

Research Paper

Quality in Indian Education: Public-Private Partnerships and Grant-In-Aid Schools

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Contextualization

Education represents an essential aspect in shaping the formation of human beings, citizens and society as a whole. There is urgency evident in Indian policy to take steps to spread education amongst all children, in a country characterized by a large number of out of school children. Policy initiatives undertaken by the Government of India, through the Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE) and the commitment to the goal of Education For All (EFA), acquire extreme importance. There is need for a more thorough understanding of the broader context within which Indian education policies occur today. India has seen many arrangements for school education continuing from colonial times (and which continued into independent India), and the complex range of institutional arrangements for providing schooling have increased (Nurullah and Naik, 1951). While until the 1980s, the private players in school education were regarded as a marginal phenomenon, catering to the elite, since the 1990s, the presence of the private has been regarded as a mainstream phenomenon, one that is growing. There is a widespread neoliberal character evident in public policy wherein private management is widely believed to produce 'value for money' (Fennell, 2007, p. 4). Public Private Partnership (PPP) has recently entered into the service delivery domain in the social sectors, where the Indian state is gradually withdrawing. The present study examines the nature of the Indian state today, and the proposed PPP model vis-à-vis the existing grant-in-aid (GIA) system, which may be considered a precursor to PPPs. The discourse on quality in education provided the theoretical background against which both these models and broader education policy were critically analysed. The congruity of these two similar yet different types of schools with the Right to Education Act and the goal of EFA was investigated, including their advantages and disadvantages. A brief, but critical, analysis of the RTE and its relation with the notion of quality in education within the neoliberal framework is discussed. Research findings throw light on shortcomings of state accountability, greater public commitment in GIA schools than in (corporate) PPPs, and embedded socio-cultural segregation within Indian society, which fosters privatization.

Abstract: *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 represents the 'last piece of the puzzle' that was missing in Indian education policy. This Act was passed at a time when the nature of the Indian state was inherently changing, due to the (neoliberal) policies adopted in the last decades. Neoliberal ideology suggests a withdrawal of the state from the public sphere, where the private sector would produce more efficient services. With the enactment of the RTE, the state reiterates its commitment and responsibility to provide free and compulsory – and 'good quality' – education to all children. This study investigates the nature of the modern Indian state in comparative terms with the past, using the discourse on quality in education as a framework for analysis. It takes into consideration the features of and values promoted by the current neoliberal framework, within which the new model of Public-Private Partnerships in education has been proposed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. A qualitative approach is employed, including the study of documents, and the use of in-depth interviews with educational experts, practitioners, activists and government officials. Case studies of two grant-in-aid*

(GIA) schools were conducted, to provide insights on the experiences, advantages and shortcomings of this system in the state of Maharashtra. These insights of the GIA system are used to reflect on the PPP model, suggesting the need for the state to strengthen its role rather than 'rolling back'. Recommendations are provided regarding the need of further research to assess long-term implications of PPPs and employ approaches beyond the dichotomy public versus private. Critical reflections unveil that policy making needs to promote an inclusive paradigm shift in Indian education.

Introduction

Clarity about Quality

The theoretical framework in this study emphasises the public nature of education. Quality is based on the notion of educational *worthwhileness* and on the 'dialectic of inputs and outputs' (Winch, 2010, p. 1) of the educational system. According to Naik, worthwhileness implies an exhaustive evaluation of an education system, Winch (2010) and Carrol and Châu's (1996) approaches maintain continuity, balance and a strict interrelation between inputs and outputs and, like Lingard, Knight and Porter (1993), emphasize the process of learning. 'Measures of educational process' are central also in Gibbs' (2010, pp. 4, 6, 43) idea of 'educational gain', within a multidimensional framework for quality. Naik's notion of standards refers solely to the achievement of students in a system (Sarangapani, 2010), while De Grauwe (2005, p. 284) distinguishes between 'administrative' and 'pedagogical standards'.

Winch's quality framework identifies four elements: i) aims, as the purposes of an institution (agreed to by different interest groups and relevant to the priorities of society). Apple (2001a, p. 413), Holt (2002, p. 6), Carron and Châu (1996, p. 247) define these as student or educational 'needs', and Broadfoot (1985) as 'educational goals'. Measuring the achievement of aims determines ii) accountability of a system (Broadfoot, 1985, p. 278; Winch, 1996); iii) (good) practice and curriculum and iv) standards (Winch, 1996). Moral and political nuances define accountability (Broadfoot, 1985; Winch, 1996), as a 'mutual obligation' (Winch, 1996, p. 2) between the government and its taxpayers, between teachers and students and between government and teachers.

