

## Quality and Equality in Education: Gendered Politics of Institutional Change

### The Millennial U-turn?

2005 had been marked with some sense of urgency on international calendars, as a signifier of deadlines, even a milestone for the millennium, to bring closer the distant goal of gender equality in education. These markers often get articulated in the ethereal space of international policy discourse, far removed from the real arena of national or local practice. In India we have not witnessed much effervescent activity or even concerned urgency in this regard but, on the contrary, have seen some very disconcerting political developments at the turn of the millennium.

In 2002 the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India, for the first time since it was framed over half a century earlier, brazenly diluted the state's commitment to universalise elementary education. Under pressure to acknowledge the 'Right to Education' a seemingly innocuous but deliberately ambiguous clause was added to allow the spirit of the original Article 45 of the Constitution to be radically altered. The new Article 21A now reads: "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years, *in the manner as the state may by law determine.*" Not only does it retract from the original Constitutional statement for 'all children until they complete the age of fourteen years', but the qualifying caveat (in italics here) seems to allow the state to get away with whatever 'quality' it deems fit for those who, in fact, suffer the severest inequalities. Several proposed drafts of the 'Free and Compulsory Education Act', which was meant to provide the 'law' sought by the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment, were put forth and debated, but in early 2004 it was almost set to have been passed by Parliament. Fortunately that move was halted on account of the general elections and the subsequent pressure on the new government to withdraw it. A Sub-committee of the Central Advisory Board on Education is now working afresh on suitable legislation that ensures equity and the right to elementary education for every child. It shall, presumably, also address legislation that facilitates implementation of education which is actually 'free', while it also deals with the contentious notion of 'compulsion'.

The 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the related proposed Act (drafts 2003, 2004) reflect the state's decision to abandon its earlier policy commitments for an education system that can consciously promote equality, social cohesion and even 'removal of disparities'. This has serious repercussions on the education of girls, who continue to be relegated to the margins, both at home and by the state, and specially for whom 'removal of disparities' of all kinds is closely linked to the transformative quality of education. India's last Education Commission (GOI, 1966), inspired by a socialist democratic vision of national development, had emphasised that quality implied equality, and strongly recommended the Common School System. It had stated that: "It is the responsibility of the education system to bring different social classes and groups together and thus promote the emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society. But at present, instead of doing so, education is itself tending to increase social segregation and to perpetuate and widen class distinctions....The children of the masses are compelled to receive sub-standard

education ... while the economically privileged parents are able to 'buy' good education for their children. This is bad not only for the children of the poor but also for children from the rich and privileged groups" (Section 1.36, 1.37). It went on to propose the 'neighbourhood school' which will "provide 'good' education to children because sharing life with common people is, in our opinion, an essential ingredient of good education. Secondly, the establishment of such schools will compel the rich, privileged and powerful classes to take an interest in the system of public education and thereby bring about its early improvement" (Section 10.19). This proposal was subsequently upheld by the National Policy on Education (GOI, 1986) which recommended Common Schools to ensure that "up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have access to education of comparable quality" (Section 3.2).

However, disregarding the earlier legacy of policy declarations which had reflected the dialectical relationship of both 'quality for equality' and 'equality for quality', the draft Free and Compulsory Act 2004 blatantly forged a new polemic for a 'school' and a 'teacher', to get legal sanction for the deeply discriminatory public system set in place over the last decade. By defining a differentiated typology it placed the 'recognised fee-charging' school parallel with what it called a 'transitional school', elaborated as an 'Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Centre' or an 'Alternative School'. These terms were essentially euphemisms the state had carefully crafted through several programmes which promoted low-cost options for poor and 'unreached' children, with a large majority of girls. The draft Act ambivalently declared that the government "shall provide free and compulsory education to all children not enrolled in fee-charging recognised schools" and that "for those habitations or groups of children for whom the establishment of 'approved schools' or 'alternative arrangements' is not immediately feasible, the government may cause 'transitional schools' to be established".

It is indeed ironical that more than half a century after the Constitution had made a time-bound commitment to provide free and compulsory education to all children within a period of ten years, the new millennium was ushered in by a government that quibbled to legally absolve itself of this responsibility, on the grounds of what is not "*immediately feasible*". No wonder then that targets have little sanctity in the context of our policy frameworks and political commitments! 2005 has come and will soon go, notwithstanding some reluctant rejoinders and perhaps some well meaning noises.

### **Schools for the 'Willing', 'Alternatives' for Others?: Policy shifts in history**

In the Indian context the phrase 'Beyond Access' has assumed intriguing connotations that trigger a series of concerned queries: Indeed, what does lie beyond access? Why is it that increasingly we find 'access' as being alluded to as the 'basic' issue, while the 'quality' of education is delegated to the so-called 'next level' of problems or priorities? What do people popularly understand by the term 'quality' of education, especially in this context, when it is placed either chronologically or even financially as something that can happen 'after' the primary problem of getting children to school has been tackled? Moreover, this ostensible dichotomy between 'access' and 'beyond', or between the 'basic' provision and its 'quality', seems to have been amplified more in the last decade,

to somehow justify not being able to do 'both' simultaneously, as had earlier been assumed. Moreover it must be noted that universal elementary education has been achieved in most countries principally through state provision of 'compulsory schooling', where 'quality' was not differentially reserved to be doled out either 'later' or 'only to some'.

Historically, the question of 'quality' was raised in policy debates in India around 1929, in connection with the Hartog Committee Report, which concluded that 'expansion had been gained at the cost of quality' and that 'consolidation should be adopted in preference to diffusion' of mass primary education. These recommendations had then been strongly opposed by several national leaders, who saw in this deliberate dichotomy between 'quality' and 'quantity' a discriminatory colonial policy with respect to universal primary education in India. In fact, after the Compulsory Education Act was passed in Britain in 1870 there had been a vociferous demand by Indian leaders for state provision of mass schooling and similar legislation here, and they had compelled the first Indian Education Commission in 1882 to seriously deliberate on these issues. Indeed, for almost the next seventy years, through the struggle for an independent nation and the making of its Constitution, this commitment to provide 'free and compulsory education' to every child was tenaciously reiterated (Rampal, 2004).

However, soon after the first decade of independence was over and it was clear that commensurate financial commitments to ensure the Constitutional promise were not forthcoming, state policy strategically shifted from 'compulsion' to 'persuasion' (Juneja, 2003). It consciously promoted the belief that only some genuinely 'wanted' education while most others were 'unwilling' and contributed to the high levels of 'wastage' by dropping out of schools without learning much. J. P. Naik, an educationist and an administrator who considerably influenced government policy, as Education Advisor and also the member secretary of the last Education Commission (1964-66), candidly writes about the political tensions and contested priorities of the time.

"The warning of the Commission that a mere extension of the existing education system without transformation and without improvement of its quality is likely to do more harm than good fell on deaf ears. For one thing, no one seemed to believe that Government would really transform or improve education to any significant extent; *everyone believed that some education (and even bad education) is better than no education.* Many politicians had only a faint idea of what 'transformation' meant; and as for quality, the common retort was: we cannot sacrifice quantity for quality. The recommendations of the Commission, however significant, had really no chance in such a hostile atmosphere... When we said that every effort should be made to bring the children of the poor into schools and that enrolments in secondary and university education from the urban upper and middle classes should be cut down, the reaction was even more hostile. *We were in fact called fools who try to educate those who do not come to school and do not want to learn... The first duty of a government, we were told, was to educate those who were willing to learn. The task of those who do not even want to learn should come later.*" (Naik, 1982; p. 97-98) (italics added).

