bill.

### **7.1. The Slow Passage of the Bill**

The passage of the bill from a landmark constitutional amendment in 2002 to a legal act in 2009 was slow and tortuous. A senior civil servant explained that the extremely slow passage of the bill through parliament was attributable to the slow process of drafting the legislation, a process that continued to be influenced by many constituencies. In a country as diverse as India the crafting of an enforceable bill applicable to all states poses many challenges. Issues of national prescriptions and definitions of in a federal structure cross-cut the division of control and powers over education between the centre and the states. While civil society groups demanded detailed prescriptions on norms of provisioning, education practitioners and civil servants preferred an evolving and phased framework for implementation. There were tensions too between civil society organisations that demanded norms on numbers of classes and numbers of teachers and many civil servants who felt that reforms on decentralisation and the management of teacher cadres were as fundamental for improvements in quality as numbers of classrooms and teachers. Some months before the bill finally went through parliament, 'the minutiae were still being slugged out over' (interview with the author).

An earlier act, no. 45 had stated that education would be compulsory up to the age of 14 and that left in some question whether it was 6 to 14 or from the age of birth to 14 years.

Some of us pointed out that while that it is a very desirable one, but we should also see that without any entry point, you cannot really implement any compulsory education. You need an entry point otherwise it is very difficult. The government can get away without providing anything (interview with the author).

A senior civil servant explained that the ambiguity over the starting age was resolved by making education a fundamental right for the 6 to 14 year age group and introducing an amendment of Article 45 to cover the zero to 6 year group. The early work of the drafting committee was passed to a high-level group comprising the minister of human resources development, the deputy chair of the planning commission, and the finance minister. But this high level group was not entirely convinced of the need for central legislation on the right to education bill. It preferred an approach by which the centre developed a model bill for the states to legislate through their own legislatures. The states resisted this encroachment on their powers and legislative competence. They expressed their concerns forcibly to the prime minister. Already by this time five years had elapsed.

In the early stages finance was a major obstacle:

We drafted it several times. It went to the cabinet, it went to the finance minister. Nobody immediately agreed. They said 'where will the money come from?' Others worked on this and said that the money requirement is not that high. The concern was that once the bill is passed there will be a lot of public interest litigations, and that will open the door for mobilisation of the civil society. The states with administrative capacity will take advantage of the bill to raise resources (interview with the author).

The division of responsibilities for the financing of education between the centre and the states posed another issue. The centre cannot legalise norms on education provision and insist that the states take over all the expenditure. The group that examined the financial implications in detail was of the view that if government was not prepared to put up the money to implement the bill, then the government would have to amend the constitution. Clearly government did not wish to take responsibility for reversing the constitution (interview with the author)

Powerful lobbies worked to resist and support throughout. The private schools resisted a legal provision to the effect that even the unaided schools would be required to admit 25% of their children from the poorer sections of society. Some parents felt that their children would be 'polluted' if poor children were allowed to join children in the private schools (interview with the author). The private schools resisted a provision to the effect that children should not be subjected to an admission test or screening of any kind and a provision that they could not charge capitation fees or accept donations. Another lobby, described by some as 'purists', felt that everything needed to guarantee an improved quality of education in a common school system (outlined many years earlier in the 1968 national policy on education) should be in place *ab initio*. The legislation was not perfect because there was no guarantee that quality education would be made available to every child and they felt that the committees that were doing the work on transforming the bill into legislation should go back to the constitutional amendment and do much more work on the amendment itself in order to realise the common school system, a set of ideas set out some fifty years earlier by the Kothari commission. Lobbies broadly in support of the bill and its legal enactment were drawn largely from among intellectual groups who in turn represented various institutions and constituencies including heads of apex education institutions and non governmental organisations.

The work of the drafting group and the legislative department began to bear fruit in late 2008 when the legal text went to cabinet again and the chairman referred it once again to the group of ministers. The group of ministers, including the minister of HRD, the chair of planning commission, and the minister of economic affairs at this time were now supportive. With elections on the horizon, the moment was opportune. But as one academic pointed out ruefully in February 2009:

We sat and then looked at it and prepared a response to the whole thing and sent it to the cabinet. The cabinet approved the bill without anything and said that it should go to the parliament. But the parliament has no time. So it has been slated, today is the last day of this parliament in fact. It will be dissolved after this ... it is not going to meet before the elections. So this is the last day of the parliament and they did not find time to really schedule it for its passage. So it's stacked, finished. So we are where we were when this new government came into power 5 years ago (2004) ... In fact the worst part of it is that it is not just where we were when the government came into power – this government ... has neither brought the legislation nor notified. So

practically there is no amendment to the constitution even. Therefore we are where we were in 1950 as far as legislation is concerned (interview with the author).

All was not lost however. Elections were held in April and May 2009 and the United Progressive Alliance led by the Indian National Congress was re-elected with a large majority. The legislation was re-slated and enjoyed smooth passage through both houses.

The effectiveness of the bill in ensuring that all children, including the poorest, girls and those from among the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will access education of reasonable quality remains to be seen. Jha and Jhingran's (2005) analysis of elementary education among the poorest and other deprived groups underlines the continuing roles of poverty and powerlessness in many parts of India in undermining the demand for an education of decent quality.

## **8. The International Dimension**

International ideas and practices in education can influence domestic policy formulation in many ways - through, *inter alia*, external funding, joint accountability mechanisms, through the policy discourse that accompanies funding, through engagement with regional and world conferences and their declarations and commitments, through the borrowing and lending of ideas and practices in education through professional associations, networks and journals, through the participation of foreigners in national and local work as consultants, advisers and delegates, through cross-border education initiatives, and through the effects of accountability systems associated with so-called global standards (Little, 2008). Here we focus on the role of external funding, mechanisms for joint review, discourses associated with external funding, engagement with World Conferences on Education and on cross border education.

### **8.1 Foreign Funding**

As described already, the involvement of foreign development partners in primary education programmes began to grow from the mid 1980s. The UK government's Overseas Development Administration<sup>8</sup> was instrumental in shaping and supporting a large scale primary education programme in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The Swedes were similarly influential in Rajasthan in the 1980s and early 1990s, and the Dutch in Uttar Pradesh with the *Mahila Samakya* project focused on the empowerment of women. Over time, lessons from these state-implemented initiatives were consolidated into the centrally driven District Primary Education Programme from 1993, involving more states, more districts and more funders.

Colclough and De (2010) describe the course of aid in general and aid to education in India since the 1950s. In terms of Official Donor Assistance (ODA) for all sectors worldwide, India ranked in the top three recipients of net aid until the late 1980s. However, given the size of India's population, her per capita aid receipts have been and continue to be very low. Currently India's main development partners are the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations agencies, the UK, the USA, Japan, Germany, Russia and the European Commission (EC). In 2007 for example net ODA was approximately 0.1% of India's Gross National Income (GNI). From the perspective of the donor assistance community the volume of aid to India is large and significant; from the perspective of Indian development policy community the volume is small and insignificant (Ward, forthcoming).

Significant increases in foreign aid to elementary education occurred during the 7<sup>th</sup> FYDP (1985-1990) and continued into the 8<sup>th</sup> FYDP (1992-1997). Most recently the involvement of World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the EC in the nation-wide SSA has been very significant. Together these three development partners have contributed finance over three 3-4 year phases through a formula designed to add to rather than substitute for government and state expenditure on basic education (Ward, forthcoming).