In the neoliberal scenario, different interest groups are seen as '*consumers*', and the providers of education as '*producers*'. (Apple, 2001a,b; Holt, 2002; Lingard, Knight and Porter, 1993; Whitty, 1997; Winch, 1996, p. 4). Education is equated to a commodity in the market (Stanfield, 2012, p. 39). A market-perspective on accountability and education fails to grasp the complexity and multidimensionality of quality. Apple (2001a,b), Winch (1996) and Whitty (1997) question public choice theory that justifies the introduction of market forces, or of unwieldy bureaucratic procedures to guarantee quality in a public-funded education system. Within market approach and terminology education is a profit-oriented process, based on 'quality for money' and divested of broader values (Stanfield, 2012). However, a worthwhile (Winch, 2010) educational process is related to values that cannot be represented in a market model, due to the 'non-commodity nature of education' (Apple, 2001a,b; Ball, 2006; Holt, 2002; Lingard, Knight and Porter, 1993; Winch, 1996, pp. 98, 100). The behaviour of an educational market is likely to differ from that of a conventional one, even without the intervention of the state. Firstly, in an educational marketplace the quality of students is as important as the price paid by their parents. If the quality of students declines, the standards of education of the school fall too, reducing its market value (Apple, 2001b; Winch 1996). Secondly, the law of supply and demand does not apply to schools the way it does to commercial firms. An expansion of the school is likely to jeopardize the characteristics that generated the demand initially (Stanfield 2012; Winch, 1996). The notion

of 'customer of education' (Winch, 1996, p. 100), is problematic because the 'customer' is not the *real* consumer (i.e. parents pay for their children). Considering the notion of accountability in a state-financed system of education, those who provide the resources for education constitute a heterogeneous group (i.e. taxpayers as parents and non-parents, corporate bodies, children as future taxpayers etc.), which cannot be reduced to a single category of customers. Likewise, the RTE makes the state accountable to children and to a wider group of taxpayers. In the same breath, the state assumes both the role of a provider and competitor in the education market, giving rise to quality-related concerns. To whom exactly is the state accountable? To children and taxpayers or to customers who can afford to pay for *educational products*? And are these the same? How can the state be accountable to taxpayers who cannot afford educational costs and rely entirely on its public provision (apparently of inferior quality)? In an "*educonomic*" system, market competition would give the state incentives to improve the quality of its educational services. A historical policy analysis unveils the reluctance of the Indian state to invest higher shares of its financial budget in education over time (Nurullah and Naik, 1951). Perhaps, are PPPs a camouflage for a de facto privatisation? According to Sadgopal (2011):

...the Indian state of late has been acting more as an agent of the neoliberal capital than as the guardian of the people's democratic rights [...] as guaranteed in the Constitution. Its policy focus is on throwing open Indian education as one of the most lucrative markets for global investment [...] This is evident in a range of initiatives such as the PPP, voucher schools, refinanced loans and tax exemptions to both the investors (corporate houses, non-governmental organisations and religious bodies) and the consumers (children and parents) and a range of pro-market laws on the anvil, including the foreign university Bill. Policymaking [...] is being outsourced to corporate houses...

In the neoliberal era, making free and compulsory education a fundamental right for all children coexists with making education a tradable commodity in the market.

Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 and Quality in Education

The RTE is the first document that assigns education as a positive right to the Indian children and the duty of the Indian state to provide educational opportunities for them. Specifically, it decrees that *all* children in the 6 to 14 age group have the right to receive free and compulsory education in government schools. Nevertheless, it allows the presence of the private sector in education, by including private unaided institutions within the definition of a school (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009). The Act implies that these schools are under obligation to provide free and compulsory education to at least 25% of the children admitted. The RTE may be regarded as a *trade-off* between different stakeholders, where neoliberal policies coexist with a more welfare-oriented step.