The above remarks lay bare the 'first' and 'later' policy dichotomy, between competing priorities for government funds, deliberately divided between those who are 'willing' and others who 'do not want to learn'. In fact, this myth of the 'unwilling' masses has continued almost unchallenged for several decades, and has been contested in the last few years by several studies, including our own study of five states published in the Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE Team, 1999). It is now clear that the disadvantaged are looking towards education as a possible way out of their condition, and are, in fact, dropping out of school mainly because they learn nothing and have lost faith in the ability of the state system to provide quality education. In addition to the poor quality, the actual experience of schooling of Dalit children needs to be urgently addressed. In fact, Dalit girls suffer the multiple burden of poverty, caste and gender, and caste discrimination from peers and teachers continues to obstruct social access to education, by hurting their dignity and self worth. Serious concern has been voiced to arrest an increasingly iniquitous system for those already facing discrimination: "In the larger context of equity, and education without discrimination, it would be important to ensure that 'alternate' schools do not become inferior systems of schooling for those who have hitherto been educationally deprived" (Nambissan and Sedwal, 2002).

Yashpal had expressed his concern for quality in his preface to the Report 'Learning Without Burden' (MHRD, 1993), stating that the students who dropped out were probably superior to those children who continued in the system, because they were the ones who had not 'compromised with non-comprehension', with the meaninglessness of what they were being compelled to do in school. Indeed, the experience of the state of Kerala, markedly ahead of the others in terms of universal access, but woefully wanting in the quality of children's performance, has shown that restructuring the curriculum and classrooms to relate to children's life and learning processes, does lead to better quality schooling, especially benefiting the poor (Rampal, 2001).

### **Whither Transformative Pedagogy?: Redefining 'efficiency'**

With the myth of the 'unwilling masses' fast losing ground, it became convenient to articulate competing priorities for funds in terms of softer dichotomies, such as 'access first' and 'quality later'. In the given scenario of poor quality public education, an unquestioning preoccupation with 'access' or a superficial attempt at improving 'efficiency' only tends to lend further legitimacy to the present system. Unfortunately today, some well meaning initiatives including corporate businesses which see their role as 'service-providers' in partnership with governments, have also taken this line. Tremendous efforts are mobilised to enrol children into schools without necessarily demanding that these be transformed for better quality. Indeed, without a transformative vision, and no examination of the structural underpinnings of inequity perpetuated by the present education system, the thrust of most efforts is increasingly on uncritically doling out the same more 'efficiently'.

Critiquing the "discourse of efficiency borrowed from neo-classical welfare economics, a tradition in which issues of power, domination and equity occupy a notoriously marginal and ambivalent place" Kabeer (1994) had warned that planning must look at the

multiplicity of social relations which constrain women's activities and resources, and undermine the traditional definition of production. Exposing the 'gender sub-text of developmental policies' she had called for new analytical frameworks which incorporate transformative politics and challenge static notions of 'efficiency' based on a given and unequal division of labour. "Developmental planning is not simply a technocratic response to neutrally determined imperatives; it is also a process of struggle over concepts, meanings, priorities and practices which themselves arise out of competing worldviews about the final goals of development" (p. 289).

Unequal gender divisions of labour in the household should similarly raise questions of the 'efficiency' of girl children at school, and the impact that long hours of domestic chores coupled with low levels of nourishment have on their achievement outcomes. Empirical findings of a study (Ramachandran, 2003) of children in diverse poverty situations in three states showed that young girls, especially if they happened to be the oldest child, though enrolled in school, were not 'free' to study. Girls attending government schools reported that they work at home both before as well as after school. Apart from sibling care, girls 6-11 years old said they supported their households with the care of milch cows/goats, fetching fuel wood/fodder, water, running errands and looking after sick family members. As a result they were either late for school or often missed it altogether. They put in long hours every day and did not get time to study at home – especially girls who are higher up in the birth order. Energy levels were found to be low and had a deleterious impact upon their ability to concentrate in school. Discussions with children revealed that on most days, given their morning chores, almost 10 to 15 per cent of children (majority of them being girls) come to school without eating. It was pointed out that in the context of malnourished, hungry and overworked girls from poor households the provision of a hot mid day meal becomes all the more necessary to help them perform at school. Moreover, if regularity could be ensured, most girls were found to perform as well if not better than boys in school.

The notion of 'efficiency' in education is particularly problematic as it leans heavily on economic theories that posit a determinate relationship between inputs and outputs in a production process, and can often lead to questionable conclusions. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (Unesco, 2005) warns that the application of production function analysis to education, still widely used in studies by the World Bank, is 'hazardous' and diverts attention from classroom practices that have the strongest association with achievement. It states that the production function for, say, a fence, describes the maximum feasible output (fence) that may be obtained from alternative combinations of the inputs – e.g. nails, some tools, some planks of wood and some days of labour. However, the "inputs to the schooling process are much less homogeneous than in the industry, where labour usually faces more defined tasks than do teachers... But the main difficulty with representing education as a production process is that some of its inputs and all of its outcomes are embodied in pupils, who have their own autonomous behaviour. Planks of wood cannot decide that they do not want to be assembled, avoid coming to the construction site or refuse to interact with construction workers". The Report also discusses a different empirical approach to the study of schools and classrooms that emerged parallel with the economic tradition, but with a focus on "the

quality and nature of teacher-pupil interactions”, and the ways resource inputs were actually being used. Thus factors such as “time spent in class, ways of assessing pupil progress and teacher expectations, experience and in-service training – were likely to affect student outcomes quite apart from the resource inputs to schooling, and that might account for the often ambiguous results of production function studies” (p.64). It warns that partnerships solely for private resource inputs can be counter productive to quality and equity, stating that “public/private partnerships are being promoted increasingly as a way to mitigate the impact of uncertainties and insufficiencies in public expenditure. They raise quality and equity issues, however, since communities differ in their ability to attract government expenditure as well as raise private funds” (p.118).

The previous EFA Global Monitoring Report ‘Gender and Education: The Leap to Equality’ (Unesco, 2003/2004) had stated that “schools must be places where stereotypes are undermined, not reinforced, through gender aware curricula and professional teacher training”. However, notwithstanding the EFA policy advice, in practice there exists a differentiated vision of learning and teaching for the ‘hardest to reach’. There is, indeed, a palpable sense of impatience with the notion of ‘quality’ in large enrolment programmes, presently conducted by or in partnership with the government. These aggressively profess a minimalist vision of schooling, often dismissing a professional approach towards children’s development and learning. Some have even questionably fragmented the skill to read, and claim that they achieve ‘reading’ first and only later ‘reading with meaning’. A few states have proposed a ‘Reading Guarantee Programme’ for improving the efficiency of primary schools; we shall have to wait to see when they graduate to Reading With Meaning Guarantee, Writing Guarantee, and so on, and if ever there is a chance for the coming generation of learners, especially girls, to avail of the more exotic schemes for Curiosity Guarantee, Creativity Guarantee, and even, perhaps, Empowerment Guarantee!

