

*Neoliberal
Fascist Attack
on
Education*



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**NEOLIBERAL
FASCIST
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INTRODUCTION

Education a Human Right

In July 1992, delivering judgement in the Mohini Jain case, the Supreme Court of India ruled that:

- right to life guaranteed under the Constitution includes the right to live with human dignity; and dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it is accompanied by right to education.
- fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution, including the right to freedom of speech and expression and other rights, cannot be appreciated and fully enjoyed unless a citizen is educated.

In delivering this judgement, the highest court of the land was only reiterating what has been the wisdom regarding the relationship between education and freedom / liberty / equality for centuries. As far back as the 17th–18th centuries, the importance of education in developing people’s capacities to question traditional ways of thinking, resisting oppression at the hands of authorities, and spread of democracy had been recognised by the most prominent Enlightenment philosophers of Europe.

By the mid-20th century, the inter-relationship between social and economic rights (including the right to free education) and human rights had become such an integral part of the global human rights discourse that in 1966, the UN General Assembly adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that recognises the right of everyone to free education; it sees education both as a human right and as “an indispensable means of realising other human rights.”¹

Education and Human Development

Even if we leave aside such high flown objectives as realisation of freedom and liberty, education is crucially important even for something as basic as human development. It unlocks the inherent potential of human beings, allowing people to enjoy an enhanced quality of life.

Education does not benefit only those taking education, it benefits society as a whole. It leads to a more dynamic citizenry. It makes society more informed, makes people appreciate diversity, reduces ethnic–religious–social tensions, and thus leads to better social cohesion. The more educated a country’s people, the more they can read, develop critical thinking, become involved in scholarly debates, and thus become more socially and politically engaged—thereby deepening democracy. A

more educated population leads to improved health conditions and faster economic growth. In this sense, education is not only a means for development, it is development! The close relationship between education and societal development is so self-evident that even Adam Smith, the celebrated economist who laid the foundation for ‘free market economics’, was a vocal champion of education for all, at public expense.²

Education and Societal Development

That is why an important characteristic of all developed societies is universal, high-quality education. This does not mean that first these societies developed, and then they implemented universal education for their citizens. In Europe, the spread of the industrial revolution in the 19th century and the spread of education went hand in hand. In fact, by the turn of the 20th century, not only had many West European countries and the USA achieved near-universalisation of elementary education, many European countries even moved towards implementing a common school system at the elementary level, that is, providing free, compulsory, common and equitable elementary education for all children.

Japan launched its industrial revolution nearly a century after Western Europe. Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, one of the first measures taken by Japan’s new rulers was the issuance of the Fundamental Code of Education in 1872, guaranteeing basic education for all. By 1910 Japan was almost fully literate, at least for the young, and by 1913, though still very much poorer than Britain or America, Japan was publishing more books than both of them. This concentration on education was an important factor that contributed to Japan’s remarkable economic progress in the late 19th century.

Later, in the 1950s, South Korea and other East Asian countries followed similar routes and firmly focussed on general expansion of education, achieving near universal primary education within just a decade. Without this, they would never have achieved their economic successes of the 1970s–80s that made them known as East Asian tigers.³

Similarly, when Venezuela launched its Bolivarian Revolution under the leadership of President Hugo Chavez, one of the first programs launched was universalisation of education. A new Constitution was drafted, which guarantees free education to all citizens up to university undergraduate level. The government has put in strenuous efforts to ensure that this guarantee does not remain only on paper, including launching programmes to educate all its adult citizens who have not completed basic schooling.⁴

India: Still in the Middle Ages

India's rulers—leading politicians of all mainstream political parties, top bureaucrats, prominent intellectuals and academicians, and business honchos—have been euphoric about the economic reforms taking place in India since the last more than two decades, euphemistically called globalisation. They are all claiming that India is on its way to becoming an economic superpower.

The discussion in the previous section clearly shows that an essential condition for any country to genuinely develop is that it should provide at least basic education to all its children. The Government of India claims that there is now near-total universalisation of school enrolment at the primary level, in almost all the states of India. It cites the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)* as proof: GER at the primary level has gone up from 95.7% in 2000–01 to 100.1% in 2007–08, that for upper primary from 58.6% to 91.2%, and for the total elementary cycle (I–VIII) from 81.6% to 96.9%.⁵ According to the Twelfth Five Year Plan, there are today only about 8.1 million out-of-school children in the country.

Propaganda . . .

Unfortunately, all this is mere government propaganda. In actuality, India's education system is in deep crisis. The Indian Constitution, as it was framed by our country's founding fathers, contained clear-cut provisions directing the Indian State to take time-bound steps to provide free, compulsory, equitable and good quality education to all children, at least up to the age of 14 years. However, the Government of India has never seriously attempted to implement this directive.

The near-universal school enrolment figures are fudged! The *Public Report on Basic Education in India* survey (a landmark study on the state of primary education in India) of 2006 found that while almost 95% of children in the age group 6–12 years were enrolled in school, children's attendance as noted in the school registers was far below enrolment: only around 66% of children enrolled in the primary classes were marked present. And field investigators found that actual attendance was even lower.⁶

* GER: The number of children enrolled in a level (primary or secondary), regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the same level. The GER exceeding 100 is a technical aberration, as it includes children enrolled in the primary stage who are outside the age group of 6–11 years.

Apart from fudging of enrolment figures, another trick being resorted to by the government to inflate the number of children in school is by narrowing the definition of “out-of-school children” to only “non-enrolled children”, that is, those children who have never enrolled in a school; they do not include the “drop-outs”—children who have enrolled and then dropped out of school. Nearly seven decades after independence, the drop-out rates continue to be very high. For the country as a whole, the drop-out rate in 2011–12 was 22.3% at the primary level (Class I–V), 40.8% at the elementary level (Class I–VIII), and 50.3% at the secondary level (Class I–X).⁷ The drop-out rates are marginally higher for scheduled caste (SC) students: 23.5% at the primary, 40.2% at the elementary and 55.3% at the secondary level; while for ST students, they are significantly higher, at 35.3%, 57.2% and 65.9% respectively.⁸

Taking the total number of children in the country in the age-group 6–14 as 20 crores,⁹ this means that nearly 9 crore children in the country have either never enrolled in school or have dropped out of school without completing even basic schooling!¹⁰

Furthermore, the quality of education is so bad that a very large number of those who do complete basic schooling cannot read, write or do sums expected of children in Class 2 or 3! UNICEF has described the state of education in India as a national emergency.

Be that as it may, the government now claims that it is taking steps to rectify this dismal situation. In 2002, the government amended the Constitution (86th Amendment) to make education a fundamental right, and then in 2009 enacted the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (also called the Right to Education Act or RTE Act) to give effect to this Constitutional amendment. However, as we shall later in this booklet, again this is mere government hype; not only is the Act not going to reduce the drop-out rate, it has actually further worsened the crisis gripping the education system.

The coming to power at the Centre of the BJP, first in 1998 and now in 2014, has only made matters worse. While the post-independence educational framework, for all its limitations, had stressed democratic values, social justice and national integration, the BJP has launched a campaign to spread its communal ideology and promote religious fanaticism through the school education network.

Why has the state of education in the country come to such a pass? To understand the reasons for this, it is important to take a look at the evolution of the education system in the country.

1. FREEDOM STRUGGLE AND 'EDUCATION FOR ALL'

India's Indigenous Education System

We have only limited information about the indigenous education system in India during the mid-18th century, before the British began colonising India. Indian society during this period was a feudal society, ruled by kings and the priestly class. The rulers were not interested in educating the people; there existed only a very limited formal education system, organised by the upper classes for themselves. The small priestly class needed a formal education system for religious instruction; the small class of officials, moneylenders, merchants and well-to-do landlords also found it necessary to acquire some elementary education. These classes organised some formal schools for themselves, supported by donations from the wealthy, and probably by the kings too.

The majority of the population did not go to formal educational institutions. This of course does not mean that they did not acquire any education. Recent studies by eminent historians have established that Indian society had achieved an unprecedented level of industrial and commercial prosperity by the 17th century, and by 1750, India accounted for almost a quarter of the world manufacturing output.¹¹ To support such an extensive and developed manufacturing system, there obviously must have existed a fairly well-developed traditional system of imparting vocational education.

The biggest limitation of India's indigenous education system, which hampered the further development of science and technology in India, was the caste system and the prohibition of the lower castes from acquiring education. The development of science requires experimentation and development of scientific theories from the results. However, the upper castes were prohibited from engaging in any kind of labour and so this prevented them from engaging in any practical experiments, or taking an interest in traditional technologies and developing them further. And the lower castes could not contribute to the development of science since they were prohibited from acquiring education. One of the reasons for the advance of the industrial revolution in Western Europe was the gradual merger of theoretical science and craft technology there in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Caste purity can only be ensured by subjugating and controlling the sexuality of women. And so, as the caste system intensified, the position of women in society also deteriorated, and they too came to be excluded from education along with the shudras.

Colonial Intervention

The British had come to India to colonise and plunder it. The caste system and the feudal mindset eminently suited them, as it helped them consolidate their rule over the land. Therefore, they made little or no effort to educate Indians in the values of the Enlightenment.

As they went about systematically plundering and raping India, destroying its vibrant industry and agriculture and turning its cities into ruins, simultaneously, the indigenous education system also gradually decayed.

Simultaneously, to consolidate their rule over India, the British introduced a limited Western education system, for which they promulgated the English Education Act in 1835. Its aim was to establish the hegemonic influence of English as the medium of colonial 'instruction' (not education). Thomas Macaulay, on whose *Minute of Education* the Act was drafted, was very clear about its objective:

To form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect . . .

On the basis of this Act, the British opened a few 'arts' colleges, to produce the limited number of civil servants and white collar workers needed to staff the lower rungs of their administration. They also opened a few engineering colleges to produce the limited number of skilled technicians needed by them for their limited public works such as roads, canals, bridges and railways. Consequently, at the time of independence in 1947, there were only 496 colleges in India, of which 420 were 'arts' colleges.¹²

And of course, it was the upper castes who monopolised the limited jobs available in civil service, legal profession, media, teaching and so on.

The British were so successful in creating a class of people entrapped in a colonial mindset that more than six decades after winning independence from colonial rule, the upper classes of independent India continue to be steeped in the same mindset.

Demand for 'Education for All' as a Fundamental Right

By the mid-19th century, a middle class had started taking birth in India. Not all were 'English in opinions and intellect', many were concerned with the plight of their fellow countrymen, and began social reform movements as well as laid the foundations of India's struggle for freedom. One of the early demands raised by them was '*education for all*'.

In September 1882, the nationalist economist Dadabhai Naoroji called upon the Indian Education Commission to ensure that four years of compulsory education be provided to all children. Mahatma Phule, in a detailed memorandum to this Commission, too demanded that “primary education of the masses should be made compulsory up to a certain age, say at least 12 years.” He urged the Commission to open separate schools for Mahars, Mangs and other lower classes as these children were practically excluded from all schools due to caste prejudices, and also sanction measures for the spread of female primary literacy. In 1910, Gopal Krishna Gokhale moved a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council seeking provision of ‘free and compulsory primary education’ in India.

The Indian National Congress too voiced the demand for State-funded free primary education for all children in several of its resolutions. Thus, the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress in 1931 pledged: “The State shall provide for free and compulsory primary education.” On October 22–23, 1937, the Wardha Conference on Education approved Mahatma Gandhi’s proposal that free and compulsory education in the mother tongue be provided nationwide to all children for seven years, from the age of 7 to 14.

Simultaneously, during this period, several social reformers like Syed Ahmad Khan, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Begums of Bhopal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Karmaveer Bhaurao Patil and many others took the initiative to open schools. A few rulers of princely states like Baroda, Kolhapur, Vizianagaram and Travancore also either supported or set up school systems to universalise free primary education.

With higher education being even more neglected by the British, Indian nationalistic leaders and social reform movements attempted to address this lacuna too by setting up nationalistic higher education institutions such as Fergusson College, Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Jamia Millia Islamia, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Vishwa Bharati and Banaras Hindu University. While these institutions played an extremely useful role, they were too few to provide a viable indigenous alternative to the Macaulayan education system.

Beginnings of Dalit and Women Education

The British were not willing to antagonise the upper castes. While in theory the British-run schools were open to Dalits, in practice they were inaccessible because of upper caste opposition; at best, Dalit children followed the classes from the school verandah.

