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Krishna Kumar
Visiting Fellow, MIDS

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by **Krishna Kumar**

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Madras Institute of Development Studies
79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar
Adyar, Chennai 600 020
Tel.: 2441 1574/2589/2295/9771
pub@mids.ac.in | http://www.mids.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

The long-cherished policy goal of universalisation of elementary schooling now seems within reach due to the promulgation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act. Universality, however, does not necessarily mean equality. Why that is can be examined in terms of major impediments embedded in the system of education itself. Structurally maintained relations between primary, secondary and higher education constitute one set of impediments. Another significant obstacle facing RTE underlies the nature of the post-welfare state and its expectations from education.

With the promulgation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009, the long-cherished policy goal of universalisation of elementary schooling seemed to have come within the nation's reach. Scholarly advocacy of universal access to elementary education (e.g. Naik 1975) had assumed that when schools can enrol and retain all children, this will enhance educational equality. Universality, however, does not necessarily mean equality. Why that is so can be examined both in terms of factors external to the system of education and also in terms of impediments embedded in the system of education itself. This paper first probes the latter kind of impediments. Specifically, it analyses the structurally maintained relations between primary, secondary and higher education. Regarded as different stages of education through which a young person passes, terms like 'primary', 'secondary' and 'higher' are commonly perceived as distinct components of the system. Routine common sense guides

the popular view that the quality of higher education depends on the quality of primary and secondary education. Relations between the three segments of the system are seldom examined as such. This paper will attempt to demonstrate how the relations between primary, secondary and higher education constitute a set of impediments that may not allow universal schooling to enhance equality. For undertaking this analysis, the paper looks into the text of the RTE law and the critique it carries of the prevailing system of elementary education. For examining the interaction between school and higher education, the paper will focus on teacher training as an overlapping sector. It will also take into account the impact made on school and teacher training policies by the growing presence and scope of a technology-centric market of pedagogic goods, and information and communication technology. Subsequent to this analysis of systemic impediments, external obstacles entrenched in the nature of the post-welfare state and its expectations from education will be examined.

Historical Background

Starting with the latter half of the 19th century, universalisation of initial schooling gradually spread to all corners of the world. This phenomenon can be described as a movement which has influenced the meaning of the term 'education' and its variants in different languages. The movement is still unfolding and spreading. It has reached South Asia only recently, and in India it continues to be a subject of debate on the roles of state and society (Mehendale 2018). Debates of this kind have raged in other parts of the world earlier. They are intertwined with economic, political and legal matters, and in many cases, with cultural issues as well. The question of responsibility has been quite central to these debates, mainly in the financial sphere, because the attempt to universalise schooling, even for a few years, costs vast sums of money. Should it be paid by the state or by the family, i.e. the parents of a child? This kind of question typically entails the assumption, and the belief underlying it, that school education is beneficial for society as a whole and also for the child who receives it. These benefits cannot be defined and listed without referring

to what we might call the demands of modernity, more specifically, the needs that arise when an economy goes through 'modernisation' – a term associated with a state-led attempt to encourage the growth of a modern, industrial economy. Modernity as the goal to be reached through the process of modernisation is widely viewed as being associated with universal literacy and democracy.

It is assumed that modernisation calls for a literate citizenry. Thus, the citizen who works in an industrial economy also forms a unit of the political order assumed to be upholding the modern kind of economy. This desired political order is customarily labelled as democracy which is said to be dependent on universal literacy. This labelling is inadequate and also somewhat misleading. Democracy and industrial economy are not necessarily related as many societies have registered industrial growth without witnessing the growth of basic values and provisions of a democratic order (Moore 1968). Modernity too remains a problematic term, especially with reference to modernisation which has been pursued in many parts of the world under conditions that do not conform to any clear definition of democracy (Touraine 1998).

Some historical references may be useful at this point. The movement towards universalisation of initial, or what is often called basic school education in England, was slow to unfold and progress. For children to attend schools, they had to be freed from the responsibility to work to contribute to family income. Child labour took a long time to be effectively outlawed, partly because of socio-economic constraints, but also because of political reasons. Consensus was not easy to achieve despite a functioning system of debate in legislative forums, not just because of entrenched attitudes, but mainly because of financial interests of the propertied and entrepreneurial strata vested in availability of cheap child labour. The struggle to legislate and support universal basic education in England went on until the early 20th century, and the parallel struggle to democratise basic school education, in the sense of ensuring equitable quality in inequal social settings, continued till after the end of the Second World War in the mid-20th century (Lawson and Silver 1973).