The RTE fails to address crucial issues, namely a stratified and unequal educational structure (Balagopalan, 2004), where different categories of schools cater to different social classes (Sadgopal, 2011), thus reinforcing social stratification. Apple (2001a) and Whitty (1997) predict the structural effects and reproduction of social inequalities of neoliberal reforms. Equal access is not guaranteed by establishing a 'neighbourhood school' (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009, p. 3), free of cost in terms of fees, but not based on population criteria (Mehendale, 2010, p. 2). The state should be responsible for covering the costs involved in educational expenditure. If it fails to do so, access will continue to be determined on the basis of socio-economic status (Raina, 2009). The Act prescribes a *restrictive* and *discriminatory* definition of a child (Raina, 2009), limits it only to the six to fourteen age group, and does not make early childhood care compulsory. This violates the international definition of a child (United Nations, 1989, p. 2). Heterogeneity in school monitoring arrangements and lack of clarity for financial responsibility for the RTE implementation, affect accountability and

quality of education (Jha and Parvati, 2010). In a neoliberal perspective, this affects quality of students too: how will students (who cannot afford high-cost private provision of early childhood education) gain more value in the market?

'Good quality elementary education' (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2009, p. 4) implies the promotion of social equity within the aims of education. Nevertheless, the Act reconfirms varied categories of schools for *different types of pupils*, with different 'socio-economic and cultural status or purchasing capacity' (Sadgopal, 2011). Where there is a lack and diversity of (e)quality of inputs how can there be (e)quality of outcomes?

Despite the RTE being a steppingstone in Indian education, its enforcement presents critical issues. These can affect quality of education, in terms of both inputs and outputs.

A Rationale for PPPs?

The draft note on PPP issued by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) defines Public Private Partnership as a contract between the government and a private enterprise to offer 'quality services' (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009, p. 1), by employing the expertise of the private sector. Government and private party assume associated risks and the latter 'performs part of the service delivery functions of the government' (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009, p. 1). Remuneration to the private party –according to performance criteria- is paid either through user charges or government budget, or a combination of both. The draft specifies that the Indian education sector already includes a heterogeneous group of public-private partnerships, as in the case of aided schools. The MHRD (2009, p. 2) lists the advantages of PPPs, as per a World Bank (1995) research study:

(i) Students in private schools outperformed students in public schools on a variety of achievements; (ii) Unit costs of private schools were lower than those of public schools and (iii) Private schools had greater authority for decision making at the school level and better emphasis on enhancing student achievement.

The PPP model can offer three types of provisions: "(i) infrastructural services, (ii) support services and (iii) educational services" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2009, p. 2). In the first case, the private partner is responsible for building and operating the infrastructure facilities at its own expenses, while the government runs the school (and basically pays a 'rental' fee to the private party), on a long term agreement. At the end of the contract, the ownership of the infrastructure may either be transferred to the government or maintained by the private. In the second type, *support services* as 'school meals, IT facilities, laboratory, gym, transport facilities etc' (ibid, p. 3) are provided by the private sector and paid by the government. The first model can also occur in combination with the second. The third case prescribes that 'the private partner has full control of management of the school including recruitment of teachers and staff' (ibid, p. 4). In this case, the government pays a 'fee per student' (ibid, p. 4) to the private school. Efficiency and ever-improving performance are, thus, guaranteed by a system of incentives, i.e. government payment of fees depends on compliance with agreed requirements. The note includes GIA schools within the third typology, and highlights their lack of incentives for quality improvement. This, according to the note, is due to the fact that government grants are not based on school performance. Thus, the GIA model proves to be unfit in an educational market, which could '*legitimate*' a de facto privatization of the education system, in the name of '*quality*'!

Section 7.5 allows the private sector to intervene in government schools, including renovation of infrastructure, teachers training and running of 'skill development centres using their own business models' (ibid, p. 17). What would be the impact of such business models on the aims and students of the school? The note presents a rationale for PPPs. Firstly, it

would reduce state budget constraint, for the government would cater to education demand through the financial resources of the private sector. Secondly, it would lead to efficiency gains and greater accountability than public sector, 'because of the inherent nature of the arrangement' (ibid, p. 7). Accountability is not derived by public commitment, but by *incentives* intrinsic to the commercial nature of education (Sarangapani and Winch, 2010). Profit-motive, lack of incentives, and exit of private providers from the market (Hodge, 2006), could hamper equity (Fennell, n.d.).

Critics argue that PPPs are in conflict with RTE regulations, which assign financial, operational and regulatory responsibility for the provision of elementary education to the state. The wide-range of agencies within the private sector cannot be categorised under the all-encompassing umbrella of PPPs (Consultation on MHRD PPP note at TISS, 2009; Fennel, 2007; Kumar, 2008).