A more crucial role in the spread of education among Dalits and women was played by Dalit intellectuals and other social reformers. Prominent amongst them were Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Vithal Ramji Shinde and 'Karmaveer' Bhaurao Patil in Western Maharashtra; Ayyankali, Sree Narayana Guru and Poykayil Appachan in Kerala; and Iyothee Thaas and several other Dalit intellectuals in Tamil Nadu. Enlightened rulers like Sayajirao Gaikwad, the Maharaja of Baroda state, and Chhatrapati Shahu, the Maharaja of Kolhapur, also did much for the spread of Dalit education. One of the greatest of these reformers of the early 20th century was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He exhorted the Dalit youth to acquire education for their social and economic advancement, for which he established the Depressed Classes Education Society in 1928, and the People's Education Society in 1945.

Reaction

That, however, is only one side of the educational discourse in India during the early 20th century. These proposals for universalisation of primary education faced strong resistance from India's traditional elites, the 'native' princes and the zamindars, as well as many prominent Brahmanical intellectuals. When Gokhale moved his Bill for compulsory primary education in the Central Assembly, the Maharaja of Darbhanga collected 11,000 signatures from princes and landlords on a memorandum expressing concern about what would happen to their farm operations if all children were required to attend school!

At the Wardha Education Conference, Mahatma Gandhi had to use all the moral powers at his command to persuade the Ministers of Education of the seven provinces where Congress had won the recently held elections to give priority to basic education for all children for seven years and allocate adequate funds for this purpose. The Ministers continued to parrot the British argument that there was no money¹³—a definitive indicator of what was going to happen after independence . . .

Education in the Constitution

During India's freedom struggle, the leaders of the movement made no distinction between fundamental rights, and social and economic rights. [Fundamental rights include right to equality, right to freedom, etc. Social and economic rights, included in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution, are those rights that guarantee all citizens the basic necessities of life.] The distinction between these two sets of rights was only made during the drafting of fundamental rights by the

Constituent Assembly. The Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly recommended that fundamental rights and social-economic rights be split. The latter were included in the Directive Principles, that is, they were meant only for general guidance of the government and were not cognizable in any court. Dr. Ambedkar, K.M. Munshi and K.T. Shah (all members of this Sub-Committee) were not very happy with making the Directive Principles non-justiciable; they in fact would have preferred an even more rigorous social programme than that laid out in the Directive Principles, and a justiciable one at that. However, in the end, they went along with the majority view in the belief that half a loaf was better than none.¹⁴

The Rights Sub-Committee included the right to “free and compulsory education” for all children up to 14 years of age in the list of justiciable fundamental rights. But the Constituent Assembly decided to make it non-justiciable and shift this also to the Directive Principles of State Policy.¹⁵ Yet another indicator of what was going to happen to the ‘fundamental right’ of all children to free and compulsory education after independence. This was how free and compulsory education came to be Article number 45 of the Constitution. It reads:

The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

Higher Education and the Constitution

It is true that the Indian Constitution limits the right to free and compulsory education for all children only up to the age of 14. But it is obvious from the efforts of nationalistic Indians to set up secondary / higher secondary and higher education institutions that our country’s founding fathers visualised that as the country developed, the policy makers would take steps to ensure that affordable and equitable higher education became available to all children. This dream was encapsulated by our Constitution makers in Article 41 of the Indian Constitution:

The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to . . . (all levels of) education . . .

Further, Article 46 directed

The State shall promote with special care the educational . . . interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes . . .

2. EDUCATION POLICIES: NEHRU PERIOD

Mixed Economy Model, 1947–80

Most people think Nehru's 'mixed economy model' was meant to develop socialism in India. In reality, the development model implemented in India under Nehru's leadership was essentially a model to promote indigenous capitalist development. Its most essential features closely followed the economic plan proposed by a committee set up by Indian capitalists themselves—headed by J.R.D. Tata and G.D. Birla—that popularly came to be known as the *Bombay Plan*.¹⁶

After winning independence, the Indian capitalist class was keen to duplicate the industrial revolution of the developed capitalist countries, and that too at an accelerated speed. But in 1947, the Indian capitalists had neither the capital nor the technology needed to set up the massive infrastructural industries essential for rapid industrialisation. Furthermore, while the gestation period for projects in the infrastructural sector was long, returns on investment in these sectors were very low. Hence the Indian capitalist classes recommended to Nehru that large scale projects in the infrastructural areas be set up in the public sector, using the hard earned savings of the people and by burdening them with indirect taxes. The Indian capitalist class invested its capital in the consumer goods industries where there were quick profits to be made. Even here, a major part of the financing was done by the public sector financial institutions, while the running of the industry and siphoning off of the profits was left in the hands of the Indian capitalists. Till the late 1970s, the total assets of many of India's biggest industrialists—including luminaries like Tatas, Birlas, Mafatlals and Singhanias—in the total assets of the companies they controlled was less than one percent!¹⁷

To help the growth of domestic capitalism, the Indian State intervened in the economy in many other ways too. One particularly important measure was the imposition of restrictions on foreign capital—prohibiting foreign investment in strategic sectors of the economy, imposing conditions on profit repatriation, etc.

It is important to note that in adopting this strategy, the Nehruvian model of economic development—that is much maligned today—was only duplicating the strategy adopted by the developed capitalist countries in the 18th and 19th centuries. Not just India, but many other countries that became free from colonial rule in the years after the Second World War attempted to follow a similar path of autonomous capitalist development.

Nehru Model in Crisis

However, there are inherent limitations to capitalist development in a Third World* country like India. Duplicating the industrial revolutions of the West was simply not possible for these ex-colonial countries. The developed capitalist countries had got the huge amounts of capital needed to finance their industrial revolutions by colonising and looting the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. And when their industrial revolutions took off, these same colonies also provided them with the huge quantities of raw materials as well as the markets needed for their industrial revolutions to continue without interruption.¹⁸

On the other hand, when these colonies became free from colonial rule and attempted to carry out their industrial revolutions duplicating the Western capitalist model, they had no region to plunder to finance their industrial revolutions. On top of it, their economies were not only totally devastated, but also crippled, due to centuries of colonial plunder.¹⁹ And therefore, within just two decades of winning independence, by the 1970s, the autonomous capitalist development models of most Third World countries became crisis-ridden.

Short-Sightedness of India's Rulers

Even within these limitations, the limited capitalist development possible in India was throttled due to the compromises and short-sightedness of independent India's rulers. Surrendering to pressure from the landed upper castes, they carried out only very limited land reform. Consequently, the large mass of peasantry continued to wallow in desperate poverty. This seriously limited the growth of the market in the countryside. With focus on growth of large industries, industrial growth was also not sufficiently employment generating to create a significant increase in demand.

Most importantly, India's ruling classes made no serious attempt to empower the people by investing in education, health and nutrition, which would have unleashed the inherent potential of the people. Neither did they make serious efforts to eliminate medieval backwardness. Religious backwardness, casteism and patriarchy continued to hobble the creative power of the masses. India's ruling

* Third World: This term is used to define the 'developing' (actually underdeveloped) countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, most of whom were colonies or neo-colonies of the developed countries in the 19th–early 20th centuries.

classes attempted to duplicate only the economic side of the industrial revolution of the West, forgetting the role played by Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment in laying its foundations.

With this brief background to the Nehruvian model, let us we now discuss its approach towards education in greater detail.

Nehruvian Model and Education

The first few decades after independence saw rapid growth in the education system. By 1988–89, the education system in India employed 4.2 million teachers and enrolled 154 million students in 776,000 institutions, with primary education being the largest sector (Table 2.1).

While these growth figures appear impressive, in reality they hide a complete betrayal of the dreams of the freedom struggle by the leaders of post-independent India.

Table 2.1: Growth of Education in India, 1950–90²⁰

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Upper Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Higher Secondary</i>
<i>Enrolment (in millions)</i>				
1950–51	19.1	3.1	1.2	0.42
1988–89	95.7	30.9	18.4	9.21
Increase (%)	401%	897%	1433%	2093%
<i>Institutions (in thousands)</i>				
1950–51	209.7	13.6	7.3	0.84
1988–89	548.1	144.1	73.3	10.48
Increase (%)	161%	960%	904%	1148%
<i>Teachers (in millions)</i>				
1950–51	0.54	0.09	0.13	0.024
1988–89	1.60	1.03	1.24	0.307*
Increase (%)	196%	1044%	854%	1179%

* Refers to the year 1982–83.

(i) Failure to Build a National System of Education

The Indian National Congress had voiced the demand for a national system of education way back in 1906. Gandhiji had in fact proposed one such scheme of ‘Basic Education’, that he called Nai Talim, in 1937.

However, after independence, not only did the Nehru Government trash Gandhiji's proposal, it also made no attempt to build any other national system of education. The first commission to comprehensively examine all aspects of the education system was only set up in 1964.

Kothari Commission (1964–66)

The Commission's report, submitted in 1966, is considered to be a landmark in the history of Indian education. It aimed to create a democratic, secular and egalitarian society, which would be based on science and spiritual values and wherein the evils of poverty, ignorance and ill-health would be eliminated. It emphasised the critical role of education in building such a society.

Had the Indian Government implemented the Kothari Commission's recommendations in a holistic manner, they would have had a major transformative impact on Indian society. However, it examined them in a piecemeal manner. While accepting some of the recommendations, such as the suggestion to set up what is known as the 10+2+3 structural pattern of education, it trashed the most important recommendations, that would have laid the foundations for a truly national system of education. We take a look at some of these important recommendations that have remained unimplemented till date—no Central government has had the political will to implement them.

(a) Setting up a Common School System

The Indian Constitution forbids an education system that reinforces inequality and socio-economic stratification. The Kothari Commission expressed its concern over the fact that the education system in India “is tending to increase social segregation . . . the minority of private, fee-charging, better schools meeting the needs of the upper classes and the vast bulk of free, publicly maintained, but poor schools being utilised by the rest.” The Commission unequivocally maintained: “It is the responsibility of the educational system to bring the different social classes and groups together and thus promote the emergence of an egalitarian and integrated society.”

Based on these observations, the Commission came up with the profound recommendation:

If these evils are to be eliminated and the educational system is to become a powerful instrument of national development in general, and social and national integration in particular, we must move towards the goal of a common school system of public education

- *which will be open to all children, irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion, economic conditions or social status;*
- *where access to good education will depend not on wealth or class but on talent;*
- *which will maintain adequate standards in all schools;*
- *in which no tuition fee will be charged.*²¹

However, the Government of India made no attempt to set up a ‘common school system’ to provide equitable education to all children regardless of the economic status of their parents. Had it done so, it would have laid the foundations for a truly egalitarian society.

(b) Education in Indian Languages

The centrepiece of the Macaulayan education policy was denigration of Indian vernaculars and promoting education in English language. Macaulay himself had admitted that this would lead to the formation of a class of clerks and interpreters who would help the British rule over India. From the very beginning, the leaders of India’s freedom struggle had voiced the demand that education in English language be replaced with education in Indian languages. This was also one of the important recommendations of the Kothari Commission.

Language at the Primary Level

There is complete unanimity among educational experts that at least at the primary level, children should receive education in their mother tongue. Educational psychologists have pointed out the close link between mother tongue and emotional and cognitive development in children. When learning is disseminated in the mother tongue language, it is easier for children to grasp the concepts, their creativity and critical thinking abilities are enhanced, and it becomes easier for them to express themselves effectively.²²

Even if children need to be taught a second language other than their mother tongue, this should be done only when children enter secondary school. They then learn the second language quickly. If, on the contrary, children are forced to start learning the second language too early, it is a recipe for ‘pedagogic disaster’. It kills the creativity of children and stunts their mental growth. A UNESCO report states: “Their self-confidence as learners and their interest in what they are learning may decline, leading to lack of motivation, school failure, and early school leaving.”²³

While this educational philosophy is universally accepted today, the Kothari Commission had voiced support for it way back in the 1960s. It had recommended that children be taught only in their mother tongues at the lower primary stage till Class IV, and no other language including English be introduced till then.²⁴

Language at Secondary and College Levels

The Official Language Commission of the Government of India, in its report of 1956, had recommended the replacement of English with Indian languages not just at the primary level, but also in higher education, as a part of a policy to replace English with Indian languages in all spheres of life, including administration and the courts.²⁵ The same was emphasised by the Kothari Commission:

It is hardly necessary to emphasise that the development of the Indian languages is both urgent and essential for the development of the Indian people and as a way of bringing together the elite and the masses. It can make scientific and technical knowledge more easily accessible to the people in their own languages and thus help not only in the progress of industrialisation but also in the wider dissemination of science and the scientific outlook. . . .