### **Curriculum for Equality: the ‘fluff of quality’ in a global industry?**

With increasing internal and external pressures to show results, and influential and uncritical allies and donors to partner with, the state has unabashedly advocated all means of cutting costs through what it calls ‘alternative arrangements’, such as the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Centres or other such ‘Alternative’ schools. Various euphemisms have been used as titles for these ‘alternatives’, ranging from Shishu Shiksha Kendras (West Bengal) to Rajiv Gandhi Pathshalas (Rajasthan), and hundreds of thousands of para-teachers, variously called *acharya* (traditional teacher), *guruji* (honourable guide), *sahayika* (assistant) or *shiksha mitra* (friend of education), are perfunctorily trained and employed as contract workers for a fraction of the salary of a regular teacher.

State provision of elementary schooling has never been as starkly stratified as now, ranging from the few better endowed Navodaya Vidyalayas and the Kendriya Vidyalayas or Central Schools for the children of Central government servants and army officers, to the poor and dismal State government schools, and now the latest ‘transitional schools’, for the poorest and the socially ‘hardest to reach’. Such differentiated state policies have

buttressed the gendered quality divide within families, which are selectively pulling out boys from government schools in favour of private options, while girls are left with the most disadvantaged children. This has been seen even in the most prosperous states of Haryana and Punjab, which, on the one hand, have recorded a decreasing gender gap in literacy and school enrolment, but have also shown alarmingly declining levels of the child sex ratio (in some districts it being as low as 770 girls to 1000 boys!). These developments raise serious questions about the present policies of development and the socialising role of education, which allows a strong cultural preference for boys to couple with declining fertility rates and weak laws (on selective-sex abortion), to result in exacerbated gender inequalities. Indeed, a comprehensive policy framework linked to legislative reform is essential for gender equality, for establishing not only rights to quality education that can empower women, but also rights to ensure women's control over resources and property.

With few concerns about 'quality' and even fewer about 'equality', the transformative agency of education has almost been forgotten; in fact, these alternative arrangements are found to be pedagogically more rigid and conservative, with little scope for critical reflection. It is indeed worrying to note how, egged by neo-liberal economic policies and demands for a global workforce schooled in only the 'basic skills', the state and its allies are increasingly dismissing, with unabashed abandon, what they call the 'fluff of quality'. The question of partnering with the state in this scenario assumes more complex and problematic dimensions, as also discussed in a following section. However, it places ever more rigorous demands on evolving mechanisms to make visible the status of public and private provision.

There is a larger context to the concern regarding current curriculum shifts across the world, towards more minimalist and even behaviourist competence-based formats, at the expense of a more critical pedagogy required for autonomous learning and democratic citizenship. Traditional forms of teacher professionalism are also being threatened with serious repercussions on the nature of teaching, which is seen to be reduced to the model of the industrial workplace. The attendant demand for the standardisation of teaching and the curriculum, with managerial modes of scrutinising school processes and testing achievement outcomes, have led to the deskilling of teachers, who find their motivation and creativity undermined. This shift is viewed as a strategic marriage of the neo-liberal need to de-professionalise teaching with the neoconservative demand to centralise education through greater control and standardisation (Apple, 1993).

Delivering the Third Ravinder Kumar Memorial lecture on 'Education and Democratic Citizenship' recently in New Delhi, Professor Martha Nussbaum called for an education that could develop critical thinking, an understanding of plurality in the context of democracy, and the development of what she termed "narrative imagination", the ability to transcend the existing pattern of rote learning to think beyond what is encapsulated in textbooks. Indeed, she seemed to sum up the present Indian concerns when she stressed that "it is imperative for the government to raise the teaching standards by making teaching 'fashionable' through revision of pay scales if necessary. Pedagogy is receiving less attention and the standards of primary education seem to be caught in a vicious circle

where good people are not coming into teaching because there is no social prestige” (Nussbaum, 2005).

### **The politics of gender awareness in education**

Issues of girls’ education in most government programmes, including the externally funded District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), which was meant to redress gender inequalities of access and achievement, are generally viewed in an apolitical and non-confrontationist ‘do-good’ perspective. The ‘de-politicisation’ of development programmes has, in general, been an area of concern, especially in the context of donor funding guided by perspectives of social capital theory (Harriss, 2000). Gender imbalances in education programmes are superficially viewed and often notionally ‘corrected’, for instance, through asking for more pictures of girls in textbooks, with little attempt to enable the system to question and grapple with unequal power relations in the domestic and public spheres (Harris, 1999). For girls from poor families the burden of household work continues to be debilitating, adding to their inability to participate meaningfully in educational programmes which, however, do not even make an attempt to critique domestic divisions of labour.

In fact, the curriculum often reinforces traditional gender roles and does not offer learners the space to imagine a different future. As seen in a study in an agriculturally progressive village in Maharashtra, the socialising function of education resulted in higher levels of education and better standards of living, but also reinforced traditional gender values about womanhood, reducing female wage employment and women’s mobility in the public domain and also their control over economic resources. However, for education to lead to women’s empowerment the curriculum must encourage critical reflection and action and must, therefore, be framed through appropriate partnerships between educationists, women’s groups and government agencies. An empowering curriculum must explicitly acknowledge that the “Agency in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relations. Because of the significance of beliefs and values in legitimating inequality, the process of empowerment often begins from within. It involves changes in how people see themselves (their sense of self worth) and their capacity for action” (Kabeer, 2003).

The right-wing conservative politics of the previous government (at the centre and presently in some states) had actually attempted a reversal in policies and programmes on women, insisting that their traditional domestic roles be restored and supported. The document of the Tenth Plan Working Group on Adult Education, for instance, consciously sought to obliterate all mention of the term ‘mobilisation’, which was assumed to have been too ‘political’ (or left aligned), but which had become an intrinsic part of the vocabulary and design of the programme. Mobilisation of several hundred thousand unpaid volunteers across the country was the strength of the campaign, which achieved an unprecedented level of participation of women, as learners, volunteer teachers and coordinators, through a working partnership between government and NGOs at the national, state and district levels.