Inconsistent assumptions include: i) the government school system has failed, ii) unquestionable delivery of quality education by the private, and iii) the same system that unsuccessfully regulated government schools would succeed in regulating wholly private schools (Apple 2001b; Consultation on MHRD PPP note at TISS, 2009; De Grauwe, 2005; Hodge, 2006; Whitty 1997). Purposes of this reform exhibit inherent contradictions, likely to affect the formation of the future citizens of the country if, '*for private providers, children's education is...just like any other business*' (Kumar, 2008, p.9). Stanfield's interpretation of education as 'very similar to the vast majority of other products...on an open market' (Stanfield, 2012, p. 39) corroborates the critics' arguments.

Public-Private Partnerships: Current Debate in Indian Education Policy

There is a dichotomy in Indian education policy between PPPs advocates and opponents to achieve Education For All, EFA, (UNESCO, 2000) and implement the RTE. The former sustain that allocation of 6% of GDP to education is not feasible to implement the RTE, and claim that the only solution for achieving EFA is through PPPs. A scenario 'in which low cost private providers of school education, who pay much lower teacher salary, cover a significant part of school education' (Jain and Dholakia, 2009, pp. 40-41). Their conclusions draw evidence from Tooley and Dixon (2005, pp. 2-44): '*...private schools [...]are playing [...] an important [...] role in reaching the poor [...] the government should look at the private unaided sector as a 'strength'*', and extend loans to private schools or contributions in the form of vouchers for students (Jain and Dholakia, 2009). Baird's (2009) research, conducted in Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh, identifies private schooling as 'demand-driven': (low-income) parents perceive private as 'better' than government schools, and *choose* to pay. Not dissimilar claims on the potential role of 'business' education in serving the poor where the state system has failed, for there is 'no alternative worth considering', can be found in the broader international neoliberal debate (Moe, 1994, p. 33; Apple, 2001b, p. 18). Parental choice (Moe, 1994, p. 26), large scale quality, accountability determined through performance-based tests (Stanfield, 2012), customer satisfaction and profit-making incentives (Moe, 1994; Stanfield, 2012), and benefits for state budget limitations (Stanfield, 2012) are essential arguments to the larger neoliberal discourse.

PPPs opponents contend the notion of school percolating from the neoliberal framework, defined by Sarangapani (2009) as an 'institutional provision...to support the acquisition of literacy and numeracy...adjusted around child labour schedules'. They question criteria for quality education, parental choice and contextualization (Fennell, 2007; Sarangapani and Winch, 2010) in PPP advocates' research results, such as 'fans, tape recorders and TVs' (Sarangapani, 2009, pp. 67-68) and 'English as a medium of instruction' (Sarangapani and Winch, 2010, p. 509). The controversial nature of findings and measures of quality in an

education market within neoliberal projects are subject to criticism at the international level (Apple, 2001a; De Grauwe, 2005; Whitty, 1997; Wylie, 1994, 1995, cited in Whitty 1997).

Higher achievements in private vis-à-vis government schools are the result of rote memory learning, students' socio-economic background or their different initial levels (Sarangapani, 2009, p. 69). Holt (2002, p. 268, 269) asserts that, in current fast food education, 'the process of creating educative experiences' is reduced to assessing 'test results'. The concept of *school* implies provision of *comprehensive and inclusive processes for the development of children*: and 'worthwhile learning...experiences and opportunities' (Sarangapani, 2009, p. 68). This requires *commitment and cooperation* between ministries in different sectors (Rebell, 2007), *rather than* doing away with current problems by *rolling the State back and pushing the private sector in!* Jain, Dholakia and Tooley propose models that offer 'educational opportunity' (Sarangapani, 2009, p. 69) in the market, which differs from the responsibility to guarantee that children become educated, inherent to education as a public good.

Critics call for the urgency to challenge the broader policy framework (Apple 2001a; Lingard, Knight and Porter, 1993; Whitty, 1997) within which PPPs have been conceived. Advocates of PPPs do not question the existing economic order (supported by multilateral bodies), and do not provide historical or theoretical backgrounds as a rationale (De Grauwe, 2005; Jain and Saxena, 2010). In the global neoliberal scenario, the *educational discourse* has shifted *from a concern for shaping new citizens*, promoting the notions of justice and *equality* and *education as a human right*, towards the concepts of *human capital* (Halsey et al., 1997, p. 219), *efficiency* and *cost-effectiveness*, in terms of 'measurable student achievement' (Apple, 2001a,b; Rebell, 2007; Holt, 2002; Jain and Saxena, 2010, p. 80). Kumar (2011) and Apple (2001a) underline the importance of historically contextualizing the term neoliberal. 19th century liberal (utilitarian) thought focused on the ability to gain pleasure from utilities. Later, the state played an essential role in protecting and educating children, and education aimed at spurring creative thinking. The neoliberal state is focused on quality, efficiency, and consumption. In this ideological framework, education *needs* to be viewed as a 'consumable commodity' (Kumar, 2011, p. 38), due to widespread consent towards profit making as a licit purpose of educational institutions. According to Panikkar (2011, p. 41) '[t]he present notion of private-public participation is a prescription for unbridled privatisation, with public subsidy'. As reported by the Indian Ministry of Finance (2011, p. 55): 'schools can be run only as non-profit...[h]owever,...[i]t is...advisable to...allow schools to be *profit making*'.