*The development of the modern Indian languages is inextricably linked with the importance given to them in the educational system, specially at the university stage. The medium selected should enable students to acquire knowledge with facility, to express themselves with clarity and to think with precision and vigour. From this point of view, the claims of the mother-tongue are preeminent. . . .*²⁶

And so the Commission recommended that urgent steps be taken so that this changeover from English to Indian languages takes place in at the most ten years.

Betrayal on the Language Issue

In the initial years after independence, the country's new leadership made some efforts to promote education in the many languages of India. However, English continued to remain the most important medium of instruction in education, for several reasons. The Indian State had continued with the British administrative and judicial system after independence, and its language continued to be English. More importantly, the Indian elites and middle classes, who had been trained in the British education system, were comfortable with English;

moreover, being generally from the upper castes, they had little concern for the Indian masses. And so they made no serious effort to replace English with Indian languages not just in higher education, but even in schools.

As the Indian society got more and more polarised due to the implementation of the Nehruvian capitalist economic model, a new type of segregation—on the basis of language—took place in the country. English became the common language of the elites all over the country. Gradually, it also came to be that knowledge of English became essential for getting a good job. And so, not just the upper classes, but even the lower classes began aspiring to send their children to English-medium schools. Over time, English-medium schools—even at the primary level—began sprouting up all across the country.

This has hobbled the creativity and learning abilities of children, forcing them to learn by rote instead of learning being a joyful experience. But what is far worse, as children from poor families are unable to cope with English education, this has been an important contributing factor to the very high school drop-out rate in the country.

(ii) Betrayal of Constitutional Promise of 'Education for All'

Article 45 of the Constitution of India directs the Indian State to provide within ten years of the commencement of the Constitution “free and compulsory education to all children” up to the age of 14 years. This has been interpreted to include: (a) elementary education of eight years (Class I–VIII) for the 6–14 age group children; and (b) early childhood care, nutrition, health and pre-primary education (kindergarten, nursery) for children below six years of age.

Post-independence history stands witness to the neglect and disdain with which these critical provisions have been treated by the State. Four decades after independence (that is, by the late 1980s), of the estimated 153 million Indian children between the ages of 6 and 14 years, as many as 28 million had never gone to school. And of those enrolling in Class I, a majority dropped out before completing Class VIII. Even for those children in school, the quality of education being imparted left much to be desired. The government itself admitted that a majority of the primary schools had at the most two teachers, and nearly 40% of the primary schools had only two instructional rooms!²⁷

So far as providing early childhood care, nutrition, health and pre-primary education for children below six years of age is concerned, the neglect has been even worse. This is obvious from the fact that

malnutrition in children under five years of age in India is amongst the highest in the world; according to the UNICEF, nearly half the children under the age of five are too short for their age (stunted), an indicator of chronic malnourishment.²⁸

What explains this distressing situation in the field of elementary education four decades after independence?

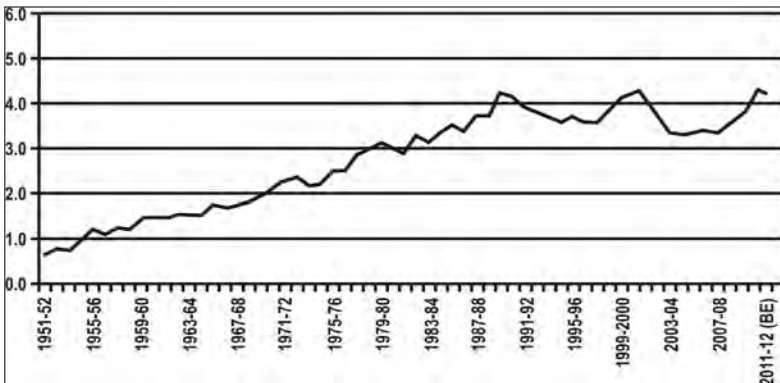
a) Inadequate Public Expenditure on Education

The most important reason for India’s failure to universalise elementary education is inadequate public investment in education.

Despite Nehru’s socialist rhetoric, and his understanding of the importance of primary education, his government failed to channelise adequate resources to it. During the entire period of Nehru’s prime ministership, the proportion of GDP spent on education remained at below 2% (Chart 2.1).

In the 1960s, the Kothari Commission, after a detailed study of our future educational needs and after making detailed comparisons with other countries, recommended that “if education is to develop adequately”, the proportion of GDP allocated to education must rise from 2.9% in 1965–66 to 6.0% by 1985–86. This suggestion of allocating 6% of the national income to education was later endorsed by several other international organisations, including the UNESCO and the UNDP.²⁹

Chart 2.1: India: Share of Public Expenditure on Education³⁰
(as % of GDP)



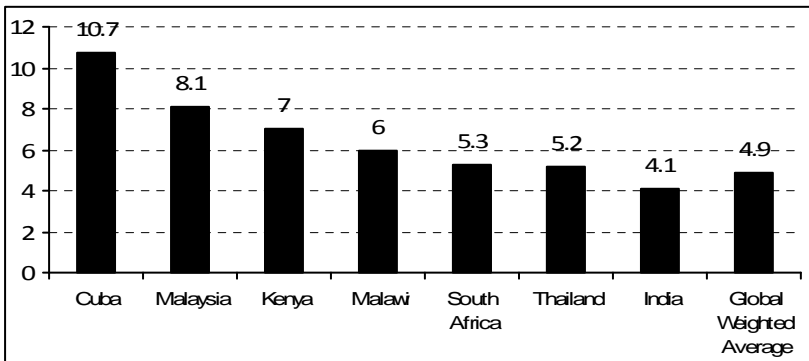
Of the several recommendations made by the Commission, this is one that was accepted by the Government of India in its *National Policy on Education* of 1968. Since then, the promise to devote 6% of national

income to education has been reiterated by the government in every Five Year Plan and in every important policy statement. But no government has implemented it. The expenditure on education increased very slowly, reaching 3.5% of GDP by 1985–86 and crossing 4% by 1989–90, only to fall back in the following years. The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007–12) was proclaimed as an ‘Education Plan’. But even during this Plan period, expenditure on education only gradually inched up, rising from 3.4% of GDP in 2007–08 to reach a dismal 4.2% in 2010–11, and then fell to 4.17% in 2011–12 (Chart 2.1).

Why have India’s ruling classes not made sufficient investment in education, especially elementary education? As Prof. Prabhat Patnaik, the renowned economist and political commentator, points out, it is not a question of lack of resources, but of priorities:

The proportion of GDP that the white-supremacist South African State spent on the education of the black majority even during the apartheid period, notwithstanding the massive drain on its exchequer that the maintenance of the highly oppressive police, military, and intelligence apparatus entailed at the time, was higher than what the Indian State has ever done on education as a whole throughout its entire post-independence history. The matter in short is one of priorities.³¹

Chart 2.2: Government Education Spending, 2002³²
(as % of GDP)



Prof. Patnaik’s argument is substantiated by Chart 2.2, where we have compared India’s public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP with other developing countries. Even by the standards of the developing countries, it is embarrassingly low, and is even significantly below the weighted average of all the countries in the world.

b) More Priority to Higher Education

At the time of independence, there were very few higher education institutions in the country due to the complete neglect of higher education by the British. As pointed out earlier, the basic orientation of the Nehru model was to develop indigenous industry along capitalist lines. Big public and private sector industry badly needed engineers–scientists–technicians. The Indian State was willing to spend only limited amount of funds on education. Within this limited expenditure on education, it preferred to give more attention to higher education and to a lesser extent secondary education, while elementary education was neglected. Consequently, as shown in Table 2.2, of the total Plan resources devoted to education, the allocation to elementary education drastically fell from 56% in the First Five Year Plan to around 30% by the Fourth Plan; while allocation to university education nearly trebled over this period.

Table 2.2: Intra-Sectoral Allocation of Plan Outlays in Education in Five Year Plans³³

<i>Education Level</i>	<i>Expenditure Outlay</i>							
	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>	<i>Ann.</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>VII</i>
	<i>51–56</i>	<i>56–61</i>	<i>61–66</i>	<i>66–69</i>	<i>69–74</i>	<i>74–79</i>	<i>80–85</i>	<i>85–90</i>
Elementary*	56	35	34	24	30	35	36	29
Secondary	13	19	18	16	18	17	16	16
University	9	18	15	24	25	22	19	12
Technical	13	18	21	25	13	12	11	11
Other^o	9	10	12	11	14	14	18	33
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

* *Includes pre-school education*

^o *Includes teacher education, vocational and adult education, social education, cultural programmes, etc.*

Noted educationists J.B.G. Tilak and N.V. Varghese have argued that had the pattern of intra-sectoral allocation of resources in the education sector adopted in the First Five Year Plan continued, universalisation of elementary education would in all probability have been accomplished by the 1990s.³⁴

3. GLOBALISATION BEGINS

By the mid-1960s, the Nehru model was in crisis. The economy had started stagnating, and both industry and agriculture were in serious crisis. While during the first fifteen years after independence (1951–65), manufacturing output grew at a healthy average annual rate of 7.1%, the subsequent 15 years (1965–80) saw this rate fall to only 3.8%.³⁵

1980s: Partial Liberalisation

The Nehru model had led to a gradual growth of capitalist classes both in the cities and countryside. With domestic market saturating and economic growth slowing down, the capitalist classes started pressing the government for a relaxation in import controls on raw materials and machinery, in the hope that this would lead to a boost in exports.

Liberalisation of imports required foreign exchange, and so in the early 1980s, the Indian Government decided to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a huge foreign loan of SDR 5 billion (roughly \$6 bn). Indira Gandhi, who was the Prime Minister then, knew that taking any such loan would require the acceptance of an economic reform package. Anticipating that there would be big domestic opposition to these conditionalities, the government in its negotiations with the IMF offered to voluntarily implement economic reforms and partially liberalise the economy, without signing a formal agreement with the IMF on such an economic reform programme. The reforms promised included reducing government subsidies to the people, and gradually removing restrictions on imports and taking vigorous steps to promote exports.³⁶

The IMF agreed and the loan was granted in November 1981.

The economic reforms led to a revival of manufacturing growth in the 1980s, with the average annual growth rate rising to 8.8% during the second half of the decade. An important reason for this was a substantial liberalisation of imports. This import liberalisation was not tied to a larger export effort; its main immediate thrust was towards producing more goods—especially luxury goods—for the domestic market. The flip side of this was a rising trade deficit, which in turn led a large increase in the current account deficit (CAD).³⁷

Entrapped in Debt

To finance the growing CAD, the government resorted to external commercial borrowings. Debt servicing of the borrowings led to a further

rise in CAD, and that led to yet more borrowings. As fresh debt was contracted even to pay off old debt, the loan terms became stiffer, the maturity period shorter, and this led to a rapid escalation of the country's external debt, from around \$20 billion in 1980 to more than \$80 billion by 1990.³⁸ The Indian economy was caught in an external debt trap: we were borrowing from abroad to pay even the service charges on our previous debt.

The developed capitalist countries, who not very long ago were the imperial masters of the entire Third World, were looking for just such an opportunity. They had been forced to retreat and grant independence to India and other Third World countries after a tidal wave of powerful independence struggles had swept across these countries in the years after the end of the Second World War. Ever since then, they had been looking for alternate ways to bring the former colonial world back under their hegemony and ensnare it once again in the imperialist network, so that they could once again control its raw material resources and exploit its markets.

With the Indian economy caught in an external debt trap by the late 1980s, the Western imperialist powers sensed that the time was opportune to force the Government of India to submit to a restructuring of the Indian economy. The World Bank (WB), an international financial institution that is decisively controlled by the US and West European countries, submitted a memorandum to the Indian Government in November 1990 'suggesting' economic reforms like opening up the economy to foreign investment, liberalising trade, privatisation of the public sector, reforming the financial sector, and so on. Simultaneously, the Western creditors put on hold fresh loans to the Indian Government, demanding that it first implement these policy changes.³⁹

With foreign loans drying up, the foreign exchange reserves of the country plummeted to just \$1.2 billion by end-December 1990. By early 1991, the Indian Government was entrapped in a situation wherein, if it wanted to avoid external account bankruptcy, it had no option but to accept the demands of its international creditors.

1991: Globalisation Begins

The Nehruvian model of capitalist development had sharply polarised Indian society. Society was split into two camps. In one camp were the capitalists, big farmers, big traders, politicians, bureaucrats, smugglers, dealers, distributors, blackmarketeers, mafia, etc.—the parasites. They comprised less than 5% of the population. In the other

camp were the working people, the students and youth, and the pro-people intellectuals—the ordinary folk. These constituted 95% of the population. It is the first camp which controls political power in the country. Most mainstream political parties serve only its interests.