In contrast to this prolonged and slow movement, Japan made radical and speedy progress towards universal schooling under the Meiji rulers. Under conditions sharply different from those of England (Kobayashi 1976), both politically and economically, Japan achieved near-universal schooling for its children by compelling the peasantry to release children from the farm. Japan's story may sound somewhat unique and exotic as its struggles for democracy and for universal schooling remained quite separate. However, it has some similarities with the enforcement of schooling on children and literacy on adults witnessed in different parts of the 20th century under communist states in societies as different as those of Russia and China, Cuba and Vietnam. These experiences, and others from some countries of mainland western Europe, remind us that the relation between universal school education and industrialisation of the economy is far from sequential. In many cases like that the Scandinavian countries, spread of schooling followed industrial growth and development of a modern state – not necessarily democratic in every case – rather than preceding it. This indeterminacy continues to be seen at the regional level in countries that have achieved high rates of growth in their industrial economy or are attempting to attain it now.

These historical lessons are highly relevant, even instructive, for India where an industrial economy is in a nascent state and, on account of several different factors, it is struggling to spread and grow against the resistance of rurality, a term I will use to cover an agrarian system of livelihood as well as a specific kind of cultural ethos (Kumar 2014). The Indian story of universal schooling has just begun, in the early 21st century. It formally started with the passage of the RTE Act through the parliament in 2009. The background of this important legal enactment is long, complex and patchy. RTE has come into force as a result of the amendment made in 2002 in the Constitution. Originally, the Constitution had no specific mention of an educational right. What it offered was Article 45 in Part IV, which lists the 'directive principles of state policy'. Article 45 offered one such principle, directing the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children aged 6 to 14. Under this provision, the Constitution recognised universal schooling as a moral responsibility of the state, not a justiceable right that

could be claimed by citizens. The right now known as RTE elaborates the amendment made to Article 21, which occurs in Part III of the Constitution where fundamental and justiceable rights of the citizen are listed. Article 21 covers the citizen's right to life. It has now been amended through the insertion of an additional clause which reads as follows: 'The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.' Before this clause was added, Article 21 offered a right to life. Through legal intervention and conceptual elaboration over several years, Article 21 acquired the capacity to offer the right to a life of dignity. RTE concretises this aspect of a citizen's life. For this reason, we can say RTE treats education as a resource of dignity in individual life. It describes the measures that the state is legally bound to pursue in order to ensure universal access to eight years of compulsory school education during childhood.

Education, Dignity and Equality

The school is where the citizenry will access this element of dignity during childhood. Given this legal background, RTE presents education as something more than entry into a school at the age of six. The eight years covered by RTE are supposed to provide an experience of learning that would make future life worthwhile in the sense of carrying the prospect of being led with dignity. How precisely educational experience might impart this particular trait to the future life of a citizen is indicated quite amply in the various sections of RTE. These indications comprise what one might call an agenda or policy of educational reform, and in this sense, RTE offers more than a mere right. It also indicates how that right is to be delivered.

This special quality of RTE can be seen as a response to the problem that any right granted to children would face – namely, the problem of children's dependence on their adult guardians to ensure the delivery of the right. This dependence arises from the natural fact that children cannot claim a right on their own. RTE indicates some of the means by which the right to be at a school for eight years is to be

experienced. It suggests the measures that must be taken for creating the enabling conditions and the institutional wherewithal necessary for implementation. Moreover, many of the clauses where these indications are given can be read as criticism of the prevailing system of education.

Let us look at some of these clauses. We can divide them into two broad categories. In the first category we can include the norms to be followed by the system. Pupil-teacher ratio, the grades under RTE, teacher's involvement in work other than teaching and deployment of teachers are covered. All of these emanate from RTE's implicit critique of the system. For instance, the age-span covered by RTE is expressed in terms of two distinct stages, 'primary' and 'upper-primary', which together constitute an eight-year span of 'elementary' education. The primary stage comprises the first five years and the upper-primary stage the remaining three years. RTE's enunciation of these divisions has already begun to re-shape and streamline initial schooling in many of the Indian States which were following a seven-year cycle, divided into four years of primary and three years of upper-primary stages. In certain States, the curriculum for the upper-primary stage is prepared by the secondary board. This practice will have to be changed in order to attain conformity with RTE's terminology that places primary and upper-primary stages under a composite 'elementary' stage.

Similarly, the mandated overall ratio of 30 children per teacher for the elementary stage as a whole, conveys a critique of large classes managed by less than the required number of teachers, which is a common situation in many parts of India. RTE goes further and specifies that schools must have subject-wise teachers at the upper-primary stage. The schedule given in RTE also asks for part-time teachers to be available in every school for the teaching of arts and crafts, and physical education. To reinforce its vision of pedagogic norms and standards, RTE summarily prohibits corporal punishment, which is a common practice in Indian schools of all different kinds. Equally significantly, RTE bans annual examinations taken by a board. At present, many States conduct a board examination at the end of Class V and Class VIII. And in certain States, an annual centralised examination is taken every year starting with Class I. These examinations categorise children into

'pass' and 'fail', requiring those who 'fail' to repeat a grade. In place of annual examination, RTE mandates the implementation of a Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system, which requires ongoing assessment of all different aspects of a child's academic progress and growth.