Lack of internal policy deliberation processes makes the state pro-privatization stance ungrounded (De Grauwe, 2005), particularly in context to the RTE and EFA: for 'nowhere in the world has a national system of education evolved without the state playing the lead role' (Kumar, 2008, p. 8).

Historical Background of the Role of the State in Indian Education Policy and Introduction of the GIA System

This study outlined a common thread between pre- and post-Independence India: a set of inconsistent commitments by the state, where the responsibility for providing education relied upon the large contribution made by private enterprise (Kumar, 2008; Nurullah and Naik, 1951; Whitehead, 2005; Misra, 1973).

The role of the state nowadays stems from its 1850s [pre-Independence British] education policy inclination to declare its inability to educate Indian masses, and the need for the private enterprise to intervene through partnerships (Whitehead, 2005). In this scenario, the GIA system played an essential function in spreading education among the masses (Misra, 1973). This model was (and still is) imbued with public nature and purposes, and incentives for the private enterprises to contribute to spreading education (Misra, 1973). Despite its

shortcomings, the GIA system ensured relative efficiency and avoided unrestrained pursuit of profit, through state monitoring and regulations (Misra, 1973). This study argues that, at present, the role of state and regulations are still crucial to ensure the non-profit motive of aided schools (Patkar, 2007). How will the State maintain its regulatory role in preserving non-profit motives and protecting poorer sections of society from unequal access to education under PPPs?

Neoliberal constriction in public expenditure has adversely affected the system of public grants and prevented the private from meaningfully contributing to the aims of better 'access, equity, quality and efficiency' (World Bank, 2003, p. 8). Policy-wise, inadequate legal framework, law implementation and monitoring systems hinder accountability and quality assurance in the GIA system (Patkar, 2007; World Bank, 2003).

Shortcomings of the system have remained unaddressed, and the distribution of public funding unfair. The bias towards richer institutions has increased, leaving the needs of the poor unmet (World Bank, 2003). Studies of the GIA system call for reforms to improve equity of access and monitoring of performance (Misra, 1973; Patkar, 2007; World Bank, 2003).

Methodology

The methodology used in this research is qualitative in nature. It includes two case studies of GIA schools in Mumbai, content analysis of documents and in-depth interviews with school headmistresses, educational experts and activists, and government officials. Document analysis helped determine the nature of GIA schools and the role played by the Indian state over time. The relationship between primary and secondary data was investigated using the quality framework defined above. In-depth interviews were conducted over a period of seven months (June-December 2011). Their purpose was to explore the respondents' perspectives and expectations on PPPs and GIA schools. In-depth interviews enable one to gather insights on processes and outcomes of the education system, through practitioners' experiences. This method is useful to throw light on secondary data on Indian education policy. Its advantages include acquiring detailed information on a specific issue, as compared to other methods, e.g. surveys. This method offers a relaxed atmosphere for the respondents to answer open-ended questions, as opposed to the mere filling out of surveys. Its limitations occur in terms of the informants' biased responses in their area of expertise, or in relation to individual stakes within the system. Hence, a data collection design and the creation of instruments to allow for minimal bias were developed. Another limitation of this technique is its 'time-intensive' (Boyce and Neale, 2006, pp. 3-4) nature. Arranging interviews and reaching different locations, as well as transcribing and analysing audio data are time-consuming processes. Developing an interviewing technique requires a conscious effort to ensure that the interviewee feels comfortable, and to avoid any influence on the respondents' answers. Results of in-depth interviews cannot be largely generalized, due to the absence of random sampling techniques and the choice of small samples. Emergence of recurrent themes in the interviews indicated that a satisfactory sample size was attained. The data collection process consisted of four steps: (i) planning; (ii) development of tools/instruments; (iii) data collection; and (iv) data analysis. Planning consisted in identifying relevant stakeholders for in-depth interviews and two GIA schools for the case studies. The latter were chosen through snowball sampling, after acquiring information from experts in the field. Two separate interview protocols were determined for the case studies of two GIA schools and for educational experts, activists and government officials, to ensure consistency in the interviews and increase reliability of the findings. Interviews were conducted by following a set of instructions included in the protocol, such as the information to be provided to the interviewees, the use of audio recording and notes. Data analysis required the transcription and review of collected data, which led to the emergence of common themes among the responses of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The schools in the case studies and all respondents were anonymous. Interviews were arranged via emails or phone calls, where purpose and duration of the interview were communicated to the informants. They were all informed that the purpose of this study is to outline the functioning of GIA schools in Mumbai, and the long-term implications of Indian education policy in context to PPPs. All respondents were asked for consent regarding audio-recording of the interview, and were ensured confidentiality of the same. At the end of the interviews, summarizing and sharing of key information was conducted with the interviewees. As per some interviewees' request, a copy of the recorded interviews was sent to them. Respondents were supportive, cooperative and willing to contribute to the purpose of this study. Government officials, however, were suspicious and did not show particular interest for the purpose of this research. Information gathered from interviews was substantiated with analysis of documents.