By the 1970s, the path of relatively autonomous capitalist development chosen by the Indian ruling classes had become mired in severe structural crisis. They experimented with partial liberalisation in the 1980s. While it entrapped the Indian economy in an external debt crisis, it also led to increased growth. The capitalist classes now came to the conclusion that in order to expand their profit accumulation, they must abandon their dream of independent capitalist development, accept the conditionalities imposed by the imperialists, dismantle the Nehruvian model, and open up the economy to foreign investment and imports.

And so, in mid-1991, the Congress Government of Narasimha Rao–Manmohan Singh went in for a *Structural Adjustment Loan* from the WB–IMF, in return for which it signed an agreement pledging a thoroughgoing restructuring of the Indian economy. The main elements of this *Structural Adjustment Package* (SAP) accepted by the Government of India were:⁴⁰

- **Free Trade:** Removal of all curbs on imports and exports;
- **Free Investment:** Removal of all restrictions on foreign investment in industry, financial sector and agriculture;
- **Free Market:** No government interference in the operation of the market. This means:
 - ending of all subsidies to the poor including food, health and education subsidies;
 - privatisation of the public sector, including essential services like drinking water, health, education, etc.;
 - removal of all government controls on profiteering, even in areas like foodgrains.

It is this ‘restructuring’ of the Indian economy at the behest of the country’s foreign creditors that has been given the high sounding name, *Globalisation*. This has been accompanied by the propagation of an economic doctrine popularly known as neoliberalism that claims that human well-being can best be advanced by free markets, including privatisation, free trade and deregulation.

Since 1991, while governments at the Centre have kept changing, globalisation of the Indian economy has continued unabated. Globalisation is the consensus policy of the entire Indian ruling class.

4. GLOBALISATION AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Provision of equitable, good quality elementary education to ALL children is an essential prerequisite for sustainable human development and sustained development of any nation. Independent India's leaders, despite all their rhetoric of socialism, did not think it important enough to make adequate investments in education, improve the quality of all government schools, and move towards the goal of a common school system of public education. As discussed earlier, it is not that the country did not have the necessary resources; it was a question of priorities.

As early as the 1960s, the Kothari Commission had observed that there is segregation in the education system in the country. The upper classes were sending their children to private, fee-charging, better quality schools, while the vast bulk of free, publicly maintained, but poor schools were being utilised by the masses. Nevertheless, even till the late 1980s, the proportion of private schools in the total school system of the country was very low (Table 4.1); the vast majority of the middle classes continued to send their children to the government school system.

**Table 4.1: Share of Private Unaided Schools
in Total Number of Schools, 1986–87⁴¹**

<i>Primary</i>	<i>Upper Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Higher Secondary</i>
2.5%	8.4%	12.7%	6%

By the 1980s, the Nehruvian model of autonomous capitalist development model was in crisis. The country's ruling classes decided to embark on a new path of capitalist development, initially partially and later at full speed, which has euphemistically been given the name of globalisation. Not only has the new neoliberal model sharply worsened the gap between rich and poor in society, it has also had deleterious effects on India's education system, taking segregation in the education system to obscene levels . . .

Towards a New Orientation in Education

The neoliberal winds from Washington that had started blowing across India in the 1980s affected the Indian education system too. The first indication that the government was now formally moving towards a new orientation in its educational policies came in 1985, when it changed the name of the Ministry of Education to Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). This implied a change in the very purpose of

education, from one of developing conscious citizens to build a democratic, just, secular, egalitarian and socialist society as envisaged in the Constitution, to one of supplying ‘human resource’, that is, skilled but slavish workforce, for corporations.

National Policy on Education 1986

In 1986, the government formulated a new National Policy on Education (NPE-1986), wherein for the first time, it formally announced that the education system in the country was henceforth going to be multi-track and discriminatory. The NPE-1986 declared that for out-of-school children in the 6–14 age-group—who comprised almost half of the children in this age-group—a stream of non-formal education (NFE) of inferior quality shall be instituted. Simultaneously, it also proposed to set up an elite layer of schools, the Navodaya Vidyalayas, one per district, whose quality would be far above the regular government schools.⁴²

The government, in a document titled *Challenge of Education—A Policy Perspective* shamelessly admitted that the real reason for introducing a discriminatory education system was budget constraints; since universalisation of education would call for significant increase in educational expenditure, therefore NFE was being adopted.⁴³ Obviously, NFE was meant for the children of the marginalised sections, not children of the middle classes and elites, and from the perspective of the elites, teaching the poor some literacy–numeracy was more than enough!

Another decision of far-reaching impact taken in NPE-1986 concerned the appointment of NFE “instructors” in place of regular, qualified, trained and well-paid teachers. The level of qualification, teacher training, salary and other service conditions of these instructors would obviously be much lower than those of the regular teachers of the formal school system.

Articles 14 and 15(1) of Part III (Fundamental Rights) together with Article 45 of the Indian Constitution make it clear that the State is duty bound to build a system of education that provides education of equitable quality to all children without any discrimination whatsoever! With NPE-1986, India’s ruling classes were thus formally abandoning this Constitutional vision, and unfortunately even the courts have chosen to remain silent on this!

SAP and Elementary Education

Having accepted a ‘Structural Adjustment Loan’ from the WB–IMF in 1991, the government in the early 1990s began implementing World

Bank dictated education reforms in right earnest. These reforms had been outlined in the Jomtien Declaration issued at the end of a World Bank sponsored international conference on education held in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990. The Indian Government too had signed this Declaration. The basic agenda of these reforms was straightforward:

- i) Starve the vast government education system, from schools to universities, of funds; consequently, their quality would gradually deteriorate.
- ii) With decline in school quality, parents, including even poor parents, would gradually begin to withdraw their children from the government education system.
- iii) This would create the demand for private schools, enabling the private sector to set up low-fee-charging inferior quality schools for poor children, and high-fee-charging elite schools for the rich.
- iv) Meanwhile, the declining enrolment in government schools would give an alibi to the government to close them down; the school campuses could then either be handed over to private schools, or be converted into commercial ventures like shopping malls.⁴⁴

The Assault: DPEP–SSA

The assault on the huge government school education system began with the launch of the World Bank sponsored District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1993–94. Beginning with 42 districts in 7 states, the DPEP steadily spread its coverage to almost half of India's districts (about 280 districts) in 18 states by 2002–03.

The DPEP inflicted serious damage on the Indian education system in just a decade. The effects included:⁴⁵

- Reduction of the holistic goals of education to literacy–numeracy;
- Replacement of the Constitutional commitment to provide eight years of elementary education with five years of primary education;
- Parallel to mainstream formal schools, introduction of streams of relatively inferior quality education such as adult literacy classes, education guarantee centres, correspondence courses, etc.
- Replacement of regular teachers with under-qualified, ill-trained and under-paid teachers appointed on short-term contracts, called para-teachers;
- Introduction of multi-grade teaching wherein one teacher teaches five classes simultaneously in one classroom;

- Reducing the responsibility of the government to provide education by allowing NGOs to enter the education sector.

In less than a decade, the DPEP ‘succeeded’ in its agenda of undermining the quality of the government school system, leading to a significant loss of its public credibility.

In April 2000, the World Bank organised another international conference on education in Dakar, Senegal as a follow-up to the Jomtien Conference. In accordance with the decisions taken at this conference, the Indian Government repackaged DPEP and presented it to the public under the new label of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). A decade later, by 2010, the government-funded school system was in absolute shambles. The World Bank had successfully accomplished its objective of destroying the government school system in India. The ground had been created for commercialisation of school education, that is, for the rapid growth of private school education in India.

5. RIGHT TO EDUCATION ACT

The Unnikrishnan Judgement

Meanwhile, putting a spoke in the plans of the World Bank and a pliant Government of India, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India gave an unprecedented ruling upholding the spirit of the Constitution of India. In 1993, in *J.P. Unnikrishnan vs State of AP*, the Supreme Court ruled that Article 45 in Part IV of the Constitution should be read in “harmonious construction” with Article 21 (right to life) in Part III of the Constitution, and concluded:

The right to education flows directly from right to life. The right to life under Article 21 and the dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it is accompanied by the right to education.

Referring to the 10-year time-frame given in Article 45 for providing education to all children up to the age of 14 years, the Court asked: “Has it no significance? Is it a mere pious wish, even after 44 years of the Constitution?” And so the Supreme Court declared that Article 45 has acquired the status of a fundamental right.

Need to Amend Article 45: Free Education till 18 Years

Any pro-people government would have welcomed the Unnikrishnan judgement. In fact, today, the need is to amend Article 45

and expand its scope to include all children up to the age of 18 years and provide them free and compulsory education up to Class XII. At the time of commencement of the Constitution, since India had just become free from 200 years of colonial plunder and so was faced with a huge paucity of resources, there might have been some validity in Article 45 being limited to “all children until they complete the age of 14 years” (implying education up to Class VIII). Fifty years later, after so much wealth creation and development, this country was definitely in a position to guarantee its children free and compulsory education at least up to Class XII.

Indeed, in most of the advanced developing countries, such as China, Mexico, Brazil, Thailand and Indonesia, the task of universalising elementary education was accomplished a long time ago and they are now engaged in universalising quality secondary education.⁴⁶

Providing free education up to Class XII is also essential from another perspective—without a Class XII certificate, no young person has any chance of getting any kind of a decent job. Barely 10% of OBC students, 8% of SC students and 6% of ST students (out of those admitted to Class I) cross the Class XII barrier;⁴⁷ implying that the benefits of reservation have been limited since independence to only this small section of OBCs, SCs and STs. The exclusion of a majority of Muslims from higher education and public employment also needs to be understood in this context as their social status is broadly equivalent to SCs/OBCs. Therefore, not providing free education to all children up to the age of 18 years makes a mockery of the fundamental right to social justice under Articles 15 (Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, etc.) and 16 (Equality of opportunity) of the Indian Constitution.

Subverting the Judgement: 86th Amendment

Forget about providing free education to all children up to the age of 18 years, the Unnikrishnan judgement giving all children in the age-group 0–14 a fundamental right to education sent jitters down the spine of the ruling elite. It was the exact opposite of the requirements of the WB–dictated SAP. The government desperately began looking for ways to extricate itself from the implications of the judgement.

Finally, in November 2001, the government presented the 86th Constitutional Amendment Bill to the Lok Sabha. The ostensible purpose of making the amendment was to implement the Unnikrishnan judgement, making ‘right to education’ a fundamental right. But the real

reason was: *in the name of implementing the Supreme Court judgement, actually subvert it.*

The 86th Amendment made two important changes in the Constitution:

- Inserted Article 21A into the Constitution (after Article 21), which read: “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”;
- Redrafted Article 45, replacing: “The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years”, with: “The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years”.

A closer reading of the above changes make it clear that the Amendment had cleverly taken away the fundamental right to education granted by the Supreme Court to 37 crore children, by:

a) Taking Away the Rights of Children of 0–6 Years

Early childhood care (which includes nutrition) and nursery and pre-school education for children up to six years of age are critical for the intellectual, emotional and physical development of the child, including curiosity, formation of character, personality, cognition, language skills and social skills. Through the 86th Amendment, the government has denied children this fundamental right, thereby discriminating between the rich and the poor, since the former will be able to afford early childhood care and education for their children while poor children will be debilitated for the rest of their life due to this deprivation in early childhood.

b) Placing a Conditionality on the Rights of Children of 6–14 Years

Even for the 20 crore children in the 6–14 years age group, the 86th Amendment restricts their fundamental right to education by adding a conditionality in the form of the phrase “as the State may, by law, determine” (in Article 21A). This phrase legitimises the various parallel streams of low-budget and low-quality education for poor children started subsequently to NPE-1986 as a part of the WB–dictated reforms.

That this is the real intention of the 86th Amendment is also obvious from the Financial Memorandum attached to the Bill which provided for an additional sum of Rs 9,800 crore per year for the next 10 years for

implementing the provisions under the Amendment. This commitment is much less than what had been estimated by the government's own committee, the Tapas Majumdar Committee, to provide elementary education to all out-of-school children through regular formal schools. In its report submitted in 1999, this committee had estimated that this would require an additional investment of Rs 1,37,600 crore over a 10-year period, that is, roughly Rs 14,000 crore a year.⁴⁸ Hardly a large expense for a government that is giving away lakhs of crores of rupees as subsidies to big corporations every year (discussed later in this booklet). But the government is not willing to invest even this minuscule amount; the Bill provided for only 70% of this!

Several MPs, cutting across party lines, criticised the Bill. But then, they were just blustering; their parties are in agreement on implementing neoliberal economic reforms. The Constitutional Amendment Bill was passed by both houses of Parliament without even a single dissenting vote! The President signed the Bill in December 2002.