In the second category we can place RTE's listing of pedagogic practices to be followed by teachers. Under Section V, as many as five clauses list the practices required for imparting elementary education of good quality. These are child-centred pedagogic practices involving activities and experiences that contribute to children's all-round development. CCE, which has been mentioned earlier, is part of this list. The most important aspect of Section V is the instruction that no discrimination is practiced in the classroom on the basis of caste, class or gender. This instruction constitutes an explicit critique and disapproval of a common reality portrayed in many studies of school education in India (e.g. Nambissan 2009). By summarily prohibiting discriminatory pedagogic behaviour, RTE puts a major responsibility on the state and anyone else providing elementary education to create and maintain an egalitarian ethos in the classroom.

The concern for equality is conveyed most sharply in another clause where RTE provides for 25 per cent reservation of seats in privately run fee-charging schools for children belonging to the 'economically weaker sections' (EWS) of society. This radical provision is not specifically aimed at universal enrolment, nor does it presume that elementary education of equitable quality will become accessible to all children if the private sector of schools makes its contribution. RTE's aims are higher, in the sense that it conveys a moral agenda for Indian society and state. RTE attempts to cover a complex set of factors that constitute the enabling conditions for its own success. As mentioned earlier, RTE responds to the amended (i.e. by the 86th amendment, covering Article 21) Constitution's call for re-equipping the right to life so that the life it protects is capable of being lived with dignity. The various provisions RTE makes for ensuring an active and positive school experience for children – all children, including those whose backgrounds or gender make them vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion – can be described

as ingredients of humanistic and socially transformative education. This is why we can say that RTE belongs, conceptually, to the welfarist idea of the state which imparts to state authority a strong agency to interfere with social reality, comprising – and sustained with the help of – traditions and other cultural constructs. This is quite different from the notion of an enabler state that merely serves a limited role of governance, expecting and allowing the market to work and grow.

RTE's Legacy and Initial Experience

RTE's own historical legacy contrasts with the historical moment in which it became an object of legislation. The legacy it represents spans India's struggle to acquire independent nationhood by engaging with the colonial state. In embryonic form, RTE first appeared in 1911 as a bill placed in the imperial Legislative Assembly when Gopal Krishna Gokhale introduced a bill to make primary education compulsory and free (Kumar 2014). Given the conditions of the time, the bill intended to cover only boys. For girls, early marriage and motherhood were the norm, and the first child marriage prevention law was 18 years away. But even for boys, Gokhale's bill offered a bold, radical protection from serving as child labour in the farms owned by powerful landowners. One such person, the Raja of Darbhanga (Bihar), who was a member of the legislative assembly, strongly opposed Gokhale's bill by asking in a pointed manner who might work in his fields and maintain agricultural production if all boys below the age of 11 were compelled to attend schools.

This perspective continued to provide the basis for opposition to ban child labour in a summary, rather than in a selective, manner. The incomplete legal triangle – formed by laws attempting to prevent child marriage, others attempting to address child labour, and state laws to provide for free primary education – ensured that children's access to school education remained a reluctantly recognised responsibility of the state. In the late 20th century, Weiner (1991) noted the deep-set attitudes of the educated middle class in his attempt to explain the state's reluctance to make access to primary education universal. The political

discourse always preferred a financial explanation, which was reflected in the term 'the state's capacity' used frequently during the drafting of the Constitution. In Article 45 (i.e. before the 86th amendment), the Constitution offered what Naik (1975) called a 'promise' to India's children. Naik's advocacy of universalisation of elementary education was based on the assumption that the state needed a workable plan to overcome its hesitation to fulfil a moral responsibility which it had accepted despite realising that it was beyond its financial and administrative capacity to fulfil.

When RTE was enacted and promulgated, it seemed as if the state's financial capacity had caught up with the demand that the task of universalising elementary education makes upon the public exchequer. This impression was grounded in the results that the national flagship programme called *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) had achieved. Like its predecessor, namely the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), SSA was driven by a generous fund flow from the Centre to the States, while the Centre's own resources were enhanced by contributions from international donor agencies. During its first five years (2002–07), SSA created an ethos of plentiful financial resources that enabled many new ideas to germinate in the system of elementary education. These included the provision of teacher-support systems at the sub-district level, rapid construction of school buildings, supply of pedagogic resources to teachers, etc. Enrolment and retention both increased at an impressive pace and universal access came within the reach of an institutional apparatus that had earlier struggled with chronic high dropout rates, especially in the populous states of northern India.

However, the sense of plenty that SSA had created did not last long after RTE's promulgation. The Centre's largesse represented financial support in a project-mode that bypassed the old systemic structures such as the Directorate of Education. Direct funding from the Centre under a project mode served the immediate goal of increasing enrolment and retention. It created the expectation that States would pursue systemic reform and maintain increased funding for elementary education from their own resources after the completion of SSA as a project. To an extent, the southern States were able to maintain increased financial

resources, though without comprehensive systemic reforms; but the northern States started showing signs of complete lack of capacity. Within a short while after the promulgation of RTE, SSA started to look like a pleasant memory. As a law, RTE began to lose steam, especially on aspects in which it sought to transform the entrenched systemic and pedagogic practices wherein it intended to make a dent.