While DFID was an early entrant to aid to the elementary school sector, the World Bank was a relatively late entrant. Even then, the bank's entry was protracted and resisted by many. The Bank had shown interest in offering assistance to education since 1987 but this was resisted by senior bureaucrats, especially senior members of India's elite administrative service. A

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<sup>8</sup> Now known as the Department for International Development (DFID)

former and powerful all-India secretary of education recalled the 'high politics' of the relationship.

The World Bank decided that they wanted to play a role in Indian education. For a variety of reasons I did not think that we wanted the World Bank to come in and play around with primary education in India. On the other hand I was keen that they invested some money in our polytechnical education which they did also. But I mean the amount of money which the external agencies can put is very small ... During the height of DPEP the World Bank, DFID and the Government of Netherlands and the European Union - their combined support was very little ... But they wanted to influence the system of education. What they did not realise is that they cannot in fact influence it. Nobody can. I was not willing to have the bank (involved). This was my personal stand and Mr. Narasimha Rao was strongly supportive of my stand. But subsequent ministers were not equally supportive but I was willing to fight with them and generally got my way (interview with the author).

Other senior officials shared his view (interviews with the author). The World Bank was seen as a domineering partner with a hands-on management style in project design and management, having a tendency to offer universal prescriptions irrespective of country context, to use expatriate consultants irrespective of need and to set up project organisation structure in parallel with the mainstream of government administration (Ayyar, quoted in Colclough and De, 2010). For its part, the bank argued, unconvincingly, that ownership and capacity-building were essential for project sustainability. Nonetheless the bank continued to step up the pressure and high level talks were held between the World Bank president and India's minister of education during the Jomtien Education for All Conference in 1990 (Colclough and De, 2010). Although the Jomtien initiative had been spearheaded by UNICEF, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNDP, the bank's financial power rendered it a dominant partner in subsequent years. Given the size of the EFA challenge in India - the country with the largest number of out-of-school children - the bank had to engage with India. Another former secretary recalls:

Right from 1987, the Bank was extremely keen to have primary education in its Indian loan portfolio. Successive chiefs of its Delhi office, successive Indian Executive Directors, and a stream of distinguished visitors from Washington, tried to persuade the Indian government to include primary education in the Bank's lending portfolio. Large-scale inflow of external resources began in 1993 with the decision of the Indian government to avail IDA funding for elementary education (Ayyar, 2008).

On the surface there was little difference in emphasis between the World Bank and Government of India's policies on primary and elementary education. Increases in access to primary education and improvements in quality were shared objectives. But the Government of India did not see a role for the bank. What may have tipped the balance of negotiation, and made World Bank entry to the arena of primary education possible, was India's foreign exchange crisis and the need for increased external financial support. The government requested a loan from the bank. In return the bank offered a loan on the condition that it would be used to support basic education in five districts in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Even then it took a full two years for the World Bank, the Government of India and the Government of the State of Uttar Pradesh to agree a project design (Colclough and De, 2010). Throughout the 1990s external resources for elementary education increased and by 2001-02,

the share of external funding in the central plan expenditure on elementary education had reached a peak level of almost 34% (Ayyar, 2008).

Throughout the 1990s the political and economic context in which external agencies engaged with Indian education would change. Despite the foreign exchange crisis in 1993, the Indian economy grew rapidly and external aid fell as a proportion of GDP. Scepticism grew about the need for aid when India herself was now becoming a provider of aid and an aspirant member of the UN Security Council. Constitutional amendments in 1992 devolved school management responsibilities to block, district and village level, the 8<sup>th</sup> FYDP shifted its development focus from 'educationally backward' states to districts; and conditions for the use of international aid were stated were revised in terms of 'additionality' and 'innovation' (Colclough and De, 2010).

India's nuclear testing programme in May 1998 led to protests from a number of development partners, with major repercussions in some states. For example, the Swedish government's SIDA withdrew its support in Rajasthan where they had worked for over ten years. SIDA's work in Rajasthan had not been easy and their funding of the Lok Jumbish programme had required considerable levels of trust in the programme leader on the part of a handful of Swedish officials (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993). By 1998 mutual trust between all parties in Lok Jumbish was yielding fruit, making the abrupt departure of the Swedes all the more unsettling for those responsible for programme implementation. A former Indian director of the Lok Jumbish programme recalled what happened after 1998 with some regret - and disdain.

Lok Jumbish ... gradually began to disintegrate after Sweden discontinued its support ... they had a reason like India experimenting with the atomic bomb and that was enough to put them off. There was a change of government in Rajasthan. The government which came in late 1998/early 1999 did not want Lok Jumbish ... to function as an autonomous organisation. They wanted it to function more as a department of the government. DFID supported Lok Jumbish after the Swedes left ... Regretfully afterwards DFID decided to pitch in with World Bank and put everything that they had into DPEP so they ceased to play any role other than being a side kick of the bank (interview with the author).

Overall, the period from 1990-2002 saw a shift from state-based innovative projects to large scale centrally-directed programmes with considerable levels of foreign interest and financial support.

## **8.2 Joint Review**

In recent years donor efforts have been directed to support centrally-directed programmes and to develop joint monitoring and accountability procedures. The idea of joint reviews involving donors and Indian officials working side by side grew in the context of DPEP. Ward (forthcoming), who ran DFID programmes for education from Delhi for several years provides an upbeat assessment of the role of development partners in the SSA programme implemented over recent years. Acknowledging that development partners have changed a number of their practices, he claims that they now work together well and with the government to achieve an alignment of aid with India's development goals at national and sectoral level. He claims further that external support for India is 'aligned behind the GoI's own objectives; is utilising and strengthening local systems; is fully harmonised; is focused

on results; and is subject to mutual accountability' (Ward, forthcoming). External funds are pooled with government resources and there is no parallel financing. Procedures are harmonised through a Memorandum of Understanding with common formats, withdrawal claims, joint review missions, minimising transaction costs in the process. A senior Indian civil servant agreed with assessment. While there are now many more jointly owned processes - for funding, review and accountability - there remained some areas of friction, especially in matters of financial regulation and procurement regulation. Moreover there is also only grudging acceptance from some agencies of the central role in education reform of decentralisation (interview with the author).

### **8.3 Discourses on Primary Education, Learning and Quality**

If the broad objectives of the donor community concerning primary education are now aligned with GoI objectives, views on the overriding objective of education, as between economic growth and social justice, may have diverged.

In 1997 the World Bank set out its perspective on the 'remaining challenges' in primary education in India. Based on a major collaborative programme of research with the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Indian research institutions and scholars, but written by a World Bank team, the specific challenges were identified as improving access and efficiency; enhancing learning achievement, especially in rural schools, reducing the gaps in enrolment, improving retention and achievement, especially among girls, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the rest of the child population, improving teachers' performance to perform effectively in small rural schools, improving the quality of textbooks and the efficiency of their production, building managerial and institutional capacity; and increasing financing for primary education (World Bank, 1997).

Appealing to the benefits of primary education that 'launched the take-off of the rapidly growing economies of East Asia' (World Bank, 1997:1), the bank asserted that India's low educational achievement remains sub optimal. India 'has not yet reached the critical threshold where benefits are greatest and high economic growth rates are sustained' (World Bank, 1997: 1). And whilst averring that political support for primary education had never been higher in India (World Bank, 1997:27) there remained a need for a better understanding of the private and social benefits of primary education. The purpose of primary education was framed in terms of economic growth and the participation of the poor in the benefits of that growth.