Findings from the Field: Case Studies

The case studies refer to two primary GIA schools located in Mumbai suburb areas. The first school was established as a Society in the 1970s, by South Indian workers. The purposes were to provide an English medium school and 'more knowledge with less fees' (primary section headmistress), because all other schools were high-fees private Marathi medium schools. In terms of quality, these aims were relevant to the local priorities of society. Both interviewees explained that the school became aided to receive funds to cover teachers salaries and other expenditures. In the last 7 to 8 years, the school has become 'partially aided' (primary section headmistress) since grants are only for teachers' salaries, and 'it is very difficult for the management' to preserve 'cleanliness and...maintenance of the school' (secondary section headmistress). Additional sources of funds are sought in Society members' donations, 20 percent revert from textbooks publishers (secondary section headmistress), and in examination fees to cover material related expenditures (primary section headmistress). Government grants are not sufficient to ensure a 'good atmosphere' for the child, and additional funds would be required 'for the benefit of the students...not of the management' (secondary section headmistress). The remarks below refer to state accountability and the (neo-liberal) contradiction between its diminished role and its increased intervention to assess school performance:

...the government expects the school to be properly maintained, without any grant for that, support, and higher aid, grants are given to schools that score higher standards (primary section headmistress).

Difficulties in maintaining school standards, good practice and accountability emerge too:

...there are no clear rules from the government, so how to take action in problematic situations like teacher absenteeism etc? Where are we? What we have to follow? Orally they [government] say that it [the appointment of teachers] should be according to RTE, but practically they will not give salaries for new teachers (ibid).

As concerns PPPs, both headmistresses were unaware of it, and the secondary section headmistress commented that children from richer families 'do not enroll in this school...parents think higher the money, higher the standard...even if it's not like that...[but] thanks to the RTE this will go!', thus revealing expectations from the state to promote equity and quality.

The school in the second case study was established in 1959, under the Kerala Peoples Education Society (KPES), by a group of 'progressive minded people' (secondary section headmistress) migrated from Kerala. The purpose was to provide a Malyali medium school for the migrants' children. Once the Malyali people shifted from the area, it turned into an English medium school. Originally, the grants were given to children and, then, to the management for teachers' salaries, maintenance, rent and other expenditures. Concerns about state accountability arise when considering that, today, grants cover only teachers' salaries, and 'the burden for maintenance expenditures is only on the management' (secondary section headmistress). She added that, as per GIA rules, part of the grant should be dedicated to maintenance costs. However, 'the rule is not applied...the school presented a case to the Ministry', who declared the impossibility for the state to cover such costs, due to 'fund crunch'. She perceived the school as 'semi-government, semi-private...poor children from the slum area enroll, like in government schools, we have to give admission to everybody nearby, first come first, because there is no fees, no facilities...[but] the style of education is different'. Regarding PPPs, she claimed that quality will be ensured through:

...fear, out of compulsion, but not out of passion, somebody is watching them [teachers], so performance based, but there are negative aspects also, privatisation has its own demons, it is becoming commodification of education, we will not have that local aspect with us, [the] private can impose global, some sort of foreign nationals it will create!

In her view, instead of introducing PPPs:

[the state could] improve its own system of education, with proper monitoring system, down to the root, with no corruption, everywhere the system is wrong because of corruption.