The literacy campaign had consciously promoted a different self-image of women, encouraging thousands of them to learn cycling and forming hundreds of travelling cultural troupes or 'kala jathas', with women performing on the streets. This emphasis on mobility and on singing, acting and speaking in public, something they had never imagined they would be allowed to do, had been a precursor to their active participation in the public and even political spheres. The campaign had supported the formation of women's cooperatives and organisations, had encouraged women to contest panchayat elections (NLRC and Peoples TV, 2002) even against the political mafia in Bihar, and also played a key role in the strongly confrontationist anti-*arrack* (local liquor) movement in Andhra Pradesh (Drishti, 1998). However, the right wing government that came later, not only halted most of those district campaigns, which had resulted in the highest national decadal increase in female literacy, but also retracted the National Literacy Mission's proclaimed vision for women's education. Its policy documents sought to further domesticate women and declared that education should provide recreation to 'help them get over fatigue'. The recommendations for the special efforts to increase women's participation in the draft Tenth Plan (MHRD, 2001) included:

- The *content of the education programme will have to be closely related to their life and problems and should help them to get over fatigue*. Discussions on issues like women's status and social evils, entertainment programmes, group-singing, games, excursions, and other activities should figure prominently. *The content should also emphasize maternity and child-care*.
- Adult education programmes for women are more likely to succeed if they can be organized taking their working time into account.
- Special efforts are needed to prepare women instructors, especially from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Suitable courses should be organized for the purpose. Emphasis should be laid on the recruitment of an adequate proportion of women instructors and supervisors and women functionaries at other levels.
- Institutions for the education of girls and women at all levels (schools, colleges, etc., particularly colleges of home science) should be involved in the programme. The services of women teachers, women employees in the public and private sectors, women social workers, and housewives should be utilized to promote the programme (p. 13)."
- In the case of schedule tribes "instructors should be willing to stay in huts or sheds within the forests for long durations. A second category of instructors, namely non-residential instructors, can also be recruited for those areas which lie closer to the *civilized regions*. As far as possible, there should be female instructors to teach the tribal women" (p. 16). (Italics added)

Clearly, replacing the mobilisational design for empowerment with an essentially managerial format for the Literacy programme, for instance, by utilising the 'services of employees', and teachers of home science colleges, to 'supervise' the task conducted by 'instructors' or 'functionaries' in place of 'volunteers' and 'activists', was symptomatic of the changed politics and priorities of the government. Subsequently, the NGOs that had willingly partnered in designing and implementing the Campaign were systematically distanced and even denigrated, while the programme was allowed to stall. However, despite the change in government the National Literacy Mission still continues in the

same mould and the bureaucracy complacently follows the same regressive programmes. Indeed, there were recent protests when some State Resource Centre had been directed by the National Literacy Mission to conduct Continuing Education courses in other states on 'pickle making' and other such traditional domestic chores.

### **'Partnerships' in the discourse of neo-liberal policies**

A focus on 'educational partnerships' is meant to draw attention to the changing social and political relationships within contemporary neo-liberal educational reform (David, 2005). It calls for a critical analysis of the expanding contours of collaboration sought between various 'partners' in the provision of education – such as the public and private sectors, between schools and communities, and in the Indian context, also between the local governments or panchayats, the school and the community. The emergence of the demand on 'partnerships' is seen by David to be related to the adoption of the social and sexual agendas of neo-liberalism, in USA and Britain, where the policy discourse was redefined from social disadvantage and social class to one about equal opportunities, through social inclusion and social exclusion. The notion of equality of educational opportunity was initially coined under social democracy during the period of liberalism, when there was a political consensus towards a welfare society. The state was meant to provide social and educational services, and the notion of its 'partnership' with the family was only implicit. However, under neo-liberalism, with the shifting role of the state, new dimensions of the discourse of partnerships have called for new feminist research methodologies to develop critiques of public policies, especially those that deal with issues of women's lives in relation to the demands of the those partnerships.

The historical context of globalised policy-making is related to the growing dependence on non-state actors as 'service-providers' of education, especially in developing countries dictated by the IMF–World Bank conditionalities for cuts in state provisioning. "Since the Jomtien Conference in 1990, globalised policy-making has replaced the conventional state-centred system, with a new vocabulary reflecting that change. The focus on the grand and fuzzy is exemplified in terms such as mainstreaming or partnership; defining a common position came down to seeking the lowest common denominator in platitudinous declarations" (Tomasevski, 2003). The 'good governance' agenda promoted by multilateral and bilateral donors called for free markets, a minimalist 'enabling role' for the state, and civil society participation in decision making and ensuring 'accountability'. However, there have been growing reservations about the legitimacy of the market to deliver basic services and its ability in meeting development goals. "Letting markets loose in an imperfect world has served only to produce more inequality. Hence the need to 'bring the State back in'. For NGOs and civil society, democratic states, rather than unregulated free markets, provide an environment that is more supportive of people-oriented development ..... Given the profound differences in functions, power, and goals among the various development actors, the word 'partner' can thus be interpreted in many different ways – as collaborator, contractor, supporter, client, patron. It is not surprising then that notions of partnership which on paper seem simple and attractive are not easy to realise in practice" (Rao and Smyth, 2005).

In the Indian context, the shift in the connotation of the term ‘partnership’ has been disconcerting and the word is used in often contradictory terms. The basic implicit notion of equality and participation implied in the term has long been abandoned and it is used to denote blatantly hierarchical relationships. The last decade has also seen the emergence of proxy donors and service providers, in the form of large NGOs, not necessarily involved in programmatic action but functioning as ‘partners’ of hundreds of smaller field-based organizations, to whom they redirect funds from donors and corporate houses. Simultaneously the relationship between NGOs and governments underwent a change, as policies increasingly alluded to them as convenient ‘contractors’ closer to the field. Specific tasks involving mobilization of communities, say, for enrolment drives or for forming and supporting mothers’ committees, was farmed out to NGOs, while all policy and programmatic decision making was diligently maintained as the prerogative of the government. In fact, even those states that had started ostensibly as partners in consultation and decision making with NGOs, such as Rajasthan in the case of the Lok Jumbish network of NGOs, or Madhya Pradesh in the case of Eklavya or Digantar, retracted and even aggressively closed these programmes. In fact, Madhya Pradesh officials would brook no criticism on the quality of EGS schools and para-teachers; a note on the closure of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP) had even disparagingly termed Eklavya as the ‘Dronacharya’, for ostensibly having opposed its EGS schools for the poor.

A decade back I had described the struggle of Soni, a young school girl who aspired to study ‘very hard’ to become a policewoman, and the enabling science curriculum which had empowered her to question the then widespread superstitions about leaves cursed by the ‘snake god’ (Rampal, 1995, 2000). Ironically, Soni had been a student of the same HSTP mentioned above, with which I had been associated and which was subsequently closed by the same government in 2002. I had then concluded, perhaps somewhat prophetically, that:

“Soni has managed to go through school against all odds. The youngest daughter of a poor scheduled caste family of daily wage labourers, and married at the age of eleven (but still resisting it, to carve a new future for herself) she has determinedly beaten all the statistics that describe girls like her. Will we ever see the day when *all* girls will be able to finish elementary school? ... We have striven to work for an education that can bring about a larger structural change, through equity and empowerment, but will our efforts be completely overshadowed by the present context of structural adjustment?

... However, the real danger may not be so much from immediate cuts in educational expenditure as from stagnation and the absence of positive reform. Such stagnation ...in terms of policy priorities, quality of schooling, the number of pupils per teacher, teaching standards, etc. has resulted in a marked decline of the educational system and structural adjustment can further contribute to this deterioration by imposing severe budgetary constraints on much needed positive reforms. ... Through her (Soni’s) story we tried to see what values education can impart to the process of empowerment of girls, especially if it is structured to ensure meaningful and critical learning.... Through Malti, her teacher, we looked

at the problems of women who strive to become teachers, and saw how an enhanced role as a resource teacher and trainer has helped sustain her motivation, in turn inspiring hundreds of girls like Soni to complete school despite all odds.