Universal primary education of good quality is key to boosting economic growth while also improving equity in India's liberalizing economy. Completing a good-quality primary education and acquiring basic skills will be essential in enabling India's poor to participate in growth and benefit from health and family welfare services. In the medium term more and better primary education for girls will help families realise their desired size, which will improve family health and slow population growth. And slower population growth will make it easier for states to mobilize the resources needed to improve and expand educational opportunities not only in terms of the final year of primary, improving the quality of schooling, through improved teacher training, textbooks and instructional materials and physical conditions (World Bank, 1997:24).

Most senior Indian policymakers acknowledge that the themes of the Education for All Conference held in Jomtien, Thailand mapped well onto Indian policy objectives. The Indian policy objective of universal elementary education was largely home-grown (interviews with the author). More critical than the policy discourse was the growing availability of foreign funds that made it possible to fund some of the aspirations set out in the UEE framework. In large measure the foreign funders, especially the World Bank, the European Commission, DFID and UNICEF, had worked in the same direction as the Indian government's aspirations. As well as resources, these funders provided encouragement. The money itself was less important than the confidence it gave to those working at state level and who were trying to move UEE in a particular direction (interview with the author).

If donors, and the World Bank in particular, have been perceived by some Indian policymakers as accommodating gradually to Indian national policy objectives, Indian academics have been quick to blame the donor community for its baleful influence on the discourse on the policy objective of improved 'quality'. Recent issues of the journal *Contemporary Education Dialogue* present a number of arguments and assertions on this theme.

Sarangapani (2010) suggests the management-accountancy approach of western donor agencies to quality, as manifested most recently in SSA, distracted attention from the proper meaning of the quality of education. While discussions of quality should properly address the aims of education and issues of curriculum, pedagogy and learning, the management-accountancy approach had reduced it to a minimalist conception based on learning achievements. The critical turning point appears, in Sarangapani's analysis, to have been the introduction of minimum levels of learning (MLL) guidelines linked with the 1986 policy on education. Before 1986, she suggests, the policy texts highlighted the importance of reforming children's school experiences away from passive learning, rote and examination oriented teaching and poor textbooks, dull classrooms and routine based teaching methods. But these policies did not crystallise programmes for action around the theme of quality. The pre-occupation of education goals at that time was a concern about how education could contribute to an inclusive, integrated and egalitarian society.

Clearly the State was committed to transforming a colonial system so as to serve the needs of an emerging democracy. The central idea was to reform the system to support a social reform agenda (Sarangapani, 2010:43).

The committee that created the MLL saw its efforts as equivalent to specifying quality and arising from three concerns - accountability, school improvement and ensuring the achievement of minimum standards of a government schooling system. This was not a completely home grown idea since the committee's head 'was a student of Benjamin Bloom, an influential leader in the area of student assessment which became popular in the United States during a period when bureaucratic monitoring and accountability of the public schooling system began to take shape' (Sarangapani, 2010:45). While the achievement of the MLL was central to the post 1986 strategy, it crystallised in the DPEP programme of 1993, a programme in which, as we have seen above, many external donors were involved.

It was in the DPEP guidelines that 'quality' first appeared as a specific independent dimension of the education system, taking its place alongside access and retention and forming a part of the planning process as an objective to be achieved. In this

document the idea of 'quality' was specifically linked to 'ensuring essential learning' (Sarangapani, 2010:45).

Sarangapani goes on to suggest that the concept of 'quality', as it appeared in operational plans of DPEP and SSA, became separated from ideas which are central to the true meaning of quality - reforms of pedagogy, of curriculum, or textbooks and of the role of the teacher. Moreover, the *de facto* debate on quality is about education that is provided for the poor, the middle classes having opted out of the public education system. This is not to suggest that Sarangapani views all foreign involvement in policy discourse and action as necessarily linked with a learning outcomes approach. She describes in a rather more approving manner the much earlier APPEP, funded by ODA and involving British educators, as a programme that had engaged with pedagogy through extensive curriculum development, capacity building and human resource development. This view of APPEP was also shared also by senior policymakers as they reflected on the involvement of external agencies in primary education (interviews with the author).

In this author's view some of Sarangapani's claims are exaggerated. First, to suggest that the term quality was absent from the Indian policy discourse prior to 1986 is to ignore much of the work of the National Commission on Education (1964-66), the National Policy on Education, 1968 and the writings of senior educators and education planners. For example, in the Resolution of the Government of India (No F.413 (3) 64-E.1 Ministry of Education, dated 14 July 1964) to appoint the National Education Commission it was noted:

Qualitative improvements in education have not kept pace with quantitative expansion, and national policies and programmes concerning the quality of education, even when these were well conceived and generally agreed to, could not be implemented satisfactorily (Ministry of Education, 1964).

In the commission's report great stress was placed on the role of the teacher in the determination of the quality of education:

Of all the factors which determine the quality of education and its contribution to national development, the teacher is undoubtedly the most important. It is on his personal qualities and character, his educational qualifications and professional competence that the success of all educational endeavour must ultimately depend ... teacher education, particularly in-service education, should receive due emphasis (NPE, 1968; section 4.2).

Even before the commission's work, writing about 'quality' had flourished. In his 1963 lecture on this theme of 'Quantity and Quality', J. P. Naik had written:

At present, no educational problem is exercising the public mind so much as the rapid expansion of education accompanied by a deterioration in quality. I welcome this growing concern for quality although I do not share all that is said about deteriorating standards, especially at the elementary stage. I also question the popular assumption, which seems to underlie so much of the discussion, that quality and quantity are mutually exclusive and that you can only have one or the other... the basis of the contradiction is purely financial... at the elementary education stage at least, there is no question of *either* quality *or* quantity. We must have both - every child must be at school and he (sic) must have good education (Naik, 1965:22).

In the NPE of 1968 the focus on the teacher was framed within a conception of the aims of education oriented towards economic and cultural development, national integration and a 'socialistic' pattern of society. A transformation of the system was required that would relate education 'more closely with the life of the people; a continuous effort to expand educational opportunity; a sustained and intensive effort to raise the quality of education at all stages; an emphasis on the development of science and technology; and the cultivation of moral and social values' (NPE, 1968:38, Para 3).

In his 1963 lecture, Naik recognised that the apparent tension between quantity and quality might be addressed in one of three ways. In the first there is 'an unrelenting stand on quality'. All existing and new schools are required to meet the same standards. This approach keeps costs per pupil high and expansion occurs only as additional funds become available. In the second approach quality is compromised. Unit costs are low and the priority is enrolment over quality. When all are enrolled quality and costs can be raised. The third approach is a compromise between the first two, with simultaneous rises in enrolment and quality 'by dividing the available resources between qualitative and quantitative programmes in some suitable proportion' (Naik, 1966).