Opponents of different provisions made in RTE approached the courts. One of the first aspects to come under such attack was the provision of reservation of 25 per cent seats for EWS children. This attack did not attain success. The Supreme Court upheld the provision, but agreed to exempt unaided boarding schools and those run by religious and linguistic minorities. Next came the assault on RTE's attempt to prohibit annual examinations and the pass-fail system. Many State governments, and even the Central Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry, were keen to re-establish the annual exam system. A committee appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) recommended that States should be left free to decide on the mode of evaluation. This decision is still waiting for incorporation in RTE through an amendment. If the decision is implemented, it will cause a major dent in the larger agenda of RTE to reform the system, and not merely to increase enrolment.

Resistance to RTE

By now it is clear that RTE has been interpreted mainly as an instrument of universality by improving access. Its capacity to equalise the quality of educational experience is facing resistance. Within less than a decade of its promulgation, it has met with serious obstacles that specifically hit its egalitarian potential. These obstacles are of different kinds: some are within the system of education itself while others are in the wider framework and ethos of state policy. We will discuss the obstacles to RTE in four categories. The first is within the system of school education, the second in the relation between school and higher education. The third systemic obstacle is in teacher training, and the fourth is in the economic and social policy framework of the post-welfare state.

Let us start with the conflict that RTE faces within the system. It lies in relations between the elementary, secondary and higher education. Discussion of RTE tends to focus on primary and upper-primary education, treating these stages in isolation from other stages of education. This tendency precludes us from noticing the impact that secondary and higher education make on primary education. These higher stages not only influence the share of financial resources available for primary education, but also its curriculum and the pedagogic choices made by teachers. These deeper kinds of impact become accessible for analysis only if we view the system of education in its entirety, focusing on the interaction that occurs between different stages. This interaction is necessarily dominated by higher stages which are more directly linked to the economy than the primary stage of education is. On account of this link, the higher stages are seen as being more crucial for national and social development. In this perception, primary education serves mainly as a passage to higher stages. Its own conditions, characteristics and demands tend to get ignored.

India's secondary education is marked by two public examinations. The first one is taken at the end of Class X and the other at the end of Class XII. Both exams are conducted by a 'Board' – a body authorised to certify that a child has passed an exam. The certificate given by this body after the Class X exam also carries the date of birth of the child. The value of a Class X or 'matriculate' exam, as it was traditionally called in colonial days, is far greater as a legally recognised certificate of age than as a certifier of academic performance. In this latter role, the Class X Board certificate is mainly a licence to proceed to Classes XI and XII, constituting the 'higher secondary' stage at the end of which comes the second Board exam. A child's performance in this latter exam serves as the basis of entry to an undergraduate college. The main difference between the two exams is that the later exam is confined to subjects selected by a child whereas the earlier exam is in all school subjects. This dual-exam system has been known in policy parlance as the 10+2 system, named as such by the Kothari Commission (1964–66) (Kothari 1966). Historically, the Class X exam acted as a filter, serving to stop a vast proportion of children from proceeding further towards college education or towards a job. This it did by declaring them 'fail'. For a

long time, starting in the late 19th century, success in the matriculate exam gave eligibility for many different kinds of jobs, including office jobs. By categorising the examinees into 'pass' and 'fail', the matriculate exam result acted as a regulator of upward mobility, both within the system of education and in the job market.

This regulatory function was performed with the help of a marking system that has persisted. The evaluator assigned marks to the answers given by an examinee to the questions given, depending on how 'correct' the answer was. Correctness was judged with reference to an authorised text in most subjects. While this practice was not unique to the Indian subcontinent, the criterion used for determining correctness was peculiar to the colonised societies where the prescribed textbooks for each subject served as the basis for judging the examinee's answer, its correctness and quality. The prescribed textbook served key pedagogic and administrative functions as it controlled the teacher, laying out officially approved knowledge, and the student, indicating how an answer will be judged in a public exam where the identities of the student and the evaluator were treated as confidential, apparently to ensure objectivity or fairness in marking. (Kumar 1988; Altbach 1988).

The Board exam system has retained these features to the present day. They ensure apparent parity among examinees and thereby equality of opportunity of success among a vast number of children whose economic and social backgrounds are sharply diverse and inequal. The Board exam equalises their chances of success by imposing a strict uniformity on how they can approach the questions set for them and how the evaluator will mark their answers. This exam-centric uniformity is a structural provision in the system of schooling. A major symbolic function served by this uniformity is to signal complete fairness with reference to the hierarchies entrenched in the social structure.