We have seen that girls are ready to put in a daunting struggle for basic education, if only they are given a chance to 'opt into' and stay on in school. Moreover, if schooling becomes relevant and an enabling experience, more girls will fight to the end, and use education to empower themselves in the larger struggles of life. But does the system recognize this as its own responsibility, and what, if any, measures does it intend to take in this direction? Ultimately, will the system ensure more Sonis or will more Sonis be lost to the system?" (Rampal, 1995)

Indeed, ultimately not only more Sonis but the 'enabling' school programme too was lost to the system. When this piece had been written in the mid-nineties, Madhya Pradesh had just flagged off its neo-liberal reform and stopped all teacher recruitments even in regular schools; in a couple of years it had contractually appointed over one hundred and fifty thousand para-teachers, on a fraction of the salary of a regular teacher. Indeed, the state cleverly used the local self government or the Panchayati Raj as a double edged means to claim it had achieved 'universalisation' and 'decentralization' of power, both with minimum investment but seeking maximum political mileage.

However, it is clear that having managed to decimate and demoralise what it now calls 'a dying cadre' of teachers (it has not appointed a regular teacher for over ten years now) and having successfully silenced its teachers unions, the state operates more strongly through centralised controls, even of the so called 'decentralised' EGS schools. Ironically, even the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission, a body that was set up as a 'Registered Society' to satisfy the norms of the externally funded DPEP, and was meant to function autonomously, was run directly by the government, through its own officers and directives. In addition, all other professional bodies, such as the advisory Technical Resource Support Group set up by the legislative assembly, to show its credentials in running the DPEP through professional partnerships, were quickly disbanded

The state, in the post-Fordist regime, pretends to devolve power to autonomous institutions or individuals that are forced to increasingly compete in the market, while it manages to remain strong through greater regulation in key areas (Apple, 2001). This tendency of greater control has been witnessed even in the changing relationship of the state with NGOs (Non Government Organisations) and grass-root groups. In fact, the earlier collective modes of collaboration have given way to a corporate relationship between hired consultants or even competing 'bidders' for grants and projects, also harming the mutual interaction and possible partnerships between such groups.

Research in several countries shows that neo-liberal reforms did not encourage diversity in curriculum or teaching methods, but instead indicated a return to dominant 'traditionalism'. It devalued alternatives and enhanced the power of dominant models, as it consistently showed increased differences in access and outcomes on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender and class (Apple, 2001; also Gillborn and Youdell 2000; and Gewirtz et

al, 1995). The manner in which the Madhya Pradesh government aggressively promoted its own EGS schools, while it dramatically 'deligitimated' the more critical model of teaching and learning as embodied in the school programmes supported by Eklavya, is also reminiscent of this devaluation.

The M.P. government also attempted to influence research studies to show that children studying in these alternative schools were performing better in achievement tests than those in the regular system, and even better than those in the innovative programme run by Eklavya. Indeed, there are very few independent researches that critically look into different aspects of educational programmes in operation, and most studies are part of individual consultancies or are commissioned by donor agencies or governments themselves. In fact, a conscious effort should be made to reduce farming out appraisal studies only to commercial management organisations and instead to involve academic and research institutions, even by forming networks where possible.

The role of Universities has been minimal and institutionally they have remained distant, with only some sporadic individual involvement. There is an urgent need to encourage more serious academic engagement in a new interdisciplinary framework, which moves out of the straight jacketed traditions imposed by disciplinary boundaries and institutional structures. Collaborative partnerships will have to be forged from both within and outside traditional institutions to enrich an analytic and critical discourse on issues emerging from field realities. Partnerships with NGOs, mass organisations, networks of schools, government agencies, etc. will also have to be sought to influence crucial agendas and policy decisions, with a greater sense of urgency than is normally witnessed in academic institutions. My own institution was the first University to focus on the neglected area of elementary education, and set up the Maulana Azad Centre for Elementary and Social Education (MACESE), which designed an innovative 4-year Bachelor of Elementary Education course run in six colleges. However, it has had to contend with a difficult struggle to function autonomously, in setting national research and programmatic agendas envisioned by its own mandate, under the hegemonic control of the Department of Education which, unfortunately, has attempted to dissolve it. Moreover, there are several Departments of Women's Studies which are often marginalised within the University hierarchies, and will need to be actively taken on board to contribute more effectively in a scheme of hands-on engagement with education.

### **Measures of Quality and Equality?**

The influence of the dominant discourse of management in shaping educational programmes and policies has been steadily increasing. Educational 'quality' is thereby viewed as a standardized commodity more on the lines of an industrial process or product. Eminent private schools in India that also influence state policy now proudly advertise their ability to convert the 'raw material' into 'finished products', using terminologies and 'standards' usually attributed to industrial benchmarks. Some of these public schools, which call themselves 'companies', have been solicited by the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank, while promoting investment opportunities in what is called the multibillion-dollar 'Global Education Industry' (IFC,

1999) of as yet untapped markets in developing countries. One of the case studies of such 'impressive education companies' is NIIT from India, which runs computer courses and claims that it has harnessed revenues of over \$160 million worldwide, as a 'for-profit company working in India where for-profit education is illegal'. Its model of efficiency is proudly and candidly explicated by the senior NIIT representative in the U.S., in the following words: "The student is viewed as the raw material, and the training process is well defined, certified under ISO9001. The instructors are like machinists; at the end of it there is the finished product, a certified student. Classrooms are considered as a factory, with classes scheduled and students as customers, leasing chairs, much like airlines have flights and seats. NIIT looks at factors of production and at capacity utilization. Its instructors are the production managers. Traditional universities are very person-driven, where the instructor has a tremendous role to play in the outcome. NIIT has tried to reduce this role by restructuring the methodology of education and by transforming the process of training into a product. Since the company was not using a university model it did not need the resource of tenured professors but instead had 'managers' of learning situations" (IFC, 1999).

The demand for 'quality controls' and 'Total Quality Management' is linked to the management model followed by neo-liberal reforms. In education this has also been supported by the flourishing global business of standardised 'achievement testing'. Multinational companies producing textbooks are selling 'scientific tests' as ancillaries; for instance, McGraw Hill is known to have used testing to play a key role in expanding its business for education related materials, yielding an income of over \$1.4 billion. Results of their own 'California Achievement Tests' were used by company lobbyists to convince the state legislature to prescribe to the McGraw Hill Open Court Reading Programme to improve reading competence. Teachers are now required to read three hours a day from those materials, and according to the president of the local teachers' union, who resents being made into a robot, "school district employees and instructors – we call them Open court police – inspect classrooms to verify that the right posters are on the walls, and they want everyone in the district on the same page everyday!" (Clarke, 2004)

The National Curriculum policy in England and the contentious No Child Left Behind Act in the U.S. have promoted the use of comparative data on school achievement through competitive centralised testing systems. The pressure to compete and 'show results' has been found to be detrimental to the interests of disadvantaged children, and have had the effect of 're-masculinising' schools. Girls have been seen to respond better to more collaborative and participatory pedagogies, and the emphasis on high-stakes testing and hierarchical management structures under the globalisation regime "may well turn back the progressive elements in teaching, which girls responded to so successfully in the West" (Arnot, 2004). The promotion of 'free' market rationality and 'consumer choice' in education is seen to ensure that the socio-economically more 'able' children seek and are sought by the supposedly 'good' and better funded schools, while the poor schools, serving poor children, are left to their meagre resources and are caught in a spiral of decline. In India the increase in private schools, often of dubious quality, is causing girls to be selectively marginalised to poor quality government schools. Research in New

Zealand has also documented how demands of the educational market had a negative impact on schools with large working class and minority populations, and actually showed an overall decline in educational standards (Lauder and Hughes, 1999).