Discussions about quality in Indian policy circles are nothing new, even if its terms have changed over time. What is new is the attempt to capture its meaning through measurement. It is certainly true that the indicators movement in education worldwide strives to capture the essential ingredients of education inputs, processes and outputs. It is also true that officials working in external agencies often find it difficult to engage in discussions with those in national agencies about and interventions in issues of curriculum aims, pedagogy, medium of instruction and values, important questions of education quality that are guarded jealously by internal stakeholders. If dialogue on these questions of quality is constrained then it would not be surprising that internal and external discourses diverged. It was precisely because one external agency, DFID, was concerned about the meaning and measurement of quality in Indian classrooms, that it commissioned Robin Alexander to explore the meaning of quality in the context of SSA. Echoing Sarangapani's concerns Alexander contends that the EFA discourse internationally and in India has moved from a commitment to quality to its measurement without adequate consideration of what quality entails, particularly in the vital domain of pedagogy (Alexander, 2008). While recognising strengths in NCERT's framework for the monitoring of quality he goes on to suggest criteria by which systems to monitor pedagogy might be developed further. Alexander, who has researched in Indian classrooms (Alexander, 2001), worked at NCERT and served on many DPEP and SSA review missions, found that while his work generally is well regarded there his interventions on the particular issue of quality have tended to receive a rather less favourable hearing (Alexander, personal communication, September 2009).

Velaskar (2010) suggests that there is currently a decisive shift taking place in the discourse about quality in the Indian context.

Increasingly the quality of educational systems is being compared internationally ... a global discourse on quality shapes national policy change. 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 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 (Velaskar, 2010:60-61).

Kumar's (2010) analysis goes further and attributes the contemporary character of the international policy discourse about quality, and, by implication, that part of the Indian discourse influenced by it, to the 'need to regulate the flow of dependable labour, expertise and knowledge in the globalised economy' (Kumar, 2010:10). The need to monitor both access and quality within and across countries is associated with a geographical expansion of markets of both goods and labour.

In India, the policy focus on universalisation has conveyed the message that education cannot be regarded as a privilege as it once was ... This message provides support for the argument that universal access must mean education of comparable quality for all children ... In the global context, such a plea for quality - along with universal access - has acted as a moral stick for 'developmentalism', which can be described as an ideology to promote the lifestyle of the developed West. (Kumar, 2010:9-10).

Kumar presents conceptual glimpses of what a policy discourse on quality should contain. For Kumar, quality is about the imparting of skills and the induction of dispositions. Quality entails a degree of learner control over his or her growth and a degree of teacher autonomy to respond to the learner, rather than to demands from above, from parents or from the market. Equality is an aspect of quality and quality for socially disadvantaged groups such as girls, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe children who require 'specific curricular and pedagogic devices;' to address the deeper sources of inequality beyond the school (Kumar, 2010). Somewhat curiously in an article addressing these issues, Kumar offers little inkling of how these conceptual glimpses might be transformed into large-scale operational programmes designed by Indian policymakers, preferring instead to bemoan the influence of external agencies on the discourse about quality in India.

Such a programme is currently being implemented, a programme that arose out of a national debate about quality and a revision of the National Curriculum Framework. In a CREATE lecture given in London in 2007 Kumar explained that when the National Curriculum Framework National Steering Committee began its work (in 2004) to revise the framework, the quality debate:

made many feel uncomfortable, even as it made many others feel comfortable ... during the 1990s the issue of access had become separated from the issue of quality. During the DPEP program it seemed as if what we can or should aspire for immediately was access to all ... Quality was a concern to be addressed when access to all has been achieved. In some way the discourse was shaped by a budgetary constraint. In the NCF we felt we needed to take cognizance of this. I take the position that we need to understand that knowledge cannot be transmitted ... knowledge can only be constructed by the child. The kind of constructivism that NCF speaks for is not rooted purely in psychology. It is also rooted in India's very complex hierarchical, divided, politicized and fragmented society. The experiences of children outside

school are important in the attempt to build a pedagogic situation, quality is about essential relationships which define educational progress between the teacher and the learner. In textbooks, syllabi and various other pedagogic material quality needs to be seen as the exercise of imaginative decision-making. Quality means interactive textbooks ... a new generation of textbooks which are not just new books but a new kind of book where the idea of knowledge is defined as something that will happen not in the pages of the textbooks but in the child's mind so that the textbooks are not heavy on information ... (Kumar, 2007).

The initial debate led to a process of widespread consultation during 2005 and to a revision to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF). This is currently under implementation.

#### **8.4 World Conferences**

Reports written by the Government of India in advance of World EFA conference in Dakar, Senegal held in 2000 refer to the positive influence of the global movement on national policy and progress. For example the Government of India's Education for All Year 2000 assessment refers to the *fillip* given to India's own policies on EFA by the Jomtien World Declaration.

The last decade of the century definitely marks a significantly positive note in the history of basic education in India. Though the constitution of the country had made a commitment to providing free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14, the task of providing basic education for all received high priority with concrete plans of action mainly after the National Policy on Education was launched in 1986 and revised in 1992. The educational priorities enunciated by the National Policy on Education 1986 have continued through the 90s. This has been reflected in the higher allocation of resources as well as in terms of clearly defined strategies to achieve the goals of education for all. The World Declaration on Education for All – 1990 adopted in Jomtien, undoubtedly, gave further fillip to the national commitment for reaching basic education for all children. The Jomtien Declaration together with several positive developments within the country brought to the central stage the need for viewing basic education as a fundamental right of every citizen. India is one of the few countries where during the stabilization phase of structural adjustment, expenditure on education has been stepped up (NIEPA, 2000).

The Year 2000 EFA assessment went on to describe how the Jomtien Declaration and Framework for Action to meet Basic Learning Needs were considered and endorsed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the apex education policy formulation body in 1991 and 1992. CABE viewed the World Declaration as an affirmation of the Indian national policy, called for more financial inputs to achieve the EFA goals and created guidance on the specific uses to which external funds should be put. The national policy goals, targets and strategies were subsequently incorporated into successive Five Year Plan proposals. While the eighth FYDP (1992-1997) referred to the goal of universalisation of elementary education, the term 'Education for All' was employed in the ninth FYDP (1997-2002).

In view of India's importance to the donor community in the 1990s as an aid recipient, and the importance of primary education within the EFA agenda promulgated at Jomtien, one might imagine, from an outside perspective, that the Jomtien EFA discourse had a strong influence on the Indian policy discourse in education. While the claims made in the year 2000 assessment suggest that the influence was indeed strong, the word *fillip* used in the quotation

above is probably the most apt for, as we saw earlier, the goals of the 1986 national policy had anticipated the goals set out for primary education at Jomtien by several years.

One seasoned observer provided a detailed view of how, over time, the EFA discourse has entered the Indian policy discourse and how it has been used selectively to justify, promote or defend ideas already circulating in the national discourse.

It has taken quite a long time since 1990. (You need to understand) that the documents that are prepared for international agencies not necessarily are done by the people who actually do things for the country at the national level. There may be an overlap between them professionals, technocrats like us but basically within the ministry these are two different situations. But it would be too optimistic to say that they are really influencing our policy making, since this is driven by the large programmes which go by their own momentum. Occasionally when it is convenient we follow the international discourse. Although we had set the goal for universal elementary education as 2011/12, when we found that it is difficult – we have said that maybe 2015 is convenient ... I don't think there is a big impact of all these conferences on what is happening in the country among policymakers. But in the civil society circles, in the professional circles, yes, they have. A few years ago if I was speaking to somebody in any university I also had to explain what EFA was. But today more or less people know what EFA is. But the Ministry are ... not bothered. They bother only when there is – when the Global Monitoring Report is published and when it is criticised that India is not doing – then they say things. But they stop there. Again they continue their business as usual (interview with the author).