If we look back at the distinctive features of RTE, they all point towards the importance of the teacher's capacity to observe and relate to children individually, recognising individual differences and viewing these differences as a means to build a rich and inclusive pedagogic ethos in the classroom. Section V of RTE covers the staple of a child-centric, experience-oriented teaching strategy. The RTE teacher is someone

who knows how to evaluate each child's progress in terms of the child's own growth trajectory, rather than, exclusively, by the old method of comparing each child with others. Moreover, RTE seeks to replace the old once-in-year exam system, designed to 'pass' or 'fail', with CCE, which allows each child to do things at his or her own pace. Between the RTE recipe for cultivating individuality and the secondary-level Board exam, there is a fundamental clash. The latter imposes uniformity of conditions in order to test each candidate's preparedness for the exam. The source of knowledge used to judge preparedness is the prescribed textbook. RTE's perspective is quite contrary to such a delimitation of knowledge. Not surprisingly, RTE explicitly refers to the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (NCERT 2005) as the guiding document for academic decisions. This document articulates five basic principles on which it is based, the third one being that 'learning must go beyond the textbook'.

This and all other ideas and practices endorsed in the NCF-2005 point towards the same kinds of reforms in curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation that RTE also points towards. RTE's enumeration of the characteristics to be found in elementary classroom teaching and ethos carries a clear rejection of prevailing practices and policies that uphold them. These prevailing practices emphasise uniformity of learning and regimentation of behaviour at the primary level. Uniformity is achieved through textbook-centred teaching, and regimentation through the exam system. Thus, each child is 'prepared' for facing the Board exams from the beginning. Children's individuality is ironed out at the primary stage itself. They progress towards secondary classes mainly by competing with each other. Finally, when the Class X Board exam results are declared, a vast proportion of those who appeared are placed in the 'fail' category, and only the rest are allowed to proceed to the next level at the end of which they will face another Board exam whose result will decide their chances of going to college and the type of college they will go to if they 'pass'.

The failure rate in the Class X Board exam has been high. In some States, more than 50 per cent of the children appearing in this exam each year 'fail'. As Nawani (2018) shows through her analysis, the rate

of failure has been consistently high since colonial times. The 'pass-fail' procedure permits the system of education to maintain its basic character despite expansion. Over the recent years, the demand to replace the RTE's provision for CCE with the old 'pass-fail' system of an annual exam, especially at Classes V and VIII levels, has been growing. Those who make this demand, including many State governments, apparently see RTE merely as a law to compel enrolment, not a law that seeks to reform elementary education in order to make the system more equitous. Between RTE's promise of universality and its potential to lay the foundations of greater equality, the former imperative enjoys greater popularity.

Teacher Training and Higher Education

Let us now turn to the relationship between elementary schooling and higher education. This relationship finds expression in teacher training. Preparing teachers through a formal training has posed several specific difficulties for India. Let us analyse some of these difficulties with reference to the expectations encoded in RTE. The RTE law has arrived at a time when India is negotiating the contrary pulls of a welfare-oriented, state-dominated inheritance of economic policy on the one hand, and the pressure to conform to the market-driven model of neoliberal economics on the other. These contrasting pulls manifested in teacher-training more than a decade before RTE was designed and promulgated. A major change in the teacher training sector came in the mid-1990s when the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was given the status of a statutory regulatory organisation. Its powers were defined in the NCTE Act passed by the parliament in 1995. These included licensing of institutions giving teacher training courses, laying down the curriculum and institutional norms, and deciding eligibility for recruitment of teachers. This was evidently a huge mandate.

As a commission appointed by the Supreme Court under the Chairpersonship of the late Chief Justice, J.S. Verma has recently concluded, NCTE could not fulfil this mandate; instead, it fell victim to commercial interests and functional impediments that led to large-

scale distortion in the training sector, and to corruption (MHRD 2012). Going by the vast amount of documentation this Commission produced while presenting its analysis and recommendations for reform, we can say that teacher training represents a highly disturbed area of the system of education in India.

Having failed to overcome older impediments, it has been further injured by new ones arising from the socio-economic landscape. The older impediments included academic poverty of courses and institutions, their aloofness from institutions of higher learning and research, and a sharp division between training for primary and secondary classes. These features had given a highly mechanistic character to teacher training in the colonial period. Post-independence growth in the sector coincided with the global influence of behaviourism in school pedagogy. The mechanistic disposition of teacher training was encouraged by this influence. Modernisation took the form of self-reassured instrumentalism, which found a fertile ground in the textbook-cum-exam culture portrayed earlier in this paper. By substituting the term 'teacher training' with 'teacher education' NCTE attempted to convey its intention to academise the sector. But new impediments were fast joining the older ones when NCTE started performing its regulatory role with its all-powerful statutory status.