The Indian school examination system, which routinely encourages rote memorization and 'teaching to the test', needs restructuring if schools have to make a difference to the culture of learning. Policies supported by public action are needed to promote alternate methods of 'authentic' assessment, to look at how schools help in the *progress* of pupils especially girl students, and to help teachers focus on performance indicators not attainment measures. Alternate efforts to define effectiveness of schools have stressed on a variety of methods, using portfolios and performance indicators, to show if a school is actually 'adding value' to enhance their pupils' achievement, not just in terms of cognitive aspects but also in other crucial ways (Mortimore, 1992). Observation based performance benchmarks to help teachers monitor individual students' progress have been used in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, where it has been seen that children enjoy assessment when they have to undertake tasks that are open-ended, engrossing and stimulating, and which are designed to enable them to demonstrate a whole range of skills and competences (Broadfoot, 1996).

To transform school education in India a radical restructuring of assessment procedures is urgently required, with decentralised monitoring of quality, and performance indicators developed locally, linked to the process of school development planning. The DPEP curricular reforms in Kerala, effected through participatory planning at the cluster and block levels, had initiated several rounds of public discussions on the need for a new vision for quality and equity. Approach papers on issues, such as, 'Why do we need a new Curriculum?' and 'Evaluation – What, how and why?' had been circulated and debated in the panchayats and other public forums. Meetings with parents had tried to communicate the need for a better observation and competence based assessment pattern and they saw that children were not anxious and even enjoyed their examinations. It was noted that the less privileged seemed to perform much better than in the traditional system (Rampal, 2001). Unfortunately, vested interests of publishers of 'guidebooks' and test papers, in alliance with the privileged groups and the party in opposition, formed a strong political lobby against examination reform. More effective partnerships would need to be forged for sustained change in this crucial respect, between teachers unions, local self-governments or *panchayats*, politicians and parliamentarians from different party affiliations, voluntary groups and also the media, to help negotiate and shape public opinion.

For girls, who suffer the impact of unequal power relations at home and in school, the need to develop observation-based indicators to assess changes in their self-esteem, confidence and 'empowerment' is crucial. Assessment through a new set of measures will also signify the significance of such qualities, and the need to depart from an outdated and 'disempowering' quantitative framework. This is the direction suggested by the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2000) which indicates that a focus on learning for life can provide higher motivation for children from disempowered backgrounds.

Some effort, though not adequately documented and researched, has been made in recording profiles of out-of-school girls or adolescents who are educated in residential camps, such as the Balika Shikshan Shivirs or the Mahila Shikshan Kendras in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. It has been seen that within a short span of a year or even less, most girls manage to perform successfully even in the traditional Class V Board examination, and many more qualify in it than the girls who go through the conventional five year primary school. This has been attributed to the high levels of motivation of girls who are more mature and eager to use the opportunity to be away from domestic responsibilities, to collectively and fully immerse themselves in study. Moreover, 'scaffolded' learning through strong partnerships with those they spend the whole day with, and shared aspirations to perform well in roles they had earlier been denied, has contributed to the visible success of residential courses. Indeed, partnerships of women in education has redefined empowerment as a collective agency, not necessarily a lone struggle for change; whether in the process of schooling or in cycling, large groups have mustered collective courage to falter but together stand up and forge ahead, where an individual would have easily given up.

Much more innovative academic engagement is required in developing appropriate curricula and creative teaching and assessment pedagogies for non-formal and 'open learning' courses, for girls coming from different cultural backgrounds, bringing with them varied knowledge and value systems. Unfortunately, the courses of the National and State Open Schools have not taken their mandate for 'openness' and flexibility at all seriously, and their curricula and assessment procedures have been designed in the alienating mould of formal schooling. The need to depart from the overwhelming hegemony of the formal school, for the millions of out-of-school girls and adolescents who aspire for good education with suitable certification, is still largely unmet. According to the EFA global monitoring data (Unesco, 2003/4) the number of out-of-school girls in the 6-10 years age group is twice that of boys, and is over 13.6 million; the actual estimates are taken to be much higher, even more so when we include those in the 11-14 years or higher age groups.

Developing courses and curricula for out-of-school and adolescent girls calls for strategic and effective partnerships in practice, to ensure a sharing of expertise between University professionals, women's groups, NGOs and education functionaries, for the transformative potential of the course to be fully explored. It also demands advocacy and public action for policies to ensure appropriate accreditation of such courses. Curriculum design for non-formal education, through academic-activist partnerships, was attempted in programmes such as the Mahila Samakhya, Lok Jumbish and the National Literacy Campaigns. For instance, curricula and resource manuals on Health education (Nirantar, 1999) were developed for a residential course for young women and Numeracy manuals (Rampal et al, 1999, 2001) were prepared using women's indigenous knowledge of folk and street mathematics (Rampal 2003). However, mechanisms of formal certification of such non-formal courses were not available in the system and girls and young women had to sit as 'external candidates' for the conventional formal school examination for Class V.

In the Literacy Campaigns there were a substantial number of neo-literate women who wanted formal certification and who mustered the courage to appear for the primary school examination, often supported by or even along with their children or grandchildren. The words of the tribal woman Bisahin Bai describe the pride and enhanced self-esteem she experienced when, along with fifteen others in the Gunderdehi Block of Durg district (in Chhatisgarh), she received her Class V certificate from the District Commissioner. On August 2, 1998, there was a special ceremony organised to felicitate the neo-literate women who had passed the primary Board examination, and she recalls how she had walked on the dais clutching her certificate close to her: “Never before have I been bestowed with such happiness as on this day – not even the day my daughter was married, or when my granddaughter was born; no, not even the day of my own wedding, or the day I was blessed with a doll-like daughter. The Commissioner came here to our village and gave us these certificates. For the first time I saw my own name printed on paper...” (Rampal and Manimala, 2002).

While the campaign was at its peak, each year the number of adult women passing the Class V examination had been growing. In 2001, while we were conducting a participatory impact study of the Durg campaign, there were more than 1900 neo-literates, mostly women, who were aspiring to appear. Across the country there were thousands of women who desired formal certification and would have struggled harder to work towards the goal but, unfortunately, the formal institutional systems did not yield. There were no attempts to design an equivalent format, more creative and mature, to respond to their adult needs, but instead, they were forced to go through the meaningless rituals of the school examinations with young children. The Open School too was not substantially different in its curricular content and pedagogies, only notionally ‘open’ in terms of its logistical structure. Nevertheless, with the support of the literacy volunteers and district officials many of them had then jumped into the fray, and a few even braved the bigger battles of the Class VIII or Class X Board examinations.