In view of India's strong commitment to primary education in the 1986 policy it is instructive to ask whether interaction with Jomtien was two-way. Did the Indian experience make a significant input into the international discourse surrounding Jomtien? At Jomtien it was clear that several senior policymakers from a handful of countries had been 'handpicked' to play key roles during the conference. A deputy minister from Ghana acted as a rapporteur (Little, 2010), while the Indian secretary of education acted as spokesperson for the Asia regional conference that had preceded Jomtien. Asked whether Indian national policy had influenced Jomtien in any way, he replied, candidly:

I don't suppose that our policy impacted Jomtien in any way. But there was a kind of upsurge in favour of EFA almost everywhere. The Indian education policy is in tune with that kind of thing but Jomtien came a few years *after* that, but no our policy did not impact – except to the extent that I was somewhat prominent in that Jomtien meeting. I was asked by a very senior Japanese educationist to become the spokesperson for the Asian conference. But that didn't really mean very much because Jim Grant (the Head of UNICEF at that time) was a personal friend of very old vintage. So it was good. One enjoyed dealing with him. There has been a lot of emphasis on universalisation of primary education in India. But I don't suppose that it is the result of the Jomtien conference. It may have something to do with education policy but that's an area about which most Indian people are very articulate, very committed, show a lot of commitment in speech - but are as neglectful as ever as far as deeds are concerned (interview with the author).

## **8.5 Cross border education**

A senior official described a shift in the policy discourse in terms of the more aggressive demand from the domestic system for information about what is happening in the rest of the world. Compared with 10-15 years ago there is a greater openness to learning from elsewhere. External agencies are seen as bodies that can provide access to international experience, to the funding to travel overseas and to access to technical cooperation. Greater openness is linked with a sense of security and a greater familiarity with some of the changes in India with which external agencies have been associated. At the same time the external agencies themselves seemed to have a new understanding of India and a greater realisation that Indians will take what they want from ideas and they will make the adaptations that they want. India's rapid economic growth during the 1990s and 2000s must also lie in the background of this two-way shift in perception. India is a rapidly rising world economic power (interview with the author).

## **9. The Drivers and Inhibitors of Policy Implementation: 1990-2010**

The most comprehensive assessments of progress in access to education, and in the EFA goals more generally, are offered by the EFA 2000 Assessment Report and in the EFA Mid Decade Review (NIEPA, 2000; NUEPA, 2008). The EFA 2000 assessment begins by underlining India's diversity and the conditions under which basic education operates, rendering an overall assessment of progress almost impossible.

One can at most characterise the progress as a mix of considerable success coupled with yet unresolved riddles ... improvement in the provision of basic education facilities in the country has been a gradual process ... A major step forward ... is to make primary education practically available at the doorsteps of the children ... by creating institutional facilities in smaller habitations with the help of the local community moving away from the traditional norms of distance and population size (NIEPA, 2000).

Based on evidence from four northern states - Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh - the PROBE report sets out a more devastating picture of education in those states where the record of access to elementary education has, historically, been poor. It highlights huge and continuing disparities by region, socio-economic status, caste, tribe and gender, slow growth in the rate of improvement in literacy compared with the rate of growth in population (PROBE, 1999). The effects of household resources, parental motivation, returns to child labour, school quality and caste membership on participation in primary schooling in rural areas remain strong, especially among girls (Drèze and Kingdon, 2001).

In 1990, access to enrolment and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning faced five main challenges.

- access to basic education for the unreached segments and uncovered habitations
- qualitative improvement in content and processes of education; to make them more responsive to learning needs of individuals -children, youth and adults, families, community and development in different sectors of social and economic life.
- consolidation and newer orientation wherever required in different areas of education through innovative programmes and changed role of educational personnel.
- community participation in education; making education a people's movement.
- evolving effective and efficient management structures in education

(National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2000)

### **9.1 Drivers**

The drivers and inhibitors of progress in access to basic education in India over the period 1990-2010 are various. The following analysis draws on the PROBE Report (1999), reports on Education For All (NIEPA, 2000; NUEPA, 2008), from the CREATE Country Analytic Review for India (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2007), from other Indian researchers and from interviews with senior policy implementers during this period.

### **9.1.1 Technical**

Technically the planning and implementation approach was simultaneously holistic and targeted. Holism stressed the linkages between pre-school, primary education, non-formal education and adult education on the one hand and linkages between education and national concerns such as nutrition, health care, environment, small family norms and life skills education on the other. The targeted approach involved a special focus on deprived groups, including girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (NUEPA, 2000).

A set of ‘minimum levels of learning’ (MLL) were designed to raise awareness among teachers and teacher educators about the expected learning outcomes to be achieved by all children in primary schools. Alongside in-service training, teachers were also supported through District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETS), through Block Resource Centres (BRCs) and through Community Resource Centres (CRCs). But equally important was the nature of the innovation inside the classroom.

Did it have the ability to excite the imagination of teachers in particular and parents? If it did and if children did in fact learn better and if they did in fact enjoy being in school this would have been motivating in itself (interview with the author).

As we saw earlier, not all educators viewed the MLL as a positive development for Indian classrooms and by the mid 2000s NCERT was recommending a move away from the MLL and to a new form of learning assessment embedded within a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Nonetheless, as a technical approach, the MLL focussed teachers’ and teacher educators’ attention on learning outcomes and the possibility of tailoring teaching to them.

Technical measures, such as school mapping and micro-planning, designed to promote community empowerment and ownership of schools have also been credited as drivers towards progress (NUEPA, 2000).

### **9.1.2 Human Resources**

Increases in numbers of teachers and major programmes for in-service training of teachers have been major drivers in the expansion of access to education and in changes in classroom practices. Leadership offered by key actors and a willingness of actors at the state level to respond to initiatives from the centre were also important drivers of change (interview with the author).

Programmes that empowered teachers were particularly effective in some states. Examples cited frequently by interviewees were the *Nali Kali* programme in the state of Karnataka and the Activity-Based Learning Programme in the state of Tamil Nadu. Both programmes involved curriculum restructuring, materials development, changes in teaching and learning practices and the use of multigrade teaching. In each case the programme was initiated and supported by strong administrators and implemented in their initial stages by small groups of teachers. In both cases the inspiration for change in pedagogy was drawn from the work of an Indian NGO, the Rishi Valley Education Centre<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> For more detail on these programmes see:

[http://indiagovernance.gov.in/files/nali\\_kali\\_innovations\\_in\\_primary\\_education\\_in\\_karnataka.pdf](http://indiagovernance.gov.in/files/nali_kali_innovations_in_primary_education_in_karnataka.pdf)

### 9.1.3 Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development has been substantial. Infrastructure development has been of particular interest to politicians. Local politicians enjoy opening new schools in local areas. New schools are visible and enable politicians to 'gain currency among their constituencies' (interview with the author).

### 9.1.4 Administration/Management

During the period in question a number of changes were made in the administration and management of education. In each state a Department of Primary Education was created, mirrored at national level by the creation of a Department of Primary and Mass Education. Parastatal bodies linked with specific EFA projects were created to facilitate flows of funds and manage specific activities. These were judged to have been effective. More particular administrative reforms, concerning planning norms on distance from home to school and size of population facilitated the establishment of schools closer to the homes of marginalised populations (NUEPA, 2000).