The Right to Education Act

Article 21A introduced into the Constitution through the 86th Amendment stated that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group 6–14 “in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.” The State was now required to pass legislation to elaborate the manner in which it was going to provide “free and compulsory” education to all children in the 6–14 age-group. The NDA Government, which had piloted the 86th Constitutional Amendment through the Parliament, couldn't get the required enabling legislation passed in Parliament as it was voted out of power in the 2004 elections. It was left to the new UPA Government that came to power in May 2004 to draft a Right to Education Bill that suited the neoliberal framework. The final Bill was passed by the Parliament on August 4, 2009. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act or Right to Education (RTE) Act came into effect on April 10, 2010.

Following the passage of this Act, the media went to town proclaiming the Act as a “historic law”, with which “India had joined a group of few countries in the world” where education was a “fundamental right of every child”.⁴⁹ The MHRD claims on its website that the Act means that “every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards.”

However, a closer reading of the Act makes it clear that its real

purpose is the exact opposite of these claims.

Deconstructing the RTE Act

i) Does the RTE Act guarantee free education to all children?

No, it does not! Nowhere in the text of the Act is it stated that children will be provided completely free education. On the contrary, Section 3 (ii) of the Act clearly states that ‘free education’ means that “no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.” Implying that fees can be charged!

ii) How does the Act propose to provide ‘compulsory’ elementary education to the roughly 8 crore children who have dropped out of school without completing elementary education?

The Act makes no special provision for this. Putting crores of out-of-school children back into school will require the construction of tens of thousands of schools, and recruitment and training of lakhs of teachers. The government has no intention of doing this; instead, it closing down thousands of government schools (discussed in next chapter)!

iii) Does the Act guarantee equitable education for all children?

On the contrary, the RTE Act legalises [Section 2(n)] the currently operating four categories of schools in India: (a) government schools; (b) government-aided private schools; (c) elite government schools, such as the Navodaya Vidyalayas and Sainik Schools; and (d) non-aided private schools. Within each of these four categories, there are a whole range of schools—from those schools that barely fulfil the infrastructural norms as required by the Schedule attached to the Act, to elite private schools with air-conditioned classrooms, swimming pools, etc.

iv) Will the Act lead to improvement of infrastructure and other quality-related aspects of schools, especially government schools?

The norms regarding this in the Act are extremely deficient. Basing himself on DISE data, the noted educationist Anil Sadgopal has estimated that even if the Act is fully implemented, almost 67% of the primary schools shall continue to be denied a separate teacher/classroom per class, and 75% of the primary schools will be without a head teacher. Even access to electricity is not guaranteed!⁵⁰

And in all probability, even these inadequate norms are going to remain only on paper; the country’s ruling classes are simply not interested in implementing these norms. The RTE Act set a deadline of three years for schools to implement the norms (ending March 31,

2013). A year after this deadline ended, an NUEPA study for the MHRD stated that only 8.3% of the schools had complied with all the 10 parameters under the RTE Act, and 21% had fulfilled 7 parameters.⁵¹

v) Will the Act raise the status and quality of teachers?

No. For the simple reason that the RTE Act does not prescribe any qualifications for teachers; nor does it say anything regarding their service terms and conditions, implying that Central and state governments are going to continue appointing ill-trained, under-qualified para-teachers on contractual basis in schools. In fact, recently, even the Supreme Court was constrained to observe that it was “shocking” that appointment of teachers on ad hoc basis was still being pursued three years after the implementation of the Right to Education Act.

vi) Will the Act ensure sufficient funds for elementary education?

No! In fact, there is not even a financial memorandum attached to the Act!

vii) What about the provision of 25% reservation in private and special category schools for children from weaker sections and disadvantaged groups —won't it ensure good education for them?

This provision of the Act states that while government schools shall provide free and compulsory education to all children in the 6–14 age group, the aided private schools shall provide free education in proportion to the aid received by them, subject to a minimum of 25% of the total number of admissions. The special category schools and non-aided private schools shall admit in Class I, to the extent of at least 25% of the strength of that class, children belonging to the weaker sections or disadvantaged groups in the neighbourhood and provide free elementary education to them. The schools will be reimbursed the expenditure so incurred by them by the State, the maximum limit of reimbursement being the per-child expenditure in government schools.

There is a lot of hype around this provision, that this will ensure ‘good quality’ education for poor children by enabling them to take admission in private schools. The problem with this belief is that it assumes that private schools provide better quality of education than government schools. Whereas, the reality is, that not all private schools deliver quality education; in fact vast numbers of them do not. A recently conducted study by the Azim Premji Foundation came to the conclusion that “fee-charging private schools are not able to ensure better learning for children from disadvantaged rural sections as compared to

government schools.”⁵² At the same time, it is true that government schools are deteriorating. But this is deliberate, because of World Bank dictated educational reforms. If the government wants, it can indeed run very good schools—it is well-known that Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas are amongst the best schools in the country. The RTE Act’s provision for reservation in private schools means that the government has decided to abdicate its responsibility to improve the quality of regular government schools and open more schools.

Be that as it may, even assuming that private schools will solve our country’s education crisis, the problem is, there are simply not enough private schools! HRD Ministry data for 2010 shows that in that academic year, even if all the private schools had fully implemented the provision of 25% reservation for poor students, at the most 18 lakh children from weaker sections would have been admitted by them in Class I. The overwhelming majority, almost 2 to 2.5 crore children, would still have to knock at the doors of the deliberately neglected government school system.⁵³

On top of it, private schools are resorting to all kinds of stratagems to deny admission to poor children. Six years after the passage of the RTE Act, an IIM Ahmedabad survey reveals that of the nearly 2.29 million seats available in private schools across the country for students from poor families (under the 25% reservation provision), these schools had filled just 15% seats.⁵⁴

In truth, this is actually a very regressive provision. Why? Because private schools are essentially teaching shops, their entire orientation is to make money by charging high fees under all kinds of guises from the children of the middle and elite classes studying there. Therefore, even if forced to admit children from poor families, they will discriminate against them in myriad ways. The attitude of both the teachers and the students from rich families towards these children will be patronising. There is also no clue as to how these poor children will meet the exorbitant and arbitrary non-fee costs of private schools. Therefore, it would not be surprising if a large number of poor students admitted to private schools under the reservation provision eventually drop out; and even if they do not drop out, they are almost certainly going to develop a strong inferiority complex.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court too has upheld the provision of 25% reservation, instead of demanding of the government that it improve the quality of education in government schools and ensure equitable education to all children. It has thus sanctioned the violation of the exalted Articles 14 (Equality before law), 15 (Prohibition of

discrimination), 16 (Equality of opportunity in public employment) and 21 (Right to life with dignity).

viii) Will the Act impose controls on the high fees charged by private schools, thereby lowering cost of education?

Again, no! Because there is no provision in the RTE Act for this. On the contrary, the Act actually gives freedom to aided and non-aided private schools to charge as much fees as they wish from 75% of the students, so long as they notify it at the time of admission.

6. POST-RTE ACT: THE PPP STORM

Clearly, the 86th Constitutional Amendment and the RTE Act will:

- i) not ensure provision of free and compulsory education of equitable quality for all children as obligated under the Constitution;
- ii) not reverse the deterioration in the government school system that has been taking place for the last two decades;

These conclusions are also borne out by a closer reading of the Eleventh Plan document. The Eleventh Plan (2007–12) was being drawn up by the Planning Commission when the government was in the process of finalising the RTE Act, and therefore its financial provisions should reveal the government's earnestness about universalising elementary education in the country. The allocation for education in the Eleventh Plan remained well below even the Kothari Commission recommendation of 6% of GDP. This, when educationists estimate that given the huge under-spending on education by successive governments over the past decades, public spending on education needs to rise to at least 8–10% of GDP today to achieve even modest goals in education development.⁵⁵

The government is not willing to sanction adequate funds for even the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)! According to the Eleventh Plan document, the SSA is the “principal program for universalisation of elementary education”; in other words, it is the main scheme for implementation of the RTE Act. Some time ago, the HRD Ministry estimated the total cost for universalising elementary education to be around Rs 1,71,000 crore over the next five years.⁵⁶ However, the total allocation made towards SSA in the Eleventh Plan was less than half of this figure: it was allocated a mere Rs 71,000 crore (and the total amount spent was slightly above that, Rs 78,000 crore).⁵⁷

Privatisation Storm

While it is not willing to sanction enough resources to improve the quality and number of government schools in the country, on the other hand, as per the dictates of the IMF–WB SAP, the government has now launched a full-scale offensive to privatise the government school system.

Of course, the government still needs to maintain the illusion that it is concerned with providing educational facilities to all children and that it has not completely washed its hands of the education sector. So, privatisation is now being done under a new slogan, ‘Public–Private–Partnership’ or PPP.

PPP is basically a fraudulent concept promoted by the economists sitting in Washington/London/Paris as a new way of transferring public resources and funds to the private sector. Under this ‘partnership’, not only are public resources (land, mineral wealth, public sector corporations, etc.) transferred to the private sector at concessional rates, the private sector is even guaranteed a minimum rate of return on its investments, the government making up for any shortfall in profits. As if this is not enough, even the investment money is also often provided by the government in the form of long term loans at concessional rates. What a partnership!

Now, the government is extending PPP to the education sector. The Eleventh Plan, while not increasing funding for education to reverse the deterioration in the government school system, unashamedly declared, “PPP in education needs to be encouraged.” This means handing over school management, appointment of teachers and their supervision, curriculum, provision of educational material, etc. to the private sector—including corporates, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious bodies.

And so, subsequent to the passage of the RTE Act by the Parliament, a storm of PPP has been sweeping across the education sector in the country. State governments are indulging in a mad orgy of commercialising education in their respective states.

Several state governments have entered into contracts with corporate houses to set up schools under the PPP model. Most of these contracts generally stipulate that the government will allocate land for the school at concessional rates. The school would have to admit 50% of the children from weaker sections, and their costs would be reimbursed by the state government. For the remaining seats, the school would be free to charge any amount of fees.

Simultaneously, state governments are privatising existing

government schools, or shutting down them! Due to the neoliberal reforms and the consequent decay in the government school system, students are exiting government schools in large numbers. This declining enrolment is giving state governments the excuse to shut down government schools en masse or transfer them to the private sector. According to an estimate made by the RTE Forum, a civil society coalition of grassroot organisations, in the five years since the enactment of the RTE Act, a total of 1 lakh government schools have been shut down across the country by various state governments. This includes 17,000 schools in Rajasthan, 5,000 schools in Odisha, 13,000 schools in Karnataka and 2,000 schools in Telengana. In Uttarakhand, the state government has decided to transfer 2,200 government schools to the private sector under the PPP mode, while Maharashtra is in the process of shutting down 14,000 schools.⁵⁸

In an astounding decision, in 2012, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) decided to hand over all of its 1,174 schools to private organisations and companies under PPP. These schools have 11,500 teachers and provide free education to nearly 4 lakh students in eight language mediums.⁵⁹ This is an unprecedented bonanza for corporate vultures, as these schools occupy prime land of the metropolis, and the value of their land alone could be thousands of crores of rupees.

The net consequence of this neoliberal assault on our school education system is that the total number of schools in the country has actually fallen in 2014–15 as compared to the previous year. In 2013–14, while there were 14.49 lakh schools imparting elementary education, the number declined to 14.46 lakh in 2014–15. This fall took place due to the massive closure of government schools across the country—their number decreased from 10.94 lakh in 2013–14 to 10.81 lakh in 2014–15 (the number of private schools increased over this period, from 3.20 lakh in 2013–14 to 3.29 lakh in 2014–15, but it was not enough to compensate for the decrease in number of government schools). It is probably the first time in the country that the total number of elementary schools has actually declined over the previous year.

And what is of even bigger concern, the total enrolment in primary schools is also declining. The huge closure of government schools and the mushrooming of fee-charging private schools all over the country has finally started taking its toll. Since 2011–12, the total number of children enrolled in primary schools has shown a steady decline, falling from the peak of 13.71 crore reached in 2011–12 to 13.48 crore in 2012–13, 13.24 crore in 2013–14, and to 13.05 crore in 2014–15.⁶⁰ This, despite the fact that the population of children who are of school-going age is

rising by 3.8% per year, according to the 2011 Census.⁶¹

As is to be expected, this decline in enrolment is affecting girls more than boys. After rising for the past several decades, for the first time, the percentage of girls' enrolment at both the primary and upper primary levels has started declining over the last few years. At the primary level, it has decreased from 48.36% in 2012–13 to 48.20% in 2013–14 to 48.19% in 2014–15. And at the upper primary level, it has fallen from 48.77% in 2012–13 to 48.66% in 2013–14 to 48.63% in 2014–15. This decline in girls enrolment is primarily due to the sharp fall in girls enrolment in private schools—in 2014–15, the percentage of girls enrolment in private schools was 44.53% for primary schools and 44.67% for upper primary schools. On the other hand, in government schools, the girls' enrolment was actually more than boys—it stood at 50.45% in primary schools and 51.36% in upper primary schools.⁶² Implying that as commercialisation of education proceeds apace, and parents are forced to withdraw children from school due to inability to pay the rising fees of private schools, girls are going to lose out more than boys.