The new problems teacher training faces are mainly three: commercialism or unbridled privatisation, technology-driven neo-behaviourist influence in training institutions as well as in schools, and enfeeblement of higher education effecting the quality of entrants to teacher training courses. The first of these, namely commercialisation, has proved the hardest to tackle. Starting a private college of teacher training, when compared to engineering or medical college, carries the attraction of high income without much investment. Small and middle-range entrepreneurs, including politicians, find teacher training a lucrative sector. NCTE's attempt to control the vast number of private institutes by imposing its norms and ensuring compliance by sending inspecting teams failed to achieve its purpose and backfired as the Verma Commission noted. Phenomena like 'non-attending' students and underpaid faculty have taken numerous bizarre forms

over the years. NCTE has recently doubled the period and quantum of the curriculum of the secondary-level Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) course. For some of the 2,000 private institutes in the B.Ed. business, the new two-year course format initially dampened the demand, but in general the doubling of duration has meant greater income from fees. For the elementary level, there are two main courses, the two-year Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) and the four-year Bachelor Elementary Education (B.El.Ed.), a less common, innovative programme mooted in the mid-1990s in Delhi University. The latter has not expanded much, mainly because it leads to the same salary and status in the school system as the shorter D.El.Ed does. This latter course has suffered, in hundreds of institutions across the country as the B.Ed has, from practices like proxy infrastructure and non-attending students. The Verma Commission was set up by the Supreme Court in response to a plea against a vast number of bogus D.El.Ed institutions operating in Maharashtra alone. The Commission examined this allegation, found it true, and ordered closure of the institutions in Maharashtra, while presenting its voluminous, futuristic recommendations for the country as a whole. Laudable steps were initiated, but in a few years, the regulatory drive through greater surveillance overshadowed the larger, especially academic, reform agenda. The new course structure and guidelines prepared by NCTE have not succeeded in touching the core problem arising from the uninspiring ethos that Gupta (2018) has described in detail and depth.

Pedagogy Market

A new problem that teacher training faces is the growing influence of neo-behaviourist ideas about learning and their corollaries in teaching. These ideas are shaping the new culture and ethos of both schools and training institutions, pulling them in a direction rather sharply contrary to the one so emphatically and clearly chalked out by RTE. Educational technology has radically grown in terms of what it means and the scope of functions and services it offers to institutions at different levels. What was earlier seen as a set of equipment to enhance the teacher's

capacity for dealing with different kinds of knowledge and activities has burgeoned into a vast repertoire of new meanings of learning and approaches to these new meanings.

This deep change is associated with the arrival of information and communication technology (ICT) and the emergence of what Elkind (2003) calls the 'new technological environment'. Its impact on education, both as a concept and as an institutionalised system of teaching the young, is difficult to analyse and assess even in countries where the 'pedagogy market' (Kumar 2012) is far more evolved than it is in India at present. What we can notice with certainty is the revivalist influence it has exercised on the behaviourist theories and approaches to learning. Astride the wave of computer-based learning systems, the neo-behaviourist discourse has retrieved the grounds it had lost in many countries to the constructivist view of learning and the pedagogical approaches consistent with it. In India, the constructivist view received policy acceptance much later than in other parts of the world. NCF-2005 endorses constructivist learning and explicitly critiques behaviourism and its continuing dominance in Indian classrooms and the examination system. The key difference explained in NCF-2005 is that according to the constructivist view, children form knowledge from their own experience whereas behaviourism stresses the role played by planned incentives, setting of common standards or levels, and specified routines to negotiate them. Debate on the relative merits of the two perspectives intensified after the promulgation of RTE, which endorses constructivism and NCF-2005, but ground reality has proved resistant to the constructivist approach.

In teacher training too, the NCTE supported a shift from behaviourist to constructivist pedagogy in a 2010 document called National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE). These indications of consensus notwithstanding, systemic rootedness in behaviourist approaches has proved difficult to nudge. This is quite evident from the ongoing gap between the two powerful institutions that shape educational discourse in India, namely the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). While the former's position became

amply clear in NCF-2005, the latter's role of conducting the crucial public exams after Classes X and XII continued to be shaped by the classification of educational objectives presented in Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom 1956). The same can be said about yet another influential body, the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) which monitors its over 1,000 schools with the nomenclature used in Bloom's taxonomy and the routine classroom tests designed according to this nomenclature. The opposition to RTE-endorsed CCE and the plea for return to the exam system discussed earlier are also indicative of the continued dominance of the behaviourist perspective.

The 'new technological environment' has further consolidated this dominance. A range of new devices and equipment has been promoted in the growing and diversified network of private schools. The range includes the devices comprising Smart classrooms, computer labs, security and surveillance devices like closed-circuit televisions CCTVs and administrative devices such as finger-print based attendance machines. Many private schools now offer a child-tracking facility to parents while their ward is at school. Internet-based learning material and mobile phones, with various networking and recording facilities, along with laptops constitute the 'new technological environment'. Though this environment is far more visible in high-end private schools, state-run schools are also being pushed to create such an environment. State governments in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have distributed free laptops as a symbol of their recognition of talent among the poor.