Of greater significance has been the gradual process of decentralisation on two fronts. During the 1990s the district, rather than the state, was adopted as the unit for education planning. By the mid 2000s, and in recognition of continuing disparities within districts, the block (with on average 300 elementary schools) has been adopted as the unit of planning in educationally 'backward' areas. A second plank of decentralisation has been the devolution of political powers to three levels below that of the state. Under the *panchayat* system bodies are elected at district, block and village level. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the constitution have enhanced the powers and involvement in education of these local bodies, community organisation and voluntary agencies.

While decentralisation policy is a driver of reform in there has been considerable variation between the states in the extent and speed of decentralisation in practice. While there appears to be a general willingness to devolve, how fast and how much a state devolves can be critical to the success of a reform. Officials in some states resist decentralisation to the panchayat bodies, viewing them as lacking the maturity to handle the administrative and financial responsibilities involved. At the same time some state legislatures are unwilling to hand over some of their 'turf' to the local bodies. Clearly state legislatures do not wish to lose the power that goes with their control. No-one likes to lose power (interview with the author).

Alongside a gradual decentralisation of powers from the state to the district level has been a concomitant centralisation of some powers in central government and, as we saw above in Section 8, the mediation by central government of support from external agencies to states.

... the proactive manner in which the Government of India has acted following the adoption of the National Policy on Education 1986 stands out as a landmark innovation in educational policy. This changed Centre-State framework of action has virtually made the Central Government the prime mover in designing and implementing development initiatives in elementary education in many states... This

relationship has got further reshaped as external aid agencies have also come to claim an important place in the partnership framework involving the Central as well as the State Governments (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2007:1)

### **9.1.5 Advocacy**

The mass media and a campaigning mode were used to advocate reform in education (Dighe, 2002). In some cases a mission mode has been adopted at community level through district literacy committees, Village education committees and parent-teacher associations. Reductions in the enrolment gap between girls and boys are attributed in some areas to advocacy campaigns. The National Literacy Mission has resulted 'in increased demand for elementary education, on the one hand, and substantially enhanced the role of non-state actors in provisioning of elementary education and support services in the country, on the other' (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2007:1). The voices of non governmental organisations grew from strength to strength and, *inter alia*, called on government to move the Right to Education Bill through Parliament and to pay ever more attention to the needs and rights of Dalits.

### **9.1.6 Funding**

Funding has also played an important role. Plan expenditure increased during the period 1990-2000 and, as we saw in Section 8, funds from foreign sources increased substantially over the period. Since 2000 the funding position has improved even more. Birth rates are falling in several states reducing the demand for school places. The fast growth of the economy in recent years has generated resources for development domestically. The educational cess (*Prarambik Shiksha Kosh* – 2% of major central taxes) has accrued substantial sums for elementary education.

This is indeed a far cry from what prevailed 15 years ago with dwindling foreign exchange reserves and increased need for seeking external assistance ... one could safely say that lack of finances is not likely to be a serious obstacle in marching towards EFA goal (NUEPA, 2008).

### **9.1.7 Political Will**

Political Will also received a specific mention in the EFA 2000 assessment via growing public awareness and demands made on the polity by civil society. Civil society has mobilised public opinion and promoted basic education programmes. Civil society action, combined with public awareness has attracted political attention for EFA. The EFA assessment speaks of a 'positive political ambience' in the country, manifested through the legislative measures for the right to education, through increased allocations of finance for primary education and through measures in some states taken to decentralise control to the district level and to school level bodies. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER Rural) for 2008 speaks of the growing 'force' for education.

So the massive infusion of funds, construction of schools, recruitment of teachers, teacher training programmes, Mid-day meals, provision of textbooks, and such other actions constitute building up the 'force' (Chavan, 2009).

But the ASER report also asks whether this force is able to counter the ‘forces of inertia’ to move education forward. It is to some of these inhibitory forces that we now turn.

## **9.2 Inhibitors**

The PROBE report of 1999 and the EFA reports in 2000 and 2008 outline a number of inhibitors of progress. Major disparities in provision occur between regions and schools and in participation between regions, communities and households.

### **9.2.1 Resistance in some states**

We noted above that in some states considerable progress had been made in decentralising powers to the district and the sub district levels. In other states the process has been more challenging.

Several state governments have already initiated the process of decentralisation of the primary education management framework. Some states have also gone for much closer collaboration and involvement of the community in decentralising the system of education management. On the whole, this has not been as easy task with deeply entrenched centralized mechanisms (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2000).

Resistance has also been observed among technical experts working at the state level. Teachers involved in programmes designed to empower them through the development of teaching and learning materials sometimes met with resistance from the education administration and from the people who traditionally had been developing curriculum and materials employed in the state Councils for Education Research and Training. The curriculum developers were beginning to ask ‘if the teachers are now developing the curriculum then what about us?’ Resistance was also expressed by some older teachers who felt that the younger teachers were questioning the way that they have taught for all of their lives (interview with the author).

### **9.2.2 Corruption**

Former senior government officials provided hard hitting accounts of corruption that held back progress in two main ways. Corruption led to a huge wastage in financial resource. Corruption in the course of making teacher appointments and in the conduct of in-service training led to the under-utilisation of available human resources. In matters of buildings infrastructure there is, in the view of one former senior official:

total corruption. I am deliberately using the word ‘total’ in the selection of the contractor, supply of substandard construction material. I have seen houses and schools and additional rooms leaking one year after construction. Doors could not be closed, toilets are not useable and there was no water supply for the toilets. Most of the toilets were locked and teachers would not allow their toilet to be used by students. There was practically no benefit derived for the children. In many cases the additional room created was converted into a teacher’s room. So in that way the money utilisation being slightly higher on the construction side, corruption was more and its functional use was also limited (interview with the author).

In the matter of teacher appointments, two officials spoke with feeling:

teachers go to the local MLAs, the local *panchayat* leader with their family problems, small children, wife cannot commute long distances, all these issues were raised ... When it comes to appointment of teachers, every political party, every minister, every officer will pull the file which relates to money just to grab the money. They are not at all interested. If they have to appoint teachers, the condition of the minister is that - and his officers know - that he will give the appointment letter after 'proper selection', wherein proper selection is you have to pay one lakh<sup>10</sup> rupees in cash. Earlier this was confined to teachers. Now it is extended to college lecturers, university lecturers and even vice chancellors ... (interview with the author).

ever since the corruption in appointment of teachers and placement of teachers came to light in Kerala of all states, there has been an alarming spread of this problem in many states. Corruption is really quite lucrative ... Almost everything is impacted by that (interview with the author).

Wastages of financial and human resources were seen to act in combination in the conduct in-service training for teachers:

the corruption extends to the training programmes. You come for a day or two or take it as a holiday for 10 days. Some lecturers come and give lectures, give printed modules. You stay for 2 or 3 days and then attend to your personal things. After 10 days you'll go back to school after signing your attendance register and getting some petty pocket allowance. The remaining money is shared by the officers themselves. The stationery shops will give a false voucher for the 500 Rupees given to each individual teacher for Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM). You submit the voucher and you share it with the head teacher (interview with the author).

### **9.2.3 Trade Unions**

The trade unions were cited by various officials as resisting changes intended ultimately to improve access to and the quality of basic education. Education ministers were thought to be particularly vulnerable to the power of trade unions.