New BJP Government: Yet More Reduction in Funding

The 2014 Lok Sabha elections saw the BJP coming back to power at the Centre after a decade, this time with Narendra Modi at the helm. Accelerating the neoliberal policies of its predecessor UPA Government, the Modi Government has severely slashed government spending on school education. During its very first year in office (financial year 2014–15), it cut actual spending on school education as compared to budget estimates by 15%. The following year (financial year 2015–16), it further chopped allocation for school education by 23% as compared to 2014–15 BE, before marginally raising it in the 2016–17 BE. On the whole, since the BJP has come to power, it has reduced budget allocation for school education even in absolute terms by a huge 21%!⁶³

[Here, it needs to be mentioned that the Centre claims that the steep cuts in social sector spending made in 2015–16 over 2014–15 were more than made up by the increase in states' share in Central taxes. But as we have shown elsewhere, the actual increase in spending capacity of the states was not as high as claimed by the Centre, due to statistical jugglery indulged in by FM Arun Jaitley.⁶⁴ Be that as it may, even if we compare only the budgetary allocations for education in the years 2015–16 and 2016–17, the increase is only marginal, by just 3%. This implies a cut in real terms. The reduced importance to school education in Union Budget 2016–17 is also borne out by comparing the budgetary allocations for

education relative to the size of the Union budget, or relative to the GDP; both these ratios have fallen, as shown in Table 6.1.]

As mentioned earlier, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is the main scheme of the Central government for implementing the RTE Act and universalising education. But the Centre is simply not willing to approve the necessary funds sought by the states for implementing this Act, and even of the amount approved, it has not been willing to sanction its share. In the two years that the BJP has been in power, the budgetary allocation for SSA has fallen by a whopping 20% over 2014–15 BE! The Mid-Day Meal Scheme is another very important scheme that not only helps in enhancing school enrolment and reducing absenteeism, but also impacts nutritional status of children—a very important factor in a country where nearly 40% of children under five suffer from malnourishment. The allocation for this too has been chopped, by 26%. The country’s ruling classes are not willing to spend money even on providing a decent nutritious meal once a day to the country’s children!

Table 6.1: BJP Government’s Budgetary Allocations for Education⁶⁵

	2014–15 BE (1)	2015–16 BE (2)	2016–17 BE (3)	Change 3 – 1 (%)	Change 3 – 2 (%)
Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL)	55,115	42,220	43,554	– 21	3.16
<i>of which:</i>					
<i>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</i>	28,258	22,000	22,500	– 20.4	2.27
<i>Mid-Day Meal Scheme</i>	13,215	9,236	9,700	– 26.6	5.02
DSEL, as % of Union Budget		2.38	2.20		
DSEL, as % of GDP		0.31	0.29		

BJP’s New Education Policy 2016

In June 2016, the HRD Ministry put out a document, *Some Inputs for Draft New Education Policy 2016*. The document does not say a word about the most fundamental problem gripping India’s school education: the deliberate destruction of the government school system because of the gradual reduction in government spending on school education, and growing privatisation of education. While the document states that its

thrust is to improve quality of education, there is not even a mention of the fact that recruitment of well-qualified permanent teachers has virtually stopped in government schools, and they are being replaced by ill-qualified lowly-paid para-teachers, and that this is playing a key role in the decline in the quality of our school education system. It makes no mention of the need to scrap informal education and convert all alternate schools into regular schools. Only at one place does the document mention that “earlier education policies had endorsed a norm of 6 percent of GDP as the minimum expenditure on education. However, this target has never been met.” But it does not promise to raise the government expenditure on education to this level. On the contrary, as we seen above, the BJP Government has further reduced budget expenditure on elementary education.

On the whole, the document promises that the neoliberal assault on our school education system is going to continue, at an accelerated pace.

Final Burial of the Constitutional Dream

Way back in the 1960s, commenting on what was then a small stream of elite ‘public schools’ (a nomenclature used for private schools in India), the Kothari Commission had stated:

*The so-called Public Schools . . . system was transplanted in India by British administrators and we have clung to it so long because it happened to be in tune with the traditional hierarchical structure of our society. Whatever its past history may be, such a system has no valid place in the new democratic and socialistic society we desire to create.*⁶⁶

Little had the fine educationists who drafted the Kothari Commission report imagined that a day would come when this small stream of private schools would become a flood!

By the first decade of the 21st century, because of the World Bank dictated educational reforms, the government school system was in tatters, due to squeezing of government grants, and decline in the quality of teachers due to increasing recruitment of under-qualified and under-paid para-teachers. Families began voting with their feet and exiting the government school system. Simultaneously, private unaided schools began sprouting up all over the country like mushrooms.

Official data reveal that over the 12-year period 2002–03 to 2014–15, of the total number of elementary schools (excluding unrecognised schools and madarasas), the proportion of government schools declined from 90% to 76.7%, while the number of recognised unaided private

schools nearly tripled, from 5.9% to 18.6%. In absolute numbers, the figures are simply staggering. Over this period, the total number of recognised private unaided schools went up by more than five times, from 46,000 to 246,000 (Table 6.2)!⁶⁷

Table 6.2: Number of Elementary Schools by Category

	<i>Total Number of Schools</i>	<i>Govt Schools</i>	<i>Private Aided Schools</i>	<i>Private Unaided Schools</i>
2002–03	7,79,205	7,03,444 (90.3%)	29,336 (3.8%)	46,425 (5.9%)
2014–15	14,09,592	10,80,747 (76.7%)	66,695 (4.7%)	2,62,150 (18.6%)

These figures underestimate the actual extent of privatisation of school education, because the above data does not include unrecognised schools. Statistics for madaras and unrecognised schools are available since 2010–11, and these totalled 36,205 in 2014–15. Including this, the percentage of private schools in 2014–15 goes up to 20.6%.⁶⁸ So far as school enrolment is concerned, the percentage of children going to private schools is even higher. The ASER report⁶⁹ of 2014–15 that is based on household surveys estimates that in rural areas, the percentage of children in the age group 6–14 going to private schools (including both private aided and unaided schools) has gone up to 32.1%.⁷⁰ Looking at the trends, the report estimates that in all probability, by 2020, over 50% students will be paying for primary education.

Poor Schools for the Poor

Only a small section of the poor can afford to send their children to high fee charging, good quality private schools, and that too, by cutting down on other essential spending. A majority of the poor continue to send their children to government schools, or low fee charging, low quality private schools. Official DISE survey data⁷¹ show that the conditions in a majority of the schools are so bad that it is a “national shame”. 2014–15 DISE data reveal that even four years after the RTE Act came into force, more than 50% (4.36 lakh) of the 8.47 lakh primary (only) schools⁷² in the country are single, or at best, two teacher schools. And a staggering 70% schools (5.91 lakh) have 3 or less than 3 teachers.⁷³

The same DISE survey found that even in 2014, 8.2% or nearly 70,000 primary (only) schools in the country were single classroom

schools (or were functioning in the open, without any classrooms), and a staggering 57.5% of the primary schools (4.87 lakh schools) functioned with 3 classrooms or less. Implying that a single teacher is teaching two or three different classes at the same time in a single room, in an overwhelming majority of the primary schools in the country! The government is not bothered—it has given this a grandiloquent name, multi-grade teaching!

Ill-Trained Teachers

A large number of the teachers in these schools are not professionally trained! According to DISE data for 2014–15, as many as 18.9% of the regular teachers in all elementary schools, a whopping 12.9 lakh teachers, are not professionally trained! Worse, to reduce their educational spending, most teachers being appointed by states are now on contract basis. According to the DISE survey of 2014–15, nearly 11.2 lakh teachers in all elementary schools are now working on contractual basis (14.06% of all teachers); of which more than one-third (34.2%) are not even professionally trained.⁷⁴

No Basic Facilities

The 2014–15 DISE report makes the grandiose claim that 97.7% of the elementary schools had drinking water facilities, 97.5% of the schools had boys' toilets, and 92.2% had separate toilets for girls.⁷⁵ The latest 2014 ASER report debunks this claim. It found that 24.4% of all elementary schools in rural India did not have functional drinking water facilities! As many as 34.8% elementary schools did not have usable toilet facilities, and 44.3% did not have separate toilet facilities for girls—an important reason for girls dropping out of schools.⁷⁶

The 2015–16 budget of the Modi Government slashed the allocation for school education by 23.4% and that for drinking water and sanitation by an eye-popping 59.1% (as compared to 2014–15 BE).⁷⁷ And yet, in his August 15, 2015 speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort, Prime Minister Modi brazenly announced that during the past year, his government had constructed separate boys and girls toilets in every school in the country!

Alarming State of Education in the Country

Given this state of our schools and teachers, is it any wonder that the 2014 ASER survey found that 51.9% of Class V students were unable to read Class II–level text while 49.4% of Class V children could not solve simple two-digit subtraction problems (that they are expected to learn in

Class II). Nearly 66% of children enrolled in Class VIII could not do simple division problems (that they are expected to learn by Class IV).

What this really means is that even though only 60% of students enrolling in Class I complete Class VIII, and 50% complete Class X, both of which are shamefully low figures, in reality, the percentage of our children who can be considered to have truly completed basic schooling is much lower than this.

Rich Schools for the Rich

On the other hand, a wide range of schools of varying quality, both in terms of educational and extra-curricular facilities and hence having differing fee structures, are opening up across the country for the children of the upper classes. School education has become such a profitable business that India's biggest corporate houses are entering the school education sector and opening five-star schools for the children of the super-rich. Thus, in Mumbai, schools such as Dhirubhai Ambani International School, Podar World School, the Aditya Birla Group promoted New Era School and Oberoi International School offer fully-wired campuses bristling with hi-tech equipment and teaching aids, fully air-conditioned classrooms and all kinds of extracurricular facilities like auditoriums, gyms, swimming pools and studios. Their fees can go up to as much as Rs 15 lakh a year and more.

This is what globalisation is all about. It means the building of a nakedly capitalistic, dog-eat-dog society. It means a free-market society, where freedom means—if you have the money, you can get the best possible education, food, healthcare and housing; but if you don't have the money, you have the 'freedom' to remain illiterate, starve, sleep on the footpath, die of curable disease . . .

India an Economic Superpower?

India's rulers never tire of claiming that the country is progressing towards joining the ranks of the developed countries.

As we have discussed in the Introduction to this booklet, all developed countries focussed on providing free, compulsory, equitable and good quality elementary education to ALL their children in the initial stages of their development, and later expanded it to secondary and higher secondary education. Most importantly, despite being avowedly free market economies, all these countries achieved universalisation of elementary and later secondary / higher secondary education entirely through public funding—they were aware that these educational goals

cannot be achieved through the private sector.

Praveen Jha, Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning in Jawaharlal Nehru University and his colleagues make the same point in their study of financing of elementary education in India:

India's policy makers refuse to learn a powerful lesson from history, which is: a decent quality infrastructure for school education accessible to all sections in society, particularly in the early to middle stages of economic development, has to be primarily the responsibility of the State. Even now, in most OECD⁷⁸ countries, only about 10% of students attend private primary schools (a section of which are dependent on government support). In Sweden, only about 2% of the total expenditure on education is supplied by private sources, and in countries like France, more than 99.5% of educational expenditure comes only from the government. There is no historical script that points to any other way, apart from the strong public provisioning in this sector.⁷⁹

The conclusion is inescapable. If India wants to develop, it must provide good quality education to all its children. And this can only be achieved through the public sector, through government spending. Indeed, a recent resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council recognised that growing privatisation and commercialisation of education constitutes a danger to the realisation of the right to education. India voted in favour of this resolution!⁸⁰ And yet, India's ruling classes are ruthlessly reducing government expenditure on education and gradually privatising school education. With the consequence that for the vast majority of the population, their children are being deprived of even basic education, something that is fundamental to human and societal development.

Globalisation and neoliberal reforms in education are not leading to development; they are causing underdevelopment of the country.