The understandable gap between private and government schools on how many technological devices they possess and use is hardly the issue we want to focus on here. The real issue is the nature of the impact of techno-driven changes on learning in elementary, especially primary, schools. NCF-2005 emphasises the importance of hands-on experience for child-centred teaching. The National Focus Group on educational technology, set up under the auspices of NCF-2005, also took a sceptical view of the usefulness of ICT in primary classes (NCERT 2006). The position paper of this group noted the tendency in the Indian education system to treat technology as a panacea rather than as an aid. This kind of counsel has, however, proved incapable of

arousing a debate on ICT in schools. Pressure of the market, and state departments themselves, has proved much too strong for any debate or policy to emerge. This is, of course, not a uniquely Indian problem. The ICT industry treats educational institutions as a vast captive market. Research on the impact of ICT-rich teaching on children's learning calls for scepticism and caution (OECD 2015), but the power of the 'new technological environment' is far greater than the potential influence of research.

In the context of teacher training too, ICT-based solutions have enjoyed great popularity and favour from policymakers. The pupil-teacher ratio norm laid down in RTE implies a huge backlog of trained teachers. Distance education courses have been mooted to overcome this gap. The quality of training these courses provide has been questioned within policy-making circles, but the lure of such solutions has proved irresistible. In old-style teacher training institutions too, expenditure on purchase of ICT equipment has taken precedence over all other expenditure, including the expenditure on hiring of the teaching faculty, libraries, and science labs. ICT is seen as an all-purpose remedy for the problems of teacher training. In any case, training for the use of ICT seems more palpable than training for fulfilling the child-centric vision of RTE through reflective teaching, capable of imparting the capacity to inquire to every child.

Relation with Higher Education

Teacher training constitutes an important factor in any educational reform process, but its own health and capacity to contribute to educational reform depends on its relations with higher education. This condition needs to be examined by looking at higher education as the resource from which teachers' claim to eligibility for teaching comes. Teachers of the elementary stage of school education have traditionally comprised two kinds of candidates. Those hired for the primary level are conventionally required to have secondary school qualification, and the ones hired for the upper primary grades are required to possess a bachelor's degree. Of late, candidates for primary level are also

coming with a bachelor's degree. This is partly a reflection of graduate unemployment, but it is also receiving policy back-up, rooted in the view that teachers of primary level children also need college-level qualifications (NCTE 2010).

Even if a certain proportion of teachers coming into primary school teaching continue to have pre-degree qualifications, the role of higher education in shaping their quality and orientation cannot be denied because those who taught them at the secondary and higher secondary levels had to have college or university qualifications. The supply of candidates with college education to training institutions is a major determinant of the contribution that training can make to their subject knowledge acquired at college. Refinement of this knowledge and addition of pedagogic capacities are possible during training if the knowledge of the subject a teacher is going to teach is of a certain acceptable quality. A training institution can hardly start from scratch and impart subject knowledge afresh before introducing trainees to child psychology and other areas of educational theory and pedagogy. This is why the crisis that higher education in India has been going through is of direct relevance to the implementation of RTE. This crisis has been examined and delineated from several perspectives over the years. The crisis has been looked at in terms of financial resources, administrative problems, the question of quality and that of employment of educated youth (Yash Pal 2009). The Verma Commission noted the aloofness of teacher training from higher academic learning and research, treating it as a major reason for its poor quality. It recommended that teacher training for all stages should be considered an area of higher education.

Governance Ethics and the Post-welfare State

The term 'post-welfare state' refers to the current phase of political economy in India which started in the late 1980s. It is associated with the radical shift of direction in economic policy that took place following a fiscal crisis the federal government had to address at the end of the 1980s. In popular discourse, the period following this crisis is referred to as the era of economic reforms in the direction of globalisation,

liberalisation and privatisation (Corbridge et al. 2013; Kurien 1994). Liberalisation included opening of the Indian economy to foreign capital and the broadening of opportunities for private business in traditionally state-controlled sectors, such as education, including higher as well as school education, and health. According to many observers, these economic trends altered India's general political ethos, narrowing the space available for liberal-minded discourses and dialogue in different spheres, including the economy itself. The post-independence consensus on welfarism got eroded even as private finance intensified its hold on two key welfare sectors, education and health. The discourse of 'governance' gained popularity, confining the state's role to regulation or overseeing. Its gradual withdrawal from direct involvement in education in order to enable private capital to have greater room was celebrated as a sign of evolution, supposedly marking the end of bureaucratic control and political interference.