The hegemony of the formal state curricula (Rampal, 2003) on alternate non-formal initiatives has continued to force NGO schools to be relegated to the margins of unrecognised institutions, with no systems of accreditation and certification. Also seen in the case of BRAC in Bangladesh (Ahmedullah Mia, in Rao and Smyth, 2005), which runs almost a parallel system of thousands of schools and teacher training centres, the government is reluctant to recognise them as ‘proper’ primary schools and legitimate training institutions. The struggle over control of content and curriculum continues, with the state retaining the final authority, consistently refusing to involve local communities or even civil society in the process, and granting recognition only to those who adopt the state-approved curriculum. Indeed, the struggle for equality and equivalence of such non-formal and non-governmental initiatives, for girls left out of the formal systems, will have to contend with similar power equations that marginalise them in the first place.

### **More Unequal than Others: Women para-teachers of West Bengal**

Finally we look at the case of one state, West Bengal, which has had a long and uninterrupted history of a left-front government, and has implemented a programme for

Alternative Schools. Started in 1998 under the scheme called the Shishu Shikha Karmasuchi (SSK), there are now almost 15000 such schools that have come up in the last few years. A cascade model of the training of teachers called '*sahayikas*', using the same textbooks, has also been in operation, since the state government has not allowed for curricular innovations in different programmes, insisting that the same syllabus and textbooks must apply in all.

The SSK is anchored problematically on a 'retired' structure, with an all-women cadre of teachers who are selected from among inexperienced housewives, expected to be satisfied with the small stipend of Rs. 1000. The women are deliberately taken when they are 'over-age' and therefore 'unqualified' to demand a regular job. The *Sahayikas* are 'aged women over forty', in the words of the programme officials, who strongly justify the need, not for caring young women, but 'aged' ones for their 'motherly' qualities! Extending this logic further, one wondered why they had not sought even older women for their 'grandmotherly' qualities!

The trainers are retired officers and inspectors from the Education Department, SCERT, etc., usually in the age group of 65-75 years. The training is highly gender skewed, with 'old male veterans' often patronisingly lecturing, to the all-women cadre of diffident housewives, made to squat on the floor in long rigid rows. The affected sing-song tone of the trainer is reminiscent of how people usually speak to children, and they often expected the women to behave as children, ostensibly in some kind of role play. These personnel bring with them not only limited resources of energy but, more significantly, extremely traditional mindsets, conditioned by the existing hierarchical system.

Clearly, the political economy of selecting 'resigned' trainers and teachers – the former, on account of their age, and the latter by virtue of their gender - who would by their very nature 'not make any demands' on the system, is at the heart of its low quality and equality potential. There seems little possibility then that such a system may generate fresh ideas, or dynamic styles of functioning, and promote critical questioning among its cadres and learners. It hardly needs to be underscored that to provide good quality education to those consistently 'excluded' by the system requires an expanded vision that voices a demand for change, both within and outside the system (Rampal, 2004).

The SSK has provided access to education to children in remote, school-less habitations or in areas where schools are overcrowded. A reasonable teacher pupil ratio of 1:30, adequate space for each child and the involvement of the community, in ensuring regular attendance of the teachers and children - are some of the factors that have contributed to its 'functioning' relatively better than many 'dysfunctional' primary schools. However, the classroom interaction was no different, often worse, because these *sahayikas*, older and not well trained, seemed understandably more insecure and heavily dependent on the textbook. Many *sahayikas* talked in a self-conscious, loud and high pitched voice, and expected loud answers in chorus from the students. There was a lot of mindless repetition, often to the point of utter distraction. In fact, classrooms reflected the same ambience and were reminiscent of the ritualistic 'drilling' sessions we witnessed during their training programme, some vignettes of which we describe below.

We all know of multiplication tables that children are heartlessly made to learn ‘by heart’ but at an SSK training we saw the use of ‘addition tables’, unflinchingly repeated over and over and over again. “*Ek jog ek dui, dui jog ek teen, teen jog ek...*” (one plus one two, two plus one three, three plus one four, and so on). They were made to say this in chorus so many times that one woman innocently asked ‘for how many days do we practice the same thing?’, to which she was told ‘the whole year round, at regular intervals’! There was also an absurd attempt to render it ‘joyful’, with little understanding of how children learn the concept of ‘number’ or addition. All kind of cosmetic padding was added to the ‘exercise’ (literally so!) which resulted in the seventy-plus trainer hopping single-legged, perilously unsteady, while chanting the ‘addition tables’. The same ‘mantra’ continued unabated, through several mindless exercises, which generated a lot of noise and energy, through the dramatically loud and breathless ‘*ek, ek, ek, ek, ek jog ek dui*’ that ended with a wobbly jump. But that was all. No concepts of arithmetic got reinforced through all this rigmarole, though it is another matter that seeing a teacher wobble and warble through much skip and song may indeed be ‘joyful’ for children, and may help the school system unlearn some of its traditional notions of authority!

Choosing local women from the community, as had been done for the remote and underserved habitations under the Shiksha Karmi programme in Rajasthan, has its advantages, but only when the selection and orientation processes ensure that the teachers are geared for this challenging task. In this case, the fact that SSK *sahayikas* were locally recruited from the same community did not mean that they had a close relationship with the children. Being from the same social class may preclude blatant discrimination, but much more is required in the student-teacher interaction, to ensure that children are encouraged to learn effectively.

We found that tribal children felt particularly inhibited, because of the language difference and disadvantaged background, and clearly needed special opportunities for self expression and confidence building, for which teachers were not equipped. We give below an extract from our field observations, of a class 4 lesson for the teaching of English. This was similar to what we saw in the other subjects, so that the quality of teaching learning observed in several classrooms of one of their best districts, was very disconcerting.

#### Inside an SSK Class 4: The Teaching of English

About 20 children are sitting quietly on a mat in two rows. 3-4 charts hang on the walls but are not being used. The teacher asks the children to write the English alphabets on the board, between the four lines she draws for them. She mechanically asks each child to do it, with no acknowledgement whatsoever. She then switches to reading and asks each child to read, each time the same lines from their textbook. “I am Joy. I am a boy. Laloo is my brother...” Each child mechanically reads, in the same sing song tone of the teacher, one line in English then translates it into Bengali and continues for the same four lines. This goes on and on, and on. The monotony is killing. Almost fortuitously, the spell is broken, when one child mispronounces ‘my brother’. At this she repeats the words, both in Bengali (*aamaar bhai*) and in English, at least 40 times in the span of the next ten minutes! One can see how well she has internalized her training, to religiously resort to ‘repetition’ when confronted with a problem. Only much later does it occur to

her that she could drill the use of the word 'my' through other examples, and she changes track, opting for 'my book', 'my book', and so on, and on and on.

It is a matter of serious concern that the SSK model, instead of being acknowledged as an interim short-term measure for disadvantaged children, before being accommodated in the formal mainstream schools, is now being formulated as the 'alternate mainstream' model in West Bengal, even for the middle school. With already about 15,000 SSKs it is now envisaged that through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan these would be extended into an MSK, for children up to Class 8, so that there is no need to plan for the 'mainstreaming' of these children.