7. HIGHER EDUCATION IN NEHRUVIAN PERIOD

Objectives

Today, most people have come to accept that the objective of higher education is to acquire the necessary skills for getting a job. And so, people don't see anything wrong in paying for higher education, with the more the 'value' of the degree in terms of its potential to fetch a high paying job (such as an engineering or a management degree), the higher

the fee.

However, this was not the perspective of our educationists and policy makers at the time of independence. Delivering the Convocation Address at the Allahabad University in 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru stated:

*A university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth. . . . If the universities discharge their duty adequately, then, it is well with the nation and the people.*⁸¹

This continued to be the opinion of the country's political leadership and intellectuals during the early decades after independence. To quote from the Kothari Education Commission report on the "general objectives of university education":

*First and foremost, they must learn to strive to serve as the 'conscience of the nation', as assessors of the national way of life, and this responsibility becomes all the greater in the absence of an enlightened public opinion . . . Universities are pre-eminently the forum for a critical assessment of society — sympathetic, objective, unafraid . . .*⁸²

Prerequisites

For universities to be places where teachers and students together address the challenges before the country to build a society that ensures justice, liberty, equality and fraternity for all its citizens, a promise made in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, it is essential that:

(i) They should have complete autonomy.

This was emphasised by the University Education Commission set up in 1948 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. The Kothari Commission went even further and stated that not only should universities have complete 'institutional autonomy', but that they should also have complete "academic freedom"; it stated that teachers must have the freedom "to hold and express their views, however radical, within the classroom (and outside) provided they are careful to present the different aspects of a problem without confusing teaching with 'propaganda' in favour of their own particular views."⁸³

(ii) They should be publicly funded.

Private investors are only going to invest in education for making a profit. When private for-profit institutions provide education, education becomes a commodity, a product on sale, and students become

consumers who buy education. Private universities will prefer to offer courses which will fetch students a high-paying job and for which therefore they can charge high fees, such as engineering and management courses. Likewise, if students have to buy education, that is, if they have to pay fees for education, their main interest in pursuing higher education will be to get a job, and not serving the nation and the people. Thus, the aim of students pursuing courses in medicine will no longer be to increase health consciousness of the people so that they don't fall sick; rather, they will seek to make money from people's illnesses.

Therefore, if the orientation of higher education is to be as visualised by our founding fathers, if universities are to be oriented towards the task of nation-building, if they are to serve as "conscience of the nation", then they must be State-funded.

Growth of Higher Education, 1947–90

After independence, there was rapid growth of higher education institutions in the country. Over the four decades from 1950–51 to 1990–91, both the number of universities and the number of colleges went up by several times. Enrolment in higher education zoomed, going up from 4 lakh to 49 lakh over this period. Even more remarkable was the growth in enrolment of girls in higher education: their share in total enrolment went up from 10.8% to 29% (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Growth of Higher Education in India, 1947–91⁸⁴

	<i>Universities*</i>	<i>Colleges</i>	<i>Enrolment in '000</i>	<i>Girls Enrolment in '000</i>	<i>Teachers in '000</i>
1950–51	30	695	397	43	24
1960–61	55	1542	1050	170	60
1970–71	103	3604	1954	431	129
1980–81	133	4722	2752	749	193
1990–91	190	7346	4925	1437	263

* Includes Central and State Universities, Deemed Universities, Institutes of National Importance, and Private Universities.

[Note: Figures of student enrolment & teaching staff (1970–71 onwards) pertain to regular courses in universities & colleges (excluding polytechnics, other diploma awarding institutions & non-formal systems of higher education)]

Government figures indicate that the enrolment of scheduled castes and scheduled tribe students in higher education more than doubled over the period 1957 to 1987, from 1.07 lakh to 2.53 lakh.⁸⁵

Crisis

As discussed in Chapter 2, India's education system was never really able to break out of the Macaulayan mould. This affected higher education too. As the Nehruvian model gradually sank into crisis by the late 1960s, the idealism present in society during the initial years after independence also dissipated. The vibrant intellectual atmosphere that was present during the early post-independence years in the universities gradually decayed; and instead of being places where teachers and students jointly address the challenges of 'nation-building', universities gradually became mere graduate producing factories producing qualified workers for the range of jobs available in society.

The colonisation of India by the British put a brake on the growing grassroots socio-cultural movement in Indian society (such as the Bhakti movement)—that some scholars have dubbed as the Indian renaissance—that had begun to challenge the feudal system, including the caste system.⁸⁶ While the British made no effort to weaken the caste system, unfortunately, independent India's new rulers also did not make a serious effort to fight the feudal values entrenched in Indian society for the past nearly 2,000 years. An important reason for a more democratic capitalist society in Europe is the long struggle waged by the rising middle classes against superstitions, prejudice and other forms of feudal backwardness. Because of this intense struggle that spanned more than 500 years, democratic values are more strongly entrenched in those societies. However, in India, the rising capitalist and middle classes compromised with medieval backwardness, due to their inherent weakness and fear of the masses. Consequently, our universities continued to be plagued by political interference, the feudal mentality of patronage and dependence did not end, and the intellectual elites instead of animating universities undermined them by promoting people of their caste–community–region.

A third important reason for the gradual decay of the higher education system in India was that the Indian Government made very inadequate public investment in education (discussed in detail in Chapter 2). It is true that within this limited expenditure on education, the government laid more emphasis on promoting higher education, spending as much as 30–50% on university and technical education

during the period 1956–85 (see Table 2.2). Therefore, as the statistics given in Table 7.1 attest, there did take place a significant expansion of higher education in the country during the first few decades after independence. However, this expansion was on a very low base; and was very inadequate as compared to our actual needs. The Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education, that is, the total enrolment in higher education as a percentage of the total youth population in the age group 18–23, was only 8% in 1990–91.⁸⁷

The failure of the Nehruvian economic model and the worsening economic crisis led the Indian ruling classes to initially experiment with partial liberalisation of the economy in the 1980s, and then go in for neoliberal economic reforms and full-fledged globalisation of the economy in the 1990s. These neoliberal reforms have not only severely impacted elementary education (discussed in the previous chapters), they have adversely affected higher education too, and have given an entirely new dimension to the crisis gripping it . . .

8. HIGHER EDUCATION AND GLOBALISATION

Neoliberal Winds: NPE-1986 and POA-1992

In the early 1980s and then again in the 1990s, the Indian Government went in for a major loan from the IMF–WB. In return, it began modulating its economic and social policies in accordance with the wishes of these international financial institutions and the imperialist countries that control them.

In 1986, the World Bank came out with a document, *Report on Financing Higher Education in Developing Countries*, which argued that since governments are short of funds, therefore, they should devote their limited resources to financing primary education. The report explicitly called for elimination of government subsidies to higher education. The same perspective was reiterated in a subsequent World Bank report of 1994, *Higher Education: The Lessons of Experience*.⁸⁸

In accordance with the wishes of the World Bank, the new National Policy of Education formulated by the government in 1986 and the revised Programme of Action of 1992 both recommended that higher education institutions be encouraged to raise their own resources and achieve maximum self-reliance. In 1992, the University Grants Commission set up the Punnayya Committee to suggest ways of resource mobilisation by universities; and in 1994, the All India Council for Technical Education set up the Swaminathan Committee to look into

possibilities of resource mobilisation in technical education. Both dutefully came up with very similar recommendations, such as enhancement of tuition fees and other fees, their periodical adjustment to rise in costs, relating fees to the employment opportunity of courses, renting out university facilities such as class rooms, playgrounds and lawns, reducing regular faculty and hiring contract teachers, increasing teacher–student ratio, and so on.⁸⁹

These recommendations implied an abandonment of the principle of public funding of higher education. They meant that the country’s policy makers and educationists were now no longer viewing higher education institutions as bodies that should strive to furnish intellectual leadership and moral tone to society. They were now viewing higher education only as a means of individual profit, as a means for getting a job, and this logically implied that those accessing higher education should pay for it. This was in fact explicitly stated in a discussion paper on government subsidies brought out by the Finance Ministry in May 1997; it argued that higher education benefited only its recipients and did not benefit society as a whole, and therefore recommended that subsidies given to higher education be reduced, and brought down to 50% in three years and 25% in five years.⁹⁰

Reduction in Public Funding of Higher Education

Basing itself on these recommendations, the Government of India made steep cuts in public funding of higher education during the 1990s. By 2001–02, the total government expenditure on higher and technical education had fallen to just around 0.5% of the GNP, as compared to between 1 and 2.5% for many developed countries (whose GNP is much more and population much less as compared to India) (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Govt. Spending on Higher and Technical Education⁹¹
(as % of GNP)

	<i>Govt. Expenditure on Higher Education</i>	<i>Govt. Expenditure on Technical Education</i>
1990–91	0.46	0.15
2001–02	0.39	0.12

Consequence: Decline in Quality, Fee-hikes . . .

After putting a squeeze on government grants, in 2000, the MHRD took the next logical step by asking universities and colleges to generate at

least 7% of their maintenance grant through internal resources (that is, through fee hike and other sources), with one percent increase every year till it reaches 15%. The MHRD further decided that fees should vary from course to course, 20% of the seats could be filled by foreign and NRI students, 75% of the recurring cost of library, laboratory, sports and computer facilities should be recovered from students, and hostel fees should be immediately revised to recover actual recurring cost and a part of the capital cost.⁹²

An important casualty of this reduction in public funding on higher education has been decline in quality of education. There have been steep cuts in budget allocations for libraries, laboratories, faculty improvement programmes, research, and so on. Faculty recruitment in universities and colleges came to a halt for more than a decade. This is admitted in the report of the Committee on *Financing of Higher and Technical Education*, set up by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in 2004:

*The financially unsatisfactory situation in higher education gets clearly reflected in the physical infrastructure of our higher education institutions. It is common knowledge that many institutions of higher education suffer from severe inadequacy of physical resources such as buildings, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, etc., not to speak of high tech modern equipment . . .*⁹³

The CABE committee points out that because of the reduction in funding by the government, universities and colleges “have made very significant upward revisions in fee levels in recent years”. Apart from tuition fees, they have also been “introducing different kinds of fees”, such as “entrance examination fee, admission fee, registration fee, eligibility fee, library fee, laboratory fee, sports fee, convocation fee, certificate fee, fee for marks statement, etc.” In case of hostel fees and other such ‘student welfare’ services, almost full cost recovery is being attempted. The committee gave an example to illustrate the steep hike in different kinds of fees: in 1999–2000, in Bangalore University, tuition fee amounted to only 2.2% of the total recurring income, while income from all fees accounted for above 40%.

To generate additional resources, many universities and colleges have launched ‘self-financing’ courses. These have been introduced even in disciplines like economics, political science, botany, zoology, etc., courses that ought to be provided as normal courses in these institutions. Exploiting the high demand for higher education, the fees charged is often much higher than the cost.

9. THE “BUSINESS” OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Boss Changes Tack

World Bank recommendations of the 1980s–90s had made the Government of India restrict funding for higher education, pushing the latter into deep crisis. Having succeeded in making the government higher education system sick, the World Bank now changed tack. It released a new report, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, in March 2000. This urged upon the developing countries to take urgent action to expand the quality and quantity of the higher education sector, and recommended that for this, the “strengths of all players—public and private—must be used.”⁹⁴

Ambani–Birla Report

The same year (2000) saw the release of another report which too had a major impact on the higher education sector in India, *A Policy Framework for Reforms in Education*. This report was shockingly not the product of any committee of academics, but was drafted by industrialists Mukesh Ambani (Convenor) and Kumarmangalam Birla (Member); and they were invited to do so, not by the MHRD or the University Grants Commission (UGC), but Prime Minister Vajpayee’s Council on Trade and Industry!

Ambani–Birla brazenly recommended privatisation of existing universities, and government encouragement for leading industrial houses to set up new private universities in areas like science, technology and management where there is potential for making profits. Simultaneously, they recommended that the State play an active role in disciplines that the private sector would not be interested in investing as they do not command a market, like “oriental languages, archaeology, palaeontology, religion and philosophy”. They wanted strict enforcement of the ‘users-pay’ principle in higher education (with loans and grants for the economically and socially backward sections of society) to make investment in the education sector profitable for investors.

Ambani–Birla also pushed for opening up the education sector to foreign direct investment, and opening up the higher education sector for foreign students from whom high fees can be charged.⁹⁵

Strong protests from academicians and teachers unions forced the government to ostensibly shelve the Ambani–Birla report. However, its recommendations have continued to influence the policy framework in higher education.