The earliest signs of this general transition became visible in the difference between the 1986 National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Programme of Action (PoA) released in 1992. This was the period when the discourse of economic reforms favouring private capital, both domestic and foreign, acquired a palpable shape. The PoA attempted to adjust the NPE to the new economic scenario that had emerged rather dramatically in 1991, following the acceptance of the 'structural adjustment programme' by the new central government. India's 'adjustment' to the regimen of global corporate capital and international donor institutions marked a significant change in the self-identity of the state and its role. The term 'post-welfare state' is meant to connote this change. It is preferable to the more widely used term, i.e. the neoliberal state, because the latter demands considerable familiarity with the history of liberalism and its various discourses. Also, 'neoliberalism' is now commonly used to point towards a global reality, hence it strengthens the assumed lack of any significant distinctions or specificities among different nations. In the context of India's state, which was formed under colonial rule, the current phase of economic growth is characterised by the transfer of several functions and responsibilities to managerial experts representing corporate capital. The transfer of the state's educational responsibilities is occurring in the name of efficiency. Private

profit is not involved in every case of institutional or functional transfer as a considerable amount of philanthropic capital is being garnered for investment in education. Political correctness helps philanthropy to receive educational responsibilities of various kinds without the risk of democratic murmur; yet, the transfer involves a shift of these responsibilities from democratic to managerial space. This kind of shift is best expressed by the term 'post-welfare state' which sheds its own welfare role in an ethos that permits political consensus to emerge on change in the basic functions of the state.

One might ask whether the Indian state, originally formed under colonial rule, was a truly welfare state at any point. Such a question can best be answered by referring to the Constitution which conveys an aspiration to create a welfare society and state in India. Such an aspiration is articulated through a transformative vision and values, including social justice and equality of rights. We can notice a welfarist inclination in the policies followed in education during the initial decades following independence, even though these policies were not backed by adequate financial provision. The last expression of such an inclination can be seen in the 1986 policy on education. As explained below, it was soon going to be reviewed and recast in a different mode, adjusting to the emerging demands of entrepreneurial forces that saw in education a vast area of profit-making opportunities and sale of commodities. An external, global ethos in favour of such a shift already existed by then as scholars such as Tomlinson (2001) and Slaughter and Leslie (1991) have demonstrated.

After RTE was passed by parliament, as a federal law, it was assumed that the Central government will carry a major part of the financial demand RTE's implementation will put on the States. Initially, this process was seen as a natural progression from the SSA, a national flagship programme led by federal and federally mediated international funds. However, after the tapering off of SSA funds in 2013, the Central government chose to view RTE's implementation as a responsibility of the States. In many States, this responsibility is being outsourced to corporate capital and non-governmental organisations (Nambissan and Ball 2010). For corporate money, the use of technology for distance

training programmes has proved an attractive option. It involves massive supplies of equipment. Schools represent a mega-space for business, not merely in pedagogic equipment and material, but also in surveillance technology like CCTVs. Public-private partnership policy has played a key role in inaugurating the incorporation of state-run schools into a vast market of goods and services. This process has enabled a corporate-managerial culture to govern school administration and classroom transaction. 'Outcome'-oriented teaching is a pivotal aspect of this new policy ethos. It demands teachers to confine their role to implementing a pre-scripted curriculum which is tied to regular testing. Their training for an outcome-focussed pedagogy helps them to view learning mainly in terms of preparation for tests. Terms like 'efficiency' and 'accountability' provide the justification for this regimen of test-oriented teaching. It enables teachers to ignore the humanistic assumptions and agenda of RTE and the concept of quality associated with these goals. If the RTE Act is amended to facilitate the return of annual exams, it will further encourage the reversal of RTE's reform agenda.

The focus of that agenda was to create room for the child's agency and enhance teachers' capacity to recognise that agency. In a highly stratified and patriarchal society like ours, recognition of the child's agency implies overcoming one's own assumptions and biases about caste, gender, class and religion. This is a tall order for the teacher. In India's case, the RTE's agenda to make elementary education child-centric means a radical shift in acceptance of children as a social category (Kumar 2016). Teachers' acceptance of such a category and its inclusive span depends on how well teachers are prepared through their own education and training to view their role in society and how clear they are about the meaning of learning as experience. RTE calls for teachers who do not use fear of failure or corporal punishment to motivate children. RTE will make an impact on social inequality if teachers are clear about their professional responsibility, to create an ethos in which children experience dignity and autonomy. For a Dalit child or a girl, equality is a function of the everyday experience of learning in an ethos of dignity and comfort. Test scores do not ensure a sense of equality, nor does outcome-centric teaching mean efficiency for a social goal like equality. This is why the current emphasis on tangible outcomes and

accountability is misplaced and hollow. It can at best promote universal attendance, not an experience of learning that enables children to absorb dignity as an essential ingredient of equality. A narrow interpretation of RTE also gets promoted, perhaps inadvertently, by those lobbying for specific causes. They focus on implementation of RTE in a purely administrative sense even if that means overlooking, even reversing, the space RTE creates for dignity of the child and the teacher of young children. At times, such a demand translates into encouraging the state's abdication of its responsibility towards elementary education and handing it over to NGOs, including those representing corporate interests. This is indeed a highly confusing ethos for a complex law such as RTE to move towards becoming a social reality. The least one can say is that the ethos is no less confusing now than it was before RTE was drafted and passed by parliament. RTE signifies one among the many paradoxical attainments of Indian democracy in its struggle to engage with deep social divisions and the state's colonial heritage of reluctant acceptance of its social duties.

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