The 'quality' of education is often measured using quantitative data such as the 'attendance' of children or the 'actual time spent' in school, without qualitative indicators related to classroom observations. The Pratiche Education Report on West Bengal uses a similar cursory comparison between the 'quality' of primary schools and the Alternative Schools. Though the overview of the Report rightly states that the "poor quality of teaching not only makes the children learn poorly, but also widens the gap between the two classes – one which can buy education, and the other, which cannot. It is the poor quality of teaching that forces children to seek private tuition (a major issue of concern in WB)". However, the analysis fails to go beyond cursory perceptions, while the section on 'private tuition and quality of education' even draws conclusions about 'quality' from whether children can write their names or not, thus almost trivialising the issue.

Having termed SSKs as "great achievers at extremely low cost", the report compares how parents of these children seem 'less dissatisfied' with the 'quality' of provision than those of children studying in formal primary schools. 'Satisfaction' is clearly a relative notion and is crucially linked to expectations and aspirations. Poor parents may have good reasons to be 'satisfied' with a school where the teacher comes regularly and does not discriminate against their child, irrespective of what goes on in the name of 'teaching' and, more crucially, of the 'quality of learning'. However, it is worrisome that a school that functions as minimally as SSKs (and for that matter also the formal primary schools) do, can qualify as a "great achiever"; ostensibly the "extremely low-cost" is what makes it attractive to policy makers. We clearly have a long way to go, to engage in policy formulation that resists purely economic equations of efficiency, to look more critically at quality and equality of education, especially for girls, through the lens of transformative change.

## **References**

Apple, M.A. (1993) *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, Routledge.

Apple, M.A. (2001) *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. RoutledgeFalmer

Arnot, M. (2004) 'Gender Equality and Opportunities in the Classroom: Thinking about citizenship, pedagogy and the rights of children'. Paper presented at the Beyond Access Seminar, Nairobi, Feb. 2004.

Broadfoot, P. (1996), 'Performance Assessment in perspective: International trends and current English experience'. In *Primary Education: Assessing and Planning Learning*,

Clarke, B. (2004), 'Leaving Children Behind', *Corp Watch: Holding Corporations Accountable*, September 23, 2004

Drishti (1998) *When Women Unite*, Drishti Media Collective, Ahmedabad. (A film on the anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh)

Gerwitz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (1995), *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education*, Open University Press (quoted in Apple, 2001).

Gillborn, D. and Youdell, D. (2000), *Rationing Education: Policy, Practice, Reform and Equity*, Open University Press.

Government of India (1966) *Report of the Indian Education Commission 1964-66: Education and National Development*, Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Government of India (1986) *National Policy on Education 1986: Programme of Action*, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Harris, M. (1999) *Gender Sensitivity in Primary School Mathematics in India*. Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

Harriss, J. (2000) *Depoliticising Development: The World Bank and Social Capital*, New Delhi: Leftword Books.

International Finance Corporation (1999) 'Investment Opportunities in Private Education in Developing Countries', Proceedings of the International Conference, IFC, Member of the World Bank Group, Washington.

Juneja, N. (2003) 'Constitutional Amendment to Make Education a Fundamental Right'. Occasional Paper, National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi.

Kabeer, N. (1994) *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*, New Delhi: Kali for Women

Kabeer, N. (2003) *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A handbook for policy makers and other stakeholders*. Commonwealth Secretariat and IDRC

Lauder, H. and Hughes, D. (1999) *Trading in Futures*, Open University Press.

Ministry of Human Resource Development (2001) Draft Tenth Plan Working Group Report on Adult Education, New Delhi: MHRD, Government of India

Ministry of Human Resource Development (1993) *Learning Without Burden*, MHRD, Government of India, New Delhi.

Mortimore, P. (1996) 'Quality control in education and schools'. In *Primary Education: Assessing and Planning Learning*, Craft, A. (Ed.), Routledge and Open University Press.

Naik, J.P. (1982) *The Education Commission and After*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers

Nambissan, G. and Sedwal, M. (2002) 'Education For All: The situation of dalit children in India'. In *India Education Report*, (Ed) R. Govinda, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Nirantar (1999) '*Swasthya Ki Khoj Mein*' (In search of health), New Delhi: Nirantar

NLRC and Peoples TV (2002) '*Mukhiya Hum Banbe*', National Literacy Resource Centre, Mussoorie and Peoples TV, New Delhi ('We Shall be Chief' - A film on the women literacy activists who contested panchayat elections in Bihar and Jharkhand)

Nussbaum, M. (2005). Third Ravinder Kumar Memorial Lecture on 'Education for Democratic Citizenship: Beyond the Textbooks Controversy', Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi Jan. 17, 2005 (<http://cities.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=114316>)

OECD (2003) *Learners for Life: Student Approaches to Learning, Results from PISA 2000*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

PROBE Team (1999) *Public Report on Basic Education*, Oxford University Press.

Ramachandran, V. (2003) 'Snakes and Ladders, A Study Commissioned by the World Bank, New Delhi: Mimeo

Rampal, A. (1995) 'Education for a Possible Structural Change'. In *Sites for Change: The Structural Context of Empowering Women in India*, (Eds.) Rao, N., Rurup, L and Sudarshan, R. New Delhi: FES and UNDP

Rampal, A. Ramanujam, R. and Saraswathi, L.S. (1999) *Numeracy Counts!*, National Literacy Resource Centre, LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie.

Rampal, A. (2000) 'Education for Human Development in South Asia', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XXXV No. 30. 2623-2631.

Rampal, A., Ramanujam, R. and Saraswathi, L.S. (2001) *Zindagi Ka Hisaab*, (Life's Accounts) National Literacy Resource Centre, LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie.

Rampal, A. (2001) *Curriculum Change for Quality Education: A Study of Schools in DPEP and non-DPEP Districts of Kerala*, Unicef, New Delhi.

Rampal, A. and Manimala (Eds.) (2002) '*Nav Vikas Le Sabjan Padhbo: Saksharta Abhiyan Par Sanjha Shodh*' ('All Get Educated for A New Development: A Participatory Research Study on the Literacy Campaign'), National Literacy Resource Centre and Books for Change

Rampal, A. (2002) 'Texts in Context: Development of Curricula, Textbooks and Teaching Learning Materials'. In *India Education Report*, R. Govinda (Ed.), Oxford University Press.

Rampal, A. (2003) 'Counting on Everyday Mathematics'. In T.S. Saraswathi (Ed) *Cross Cultural Perspectives in Human Development: Theory, Research and Applications*. Sage Publications.

Rampal, A. (2004) 'Unpacking the 'Quality' of Schools', *Seminar*, 536, p.46-51.

Rao, N. and Smyth. I. (eds.) (2005) *Partnerships for Girls' Education*, Oxford: Oxfam

Tomasevski, K. (2003) *Education Denied: Costs and Remedies*, London: Zed Books.

Unesco (2003/2004) EFA Global Monitoring Report 'Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality', Paris: Unesco.

Unesco (2004/2005) EFA Global Monitoring Report 'The Quality Imperative', Paris: Unesco.