The education minister being a political person always surrenders to the union thinking that they will politically support his vote capturing (interview with the author).

The nature of this resistance varied from state to state. In some states teacher unions are very strong. Moreover, the structure of state legislatures interacts with the power of state teacher unions. Some states have bicameral legislatures; some have unicameral legislatures. Some states have assemblies elected in part by teacher constituencies. In some states secondary school teachers are represented in the legislature assemblies, while in others both primary and secondary school teachers are represented. The state of Uttar Pradesh provides a particularly good example of where teachers enjoy reserved representation in the Upper House of the state legislature, leading to very close links between teachers, teacher unions and political lobbying. The stances taken by teacher unions to proposals for decentralisation reforms made

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<sup>10</sup> 100,000

by successive governments in Uttar Pradesh demonstrate just how far unions can resist and inhibit policy reform (Kingdon and Muzammil, 2003; 2010).

While the above outlines some of the drivers and inhibitors of progress recommendations about what needs to change in the future are many. The PROBE report (1999) called on government to invest more in elementary education, to making elementary education a fundamental right, increase the accountability of teachers while improving the conditions in which they work. It also called for a change of attitude on the part of urban elites and middle classes towards education for the poorest. The official EFA reports called, *inter alia*, for more needs-based support for schools, strengthened internal management of schools, and improved processes of teaching and learning (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2000; National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2008). The CREATE reviews call, *inter alia*, for a greater understanding of the processes through which children are excluded from enrolment and learning (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2007; Subrahmanian, 2005) and the role that can be played by community participation (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Dimensions of exclusion that require particular focus include girls (e.g. Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian, 2008; Drèze and Kingdon, 2001) caste/tribe (e.g. Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Drèze and Kingdon, 2001), residence and school size (e.g. Blum and Diwan, 2007; Little, 2008), poverty (e.g. Drèze and Kingdon, 2001; Härmä, 2010) and other marginalised groups including seasonal migrants, street children and those living in unauthorised slums (e.g. Smita, 2008; Juneja, 2010).

### **9.3 Elementary education, higher education and inequality**

Progress in access to elementary education in India must be seen in relation to access to education as a whole and to the impact of education on outcomes, including equality. In a much quoted speech to the nation in 2000, India's president, Dr, K.R.Narayan described the contradictions of the 'two Indias': the huge pool of highly educated technical personnel and the world's largest number of illiterates; the world's largest middle class and the largest number of people of below the poverty line (Narayan, 2000)

The dualities of India's education system go further. On the one hand there is a huge gulf in living standards between those who access only the elementary system and those who progress to higher education. This in turn is influenced at an early stage by the gulf between those who access elementary education through the public system and those who access it through the private system. At the same time there is a continued tension between the dualities of purpose in Indian education policy between economic growth on the one hand and the promotion of secularism, democracy and national unity within a highly complex polity on the other. Kamat (2007) explains:

one observes both exceptional success and inexplicable failures in meeting these twin objectives. On the positive side, a certain degree of democratisation was achieved and a system that in the colonial and pre-colonial periods served only a privileged few became accessible to a majority of the population including women, Dalits and tribals. The number of schools, colleges and universities expanded significantly to accommodate the growing numbers who sought access to formal education. Values of secularism, toleration and affirmation of diversity were endorsed in the national curriculum framework. The rights of religious minorities to set up their own educational institutions were protected. The public higher education system grew at a rapid pace, and produced a substantial number of high quality professional, technical and academic personnel. State subsidised engineering and science education was seen

as comparable to the best in the world. Publicly funded autonomous research and development centres contributed significantly to basic and applied research in the sciences. A free and independent press in English and vernacular languages flourished and the state promoted the development of fine arts and culture (Kamat, 2007:98).

On the negative side, and quoting Drèze and Sen (2005:12), Kamat writes that India's record on elementary education is unjustifiable given the experiences of comparable countries such as Sri Lanka, Costa Rica and Jamaica that adopted similar economic policies but adopted different political priorities that promoted universal coverage of elementary education and other social welfare interventions that in turn resulted in radical improvements in basic quality of life indicators in quite short periods of time. Moreover, the impact of policies on elementary education on caste and gender discrimination, rural-urban inequalities, and poverty alleviation 'remain negligible. On the contrary, policies in this sector encouraged the formation of schools of widely differing quality thereby exacerbating social and economic disparities' (Kamat, 2007:98).

## **10. Conclusions**

Progress in increasing access to elementary education in India since independence has been slow but steady. Literacy rates among the population aged five and above have almost quadrupled, from around 18% in 1951 to 68% estimated for 2011. Notwithstanding the considerable progress over 60 years, a literacy rate of 68% is very low by world standards.

In the run up to and in the years following independence there have been numerous policies and programmes for elementary education. Until 1976 responsibility for the financing and implementation of such policies and programmes lay with respective states and union territories. From 1976 financing and implementation responsibilities were shared between states/union territories and central government. In recent years the central state has come to play an ever more active role in formulating, financing and implementing programmes for elementary education.

Overarching national policies for elementary education were formulated by National Commissions for Education and presented in the 1968 National Policy on Education, the 1986 National Policy on Education and in the 1992 amendment to the 1986 National Policy. The 1986 policy was significant for the development of a Programme of Action at a high level and intended to support the practical implementation of policies. But policies on education in India manifested themselves in ways that go beyond documents titled as 'policies'. If policy is taken to mean statements of intent accompanied by financial allocations and plans of action then policies appear in the sectoral components of the Five Year Development Plans, developed jointly by the National Planning Commission and the states/union territories, through legislation such as the recently formulated Right to Education Bill and through large-scale programmes such as *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. At the same time policies for elementary education, however manifested, need to be seen in the context of overall provision. In India an estimated 27% of children aged 6-14 years attend schools wholly or partially funded privately. Government provision caters mainly to the education needs of the poorest socio-economic groups, especially in rural areas where 80% of elementary enrolment is in government schools.

The role of political will for and commitment to elementary education in India has shifted over time and reflects broader political shifts in the definition of development and in commitments to overcoming social and economic inequalities. While education was a site for the nationalist struggle and was believed to have a liberating potential for all groups in society, Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on the role of education in development diverged from those of several post independence leaders. In Gandhi's vision elementary education would serve self-reliant villages and manual and mental skills would be valued equally in school curricula. In Nehru's vision and that of many subsequent Congress leaders the expansion of access to education was needed to serve the broader process of industrialisation and modernisation through science and technology. While the rhetoric of free and compulsory education for all pervaded all political programmes at some level, improvements in access to and the quality of mass education did not sit comfortably with education designed to nurture scientific talent. Throughout India's modern education history there has been a tension between education as builder of human capital for economic growth and education as tool for social transformation and the removal of social and economic inequalities. If political will is reflected in financial allocations, then allocations for elementary education have been modest, especially when compared with countries in the region with comparable per capita GDP. More recently, elementary education has benefited

from the growing consensus of the view that access to elementary is a human right. The rights agenda, promoted by many groups, both internal and external to India has contributed to increased levels of financial allocations to elementary at the central, state levels as well as from external agencies.

While the dominant views of elementary education as a human right, as human capital, as investment or as consumption have shifted over time, so the political commitment to the translation of policies into action have waxed and waned.