These perspectives highlight the contrast between the GIA school management public commitment and the coercive nature of accountability and quality within the neoliberal framework, against the notion of worthwhile education. They also express the perceived need for the state to assume responsibility for improving the existing system.

Public commitment inherent in the aims of the school, lack of state accountability and negative consequences for good practice emerge from the primary section headmistress' words:

...[the school is] striving to get another grant-in-aid code, so many rules, so many points are there, all the rules should change! Nobody is following that, here the pupil-teacher ratio we have in one class is nearly 80:1, 77, 70...[it] is against the education policy [RTE] and the government is giving no extra teachers, nothing like that. If you want you can keep, but they [state] will not give salary!

She explained that 'now the management is trying to pay for surplus teachers', but is not able to provide adequate salaries:

...[the management do] selfless work, they spend their own money, they are committed members, but [quality is] deteriorating year by year, that is it! That's a truth! Our teachers try hard to bring up the level, even by working on Saturdays. Now teachers have more work, but children have nothing.

In-depth interviews

Five in-depth interviews were conducted with educational experts, activists and government officials.

The extract from the interview with an educational activist in Mumbai reiterates concerns about equity and the inherent stratified structure of the Indian society -reflected in a 'multitrack education system', state accountability, aims of private arrangements within the neoliberal framework and their effects on society, and the need for a larger paradigm shift in education:

...[the] government eventually had to fulfill the demands of the upper and middle classes, sizeable means it started disturbing the system, when I say government in this democracy, government belongs to them, they are the government! The Education Department became the Human Resources Department, naturally for the PPP, for them the child is a unit in the factory, the citizen has gone, equality has gone, the formation of the society has gone, the market decides how society will become [...] Now only those who possess capital can open schools! The government saw that these private players are so smart that when they are making profit they want freedom and when they come to losses they said that no bailout programme should be required. Socialisation of losses and privatisation of profit is their motto!...the state will have to be brought back [...] for democracy's sake don't make education a commodity! Education is a necessity! Education is for the citizens!

The following excerpt from the interview with an educational activist and practitioner in Pune, who works with government and GIA schools teachers, illustrates field perspectives and insights on the roots of inequalities in Indian society and the phenomenon of cultural obstracism:

In a way I feel that it was inborn into the psyche of the middle class Indian, that it is ok to have different types of schooling for different types of children. The public-private is not merely an economic perspective, something that is missing in the public-private discourse right now is the cultural difference. There is no merely economic stratification, there is a lot of cultural stratification [...] when you have the buying capacity you can impose your culture!

Below are his views on the implications of privatization of education, social commitment of GIA schools, and the necessity for the state to reassert the aims of education:

There is a widespread monoculturalisation and McDonaldisation of the society, so criticality and creativity parts of education will be under the grave, as I stated in an article, PPPs risk to be a deathbell for education, delivery is a term that you would borrow from the corporate industry, historically grant-in-aid never segregated children, now education is looked at as a service to be delivered. If you look at the aspect of thinking in education, this is missed, then education [has] to be inculcated and built up, not delivered! [...] The government denies textbooks to schools, but it provides subsidies to the corporate sector to set up multiplexes, the middle class in this country has accepted this easily once it has started to get the benefits of globalisation, but when education will not be a profitable market anymore, the state will have to be brought back!

Observations below from an educational practitioner and activist in Mumbai, who worked in government schools programmes and as Education Officer in the UNESCO, bring to light how ingrained social hierarchy values within Indian culture are reinforced by neoliberal model and language:

No one will believe that with the PPP model, that the private sector is really keen to do some social work and without getting any money they want to do something

good for the children! It's not that they are doing any great thing out of any, no notion of social responsibility in the corporate type of PPPs. What bothers me the most is that obviously they will bring in there their value system also, which is convenient to the corporate sector only.

She then provided her perspective on the PPPs' impact on quality in education and the broader society in the long term:

The quality that is showed by these schools is based on the image that is created by exam results and fancy infrastructures, and I feel that the children of the rich will always believe that they are special and they will not learn social values and ethics and to coexist with or develop a concern for lower social classes.

The above issues could hinder the aspects of equity and worthwhilness in education within PPPs, while GIA schools are perceived as promoting good practice and education as a public good:

In grant-in-aid schools the importance of the overall learning process of the child, there is interaction with the outside society. In private schools, there are iron walls around these schools, only few parents are interested in the learning process happening in these schools. These schools are product oriented, in a dictatorial fashion, teachers would tell the parents how much more money [to pay] and that's all, rather than being a dialogue.

She also added remarks on the differing nature of the liberal and neoliberal state, where the former actively promoted democratic values, whereas the latter currently abdicates its responsibility.

The analysis of observations from six government officials (SCERT, Pune) contrasts with the views of other interviewees. Their comments are compiled below. They were interviewed in a group and their responses overlapped. It was not possible to determine distinct responses from the recordings:

...the management is not at all allowed to do whatever they want, the control of the [Education] Department is there. Now as privatization is concerned, un-aided, un-recognized schools have to follow the regulations and they distinguish [themselves] from grant-in-aid schools. They do not receive any grant from the government. These aided schools, means that they receive grants for teachers' salaries and other expenditure.

With regard to the introduction of PPP policies in education, they explained that:

..education is not a for-profit sector, but a long-term investment, making profit out of running an institution is not expected, but implementation is a different aspect. The focus [is] on educating the masses. But now it is a changing world, today the education of classes is also expected and the whole structure is designed that way, mass and class education will be achieved and equality will be ensured.

It could be inferred from their responses that educational aims in aided schools and other types of private institutions do not differ in nature. The respondents imply that all schools have the same standards and accountability. A critical interpretation, however, unveils confirmation of socio-cultural segregation, dissimilar aims and accountability in different school arrangements:

...no need to worry about the upper and middle classes concerns regarding their children mixing with those coming from backward classes. If I have prejudices, if I don't have social orientation, I will tell my child not to mix with them, that can happen and this can be avoided. If parents warn their children not to mix up and focus of parents will be on quality of the facilities and academic performance of the school, this will not be a binding factor.

Another interviewee added:

[this] is the socialist nature of the state: when it is deciding different policies, government is taking the representative funders of private sector also, to make policies. It is not only the government officials that are forming these policies, but NGOs are there, different types of people, and this is a heterogeneous body maybe, but they are all coming together and they are taking decisions, so PPP will create a homogeneous group in society.

The findings suggest that similar perspectives emerged at different levels (within school units and at the systemic level).

Some Food for Thought

State commitment to ensure the right to free and compulsory education to all children while promoting larger neoliberal policies represents *a drop of social welfarism in an ocean of profiteerism*. Today, the Indian state shows a will for abdication in the provision of education, and legitimate de-facto privatisation, by promoting profit-making motives in (corporate) private educational institutions (Apple, 2001a). Promotion of equity and education as a worthwhile process is challenged in the neoliberal context by market forces and terminology (De Grauwe, 2005; Sarangapani and Winch, 2010; Whitty, 1997). Inconsistencies between policy documents and implementation raise concerns regarding the convergence of the aims of education promoted by the Right to Education with (profiteering) goals pursued by private corporate educational institutions.

Findings revealed a lack of public concern in (corporate) private institutions, vis-à-vis the commitment of trustees in aided schools. There is evidence that the GIA system is relatively effective in the provision of primary education, especially in addressing the poorer sections of society and in promoting equity.

The investigation of the historic role of the state in Indian education from the comparison between secondary and primary data unfolds that, earlier, the relationship between educational institutions in the form of GIA schools and the State was closer to the notion of a partnership, as compared to the current PPP model. Nevertheless, the education system always presented a stratified educational structure, modelled on the intrinsic socio-cultural segregation present in Indian society (Sarangapani and Winch, 2010). Indian policy making reflects the outlook of influential sections of society, with consequent marginalization of disadvantaged classes from education.

There is need to approach educational research from a perspective that goes beyond the categorization of public versus private. A sound theoretical framework to determine quality in education as a worthwhile process, grounded on the dialogical relationships between inputs and outputs (Gibbs, 2010; Winch, 2010) should be at the basis of changes in systemic educational arrangements. The inherent difference between traditional and education market should be born in mind to preserve a progressive educational character.

An old truth unfolded from the case studies and in-depth interviews. The root of the problem lies in the 'cultural ostracism' embedded within influential classes' outlook against 'egalitarian norms and values' (Apple, 2001b, p. 36). This draws a parallel with the results of Weiner's study in the early 1990s. A common set of beliefs, amongst individuals involved at different levels of the education system, plays a crucial role in determining the outcomes of education policies (Weiner, 1991). The call of the hour for the Indian state is to play a leading role in promoting a paradigm shift in education to foster socio-cultural equity. Further research should help to determine the long-term impacts of PPPs. An educational system whose aims and practices promote the much needed change is imperative.

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