The implementation of the 1968 National Policy, covering elementary, secondary and tertiary education, was stymied in the early years by the growing unpopularity of the Congress party and government, and by the domination of medium of instruction and admission to higher education in the debates leading up to and following the formulation of the policy. These were economically difficult times following the war with Pakistan in 1965, famines in 1966 and 1967 and balance of payments problems leading to devaluation in 1967. The subsequent war with Pakistan in 1971, growing social problems and the state of emergency consumed the attention of the political leadership and distracted national attention from elementary education. Moreover, responsibilities for the implementation of central policies continued to lie exclusively with the respective states increasingly administered by political parties in opposition to the centre. While the centre could advise, guide and recommend it could not direct implementation in states. No political party was committed to radical change in elementary education and qualitative improvements were especially difficult to achieve in state systems where, if politicians were interested in elementary education at all, then that interest lay in the sanctioning and opening of new schools.

A subsequent attempt to reformulate elementary education came about after the elections of 1977. A group more sympathetic to Gandhian ideals developed a 'policy frame' for the period 1978-87 that called for a social movement for an elementary system responsive to the needs of the poorest and deprived. But the fate of this policy was sealed by a return to power of Congress in 1980. The 1980s saw a fresh political impetus for education reform, especially at the secondary and higher education levels. Education was being called on to promote national integration, contribute to the modernisation of society and economy, to address inequalities of gender, caste and class and to reduce unemployment. After the assassination of his mother, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi (grandson of Nehru and no relation to Mahatma Gandhi) became prime minister and was personally involved in driving the formulation of the 1986 policy and in moving it through parliament in 1986. Like its predecessor policy of 1968, elementary education competed for policy attention with the challenges of secondary and higher education. The reforms in elementary education called for a re-organisation of curriculum content, of teaching methods, of teacher education and of education management. The call from the Central Advisory Board of Education and the National Development Council for a detailed Programme of Action indicated the strength of political and policy will for the implementation of the 1986 policy. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in 1991, elections called, and a minority Congress government led by Narasimha Rao, formed. So thorough had been the process of development of the 1986 policy and plans, and perhaps because the new prime minister had been involved in them in his former role as minister of human resource development, that the 1986 policy survived its review with a few amendments designed to re-emphasise the need for improvements in school facilities and learning environments designed to reduce social and economic inequalities.

Through the 1980s the Ministry of Education in Delhi assumed increasing involvement in the direction and funding of state-specific projects for elementary education, especially in the lower elementary grades (G 1-5). External agencies too became gradually more involved in designing reforms in and the funding of reforms in elementary education in specific states. By the late 1980s state governments, central government and external agencies were working together. From the early 1990s this experience was employed by the District Primary Education Programme implemented across several states and subsequently by the country-wide *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*.

Pressure for reform from civil society groups also became a force to be reckoned with by government through the 1990s and 2000s. While several states had had regulations for compulsory education on their statute books for several years, some from before independence, these regulations were not enforced. The movement to introduce 'justiciable' legislation at the national level was led by various civil society groups, including intellectuals and facilitated by a handful of bureaucrats in the central ministry. Despite resistance from groups as diverse as the private schools who objected to the requirement that they reserve places for poor children and the 'purists' who insisted that all key ingredients for quality education were in place before the bill was passed, the constitution was amended in 2002 to include the right to free and compulsory education to 14 years of age and the Right to Education Bill enacted in 2009.

The diversity of conditions under which elementary education is both provided and demanded in India renders a general story of the drivers and inhibitors of change impossible. States enjoy very different levels of provision in elementary education and very different experiences of its management. However, in addition to the array of political drivers outlined above, any account of the drivers and inhibitors of reforms in elementary education in particular states or across the country must include consideration of the following. The technical design of elementary education has been important in giving refreshed emphasis to elementary education. In the 1980s Operation Blackboard, with its technical requirements for two teachers, minimum levels of physical infrastructure, combined with a restructuring of the primary curriculum, gave an important fillip to increases in access and quality. Today, the technical designs of the Activity Based Learning programme in Tamil Nadu and the Nali Kali programme in Karnataka are changing the quality of learning experience of hundreds of thousands of students. The SSA programme has adopted a planning and implementation approach targeted on socially deprived groups, especially girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes; on curriculum, pedagogy and teacher training, as well as on school mapping, micro-planning and community management. The driver of 'human resources' cannot be over-emphasised. Increasing the number of teachers in a school from just one to two makes a huge impact, not only on children but also on community perceptions. Increased numbers of teachers trained in appropriate methods has also made its mark. Administrative drivers have also played their part. Changes in the structure of education management at state and national levels have facilitated a focus on elementary education and the flow of funds to it. Shifts in the unit of planning, progressively from state to district, and from district to block, combined with increases in the powers over elementary education of the *panchayat* bodies are changing the constellation of drivers for change at the local level. The use of the mass media in the promotion of reform has been very effective in some states. Underpinning all of these drivers and the general increase in political will and the increasing strength of civil society are increasing levels of funding for elementary education.

But in all reform contexts drivers are accompanied by inhibitors and resistances to change. As noted above states have very different experiences of elementary education and they do not start from a level playing field in responding to initiatives driven from the centre. Even within states not all teachers, administrators and teacher unions respond in similar ways to training, school reorganisation and new expectations. While financial resources may increase, many judge that much of these are wasted through corruption that manifests at many levels of the system.

What is clear is that in the highly politicised society that is India, civil society groups will continue to call on government to do more for elementary education. Central government will appeal to state government and local government bodies to do more. All will call on teachers and on parents to support the education of their children more. Poor parents will look to local, state and national government bodies to meet the Fundamental Rights of their children. Meanwhile the middle classes will use private means to look after the educational futures of their children. The middle classes will use this education to access growing economic opportunities in the modern sector of the economy linked with the global economy.

Considerable progress has been made in access to elementary education in India over the past six decades. However, access to education and achievement in education are different. As access to the base of a system becomes more equal so the goal posts for politicians, policymakers and parents change. Over the coming years there is likely to be a greater emphasis on learning outcomes and improvements in the quality of learning experience in elementary education. Inequalities between those who have access, and those who have no access will remain, and inequalities in educational achievement are likely to be enhanced. Inequalities in elementary education will gradually move up the system to join the glaring inequalities between those who currently do and do not have access to secondary and higher education

India is poised to become one of the economic superpowers of the twenty first century. One of her many challenges will be to see how the benefits of economic growth can be extended to the poorest, not only for reasons of equity and social justice but also for political stability. India's public and private higher education system is flourishing and its graduates are set to contribute to and enjoy the fruits of broader economic growth within the global economy. If India is to maintain her position as a democratic and secular state then the graduates of elementary education must also secure access to improvements in their economic opportunity. The achievement of education for all at the elementary level and the reduction of inequalities in access to secondary and higher education will require considerable political will at all levels of the Indian polity.

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### Report summary:

This monograph examines progress in, and policies for, access to elementary education over the past 60 years, the role played by political factors in the process of policy formulation and implementation and the drivers and inhibitors of the implementation of reforms in elementary education in recent years in India. Drawing on interviews and documentary sources, the monograph analyses the growth in central direction and international support for elementary education alongside the parallel and at times countervailing trend towards decentralisation and community participation. It outlines the tensions between agendas focused on expansion, quality improvement, human rights and economic development that led to the legal enactment in 2009 of the Right to Education. Overall, political will is found to be an important driver of progress while corruption, resistance by vested interests and the general condition of poverty in rural areas are among the key inhibitors.

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