National Knowledge Commission Report

In 2005, the Government of India constituted the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) to recommend policy reforms to “build excellence in the educational system.” The Commission was chaired by Sam Pitroda, an NRI known for his open loyalties to neoliberalism. The Commission submitted its *Report to the Nation 2006* in January 2007. The NKC too recommended substantial privatisation of the higher education sector. Additionally, in the name of expeditious decision-making, it called for scrapping of all democratic governing bodies in universities, such as university courts and academic councils, and increasing powers of Vice Chancellors so that they function like chief executive officers—an ominous sign that India’s rulers are planning to stifle academic freedom and convert our universities into authoritarian bodies.⁹⁶

Eleventh and Twelfth Five Year Plans

The World Bank report of 2000, and its virtual endorsement by India’s leading industrialists in the form of the Ambani–Birla report (which reads almost like an Indianised version of the former) and by the NKC, saw the Indian Government make an important change in its policy on higher education in the first decade of the 21st century. It now began a major push for expansion of higher education through the private sector.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007–12) announced a major thrust to expand capacity in higher education institutions, and proposed to achieve a GER of 15% in higher education by 2011–12, for which it estimated that an additional enrolment of 8.7 lakh students in universities and 61.3 lakh in colleges would be required. It proposed a major part of this expansion to take place either in the private sector or through PPP. To encourage private sector investment in higher education, it called for granting financial autonomy to higher education institutions, so that they could “mobilise resources from user fees, review fee-structures, consultancy services, and donations.”⁹⁷

The Twelfth Plan (2012–17) envisages a further rise in GER in higher education to 25%, to achieve which it envisages an increase in student enrolment in higher education by 10 million, and expects the bulk of this growth also to be in private institutions. For this to be possible, it calls for encouragement to new models of PPP in higher education, innovative changes in legal provisions to encourage increased private sector investment in higher education and granting of public

funds to private unaided educational institutions. It even goes to the extent of advocating that for-profit institutions be allowed entry into higher education.⁹⁸

Soon after coming to power, the Modi Government scrapped the Planning Commission and replaced it with Niti Aayog. Nevertheless, the government has clarified that the Twelfth Five Year Plan will continue and will now be executed by the Niti Aayog.⁹⁹ In other words, the accelerated privatisation of the higher education sector envisaged in the Twelfth Plan is to continue . . .

This brazen promotion of the entry of the private sector into higher education and giving it a free rein to hike fees and make unrestricted profits has led to a huge private sector boom in higher education over the past decade.

The Private Sector Takes Off

From 256 in 2000–01, the number of universities (including Deemed Universities and Institutions of National Importance) in India rose to 700 by 2012–13, a two-and-a-half fold increase in just 12 years. And the number of colleges zoomed to 35,539 in 2011–12, from 7,346 in 1990–91 and 12,806 in 2000–01 (Charts 9.1 and 9.2).

This increase was mainly driven by a huge increase in the number of private higher education institutions. As can be seen from Chart 9.3, the total number of private (unaided) universities and colleges shot up by more than six times in the past decade, and now account for nearly 60% of all universities and colleges combined, as compared to less than 25% in 2001. There are now nearly 200 private universities and deemed universities, compared to almost nil a decade ago.

Chart 9.1: Number of Universities in India, 1950–2013¹⁰⁰

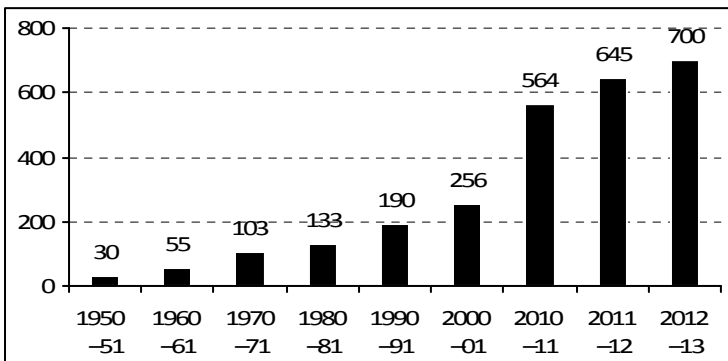


Chart 9.2: Number of Colleges in India, 1950–2012¹⁰¹

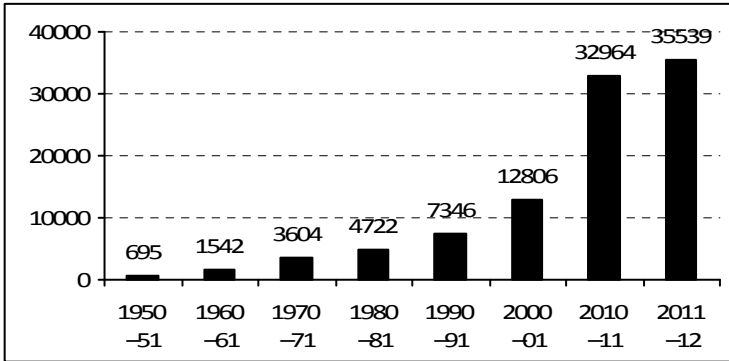


Chart 9.3: Increase in Number of Private Unaided Universities and Colleges, 2001–2012¹⁰²

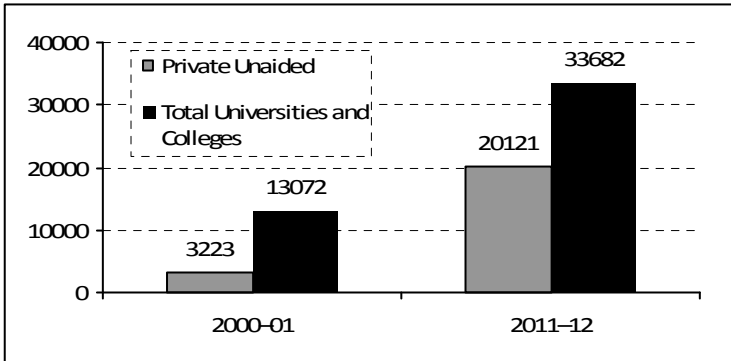
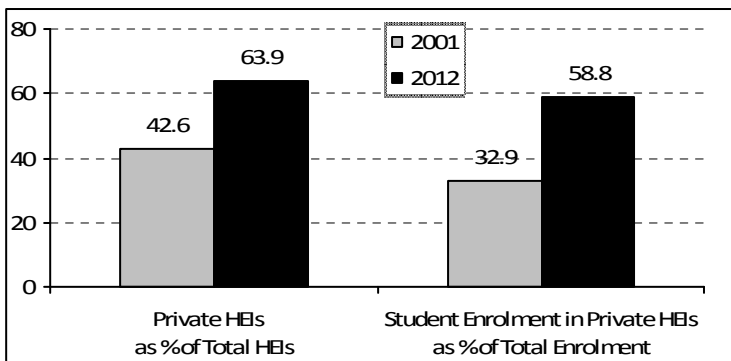


Chart 9.4: HEIs and Student Enrolment, 2000–01 & 2011–12¹⁰³
(by type of management, %)



Including both degree and diploma granting institutions, the total number of higher education institutions (HEIs) had zoomed to 46,430 by 2011–12; the total number of private HEIs (unaided) accounted for two-thirds of all institutions. The total student enrolment in HEIs (degree + diploma) more than tripled over the past decade, going up from around 70 lakh in 2000–01 to more than 217 lakh in 2011–12; private institutions account for nearly 60% of this student enrolment in 2011–12 (Chart 9.4).¹⁰⁴

This huge private sector–led boom in higher education has resulted in a near tripling of the Gross Enrolment Ratio (taking into consideration only students in degree and diploma courses, and not those in distance learning courses) over the past two decades. It has gone up from 8.85 in 1993–94 to 12.59 in 2004–05 to 23.05 in 2009–10.¹⁰⁵

Quality by the Wayside

With higher education institutions sprouting all over the country like mushrooms, in an attempt to maintain some semblance of quality, the government in 1994 established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), as an autonomous body under the UGC, to evaluate, assess and accredit higher education institutions in the country. It assesses universities and colleges on the basis of a number of criteria (such as organisation and governance, infrastructural facilities, quality of teaching and learning, research and publications, and student services) and grades the institutions.

However, accreditation for higher education institutions is mandatory only for those colleges and universities that receive UGC grants. Most colleges that have opened in recent years are private self-financing colleges; they have such poor physical infrastructure and are so deficient in terms of quality and quantity of teachers that they have preferred not to get themselves accredited. Therefore, only a small number of higher education institutions have been graded by NAAC. As of October 2013, of the 630 universities and 33,000 colleges in India, only 179 universities and 5,224 colleges had valid accreditation—that is, less than 30% of the universities and 16% of the colleges had been assessed and accredited by NAAC. Such is the dismal quality of higher education in India that even of this small number of higher education institutions that have taken accreditation, only 70 universities and 554 colleges have obtained A grade; the remaining have all been graded ‘average’ or ‘below average’.¹⁰⁶

Assuming that all colleges and universities not graded by NAAC are

either average or below average, this means that of India's 630 universities, only 70—11% of the total—are A grade universities; while of India's 33,000 colleges, just 554—less than 2%—are top grade.

Apart from NAAC, India has another accreditation organisation for professional and technical colleges, that is, engineering and technology, management, architecture and pharmacy colleges, called the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). Just like as happened with NAAC, most professional colleges have not got themselves accredited by NBA. In an unholy alliance with these colleges, NBA is not willing to reveal how many colleges it has accredited! For example, NBA's website only gives figures up to May 2009—till then, 786 engineering institutions out of 1,346 had got themselves accredited. Since then, though the number of engineering colleges has more than doubled, there is no update on the website as to how many colleges have got themselves accredited.¹⁰⁷

The reason is the same like for NAAC—most of them are scared that their racketeering would get exposed.

New BJP Government: More Privatisation

The BJP Government's first two budgets have not delivered *achhe din* for higher education. In the 2015–16 budget, the government cut its allocation for higher education by 2.9% over the 2014–15 BE. In 2016–17, the budget allocation for higher education was increased, but when compared to 2014–15 BE, this increase is only by 4.3%; taking inflation into account, this means it is actually a cut in real terms.

Table 9.1: Budgetary Allocations for Higher Education, 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17 (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE (1)	2015–16 BE (2)	2016–17 BE (3)	Change (2 – 1) (%)	Change (3 – 1) (%)
Department of Higher Education	27,656	26,855	28,840	– 2.9%	4.3%

Of the budget allocation for higher education in 2016–17, a significant portion, Rs 9,754 crore or one-third of the total allocation, is for elite institutions like the IITs and IIMs, and another Rs 6,355 crore have been allocated for Central Universities. The University Grants Commission, that is supposed to regulate the higher education institutions in the country and provides grants to more than 10,000 institutions, has been allocated only Rs 4,492 crore, less than half the amount allocated to it in 2015–16 RE (Rs 9,315 crore)—a clear

indication that the government is pushing ahead with its agenda of privatising higher education.¹⁰⁸

Commodification of Higher Education

Higher education has now become a commodity in India, a good for sale on the market place. Obviously then, like every other commodity—soap, mobile phone, cloth, TV, scooter, car—there would be good quality and bad quality education, depending upon the purchasing power of the consumer. Thousands of private colleges have opened in the last few years, some targeted at the children of the elites, others towards the middle and poorer classes. On the one hand, there are colleges with inadequate resources—poorly equipped libraries and laboratories, under-qualified teachers, no sports facilities, badly endowed computer rooms, etc.; and on the other hand, there are five-star private universities with luxurious amenities for students, like shopping malls, five-star hotels, luxury saunas, designer lounges and touchscreens in classrooms, luxury gymnasiums, etc.

An important component of the neoliberal agenda worldwide is casualisation of the workforce so that the capitalist classes can maximise their profits. This is being extended to the education sector too. Colleges and universities are drastically reducing the number of permanent teachers on their rolls, and there has been a huge rise in ad hoc faculty. The UGC has no record of the total number of vacancies in colleges and universities, and the number of contractual non-regular teachers appointed to tide over these vacancies. According to one newsreport that cites several sources, an estimated 40% of college teachers are non-regular, designated variously as ad hoc, temporary, contractual or guest.¹⁰⁹

Rubber-stamping this approach of treating teachers like factory workers, the UGC in May 2016 issued a notification effectively increasing the workload of assistant professors from 16 hours to 24 hours, and for associate professors from 14 hours to 22 hours.¹¹⁰ This is obviously going to adversely affect not only the quality of education, but will also result in a skewed student–teacher ratio, and will lead to massive retrenchment of teachers in colleges and universities where, as it is, a very large number of teaching posts have been lying vacant for years. It will also have disastrous consequences for research in our academic institutions.

Super Profits

With higher education a business, college fees are going through the roof. Even for a BA or B.Ed. degree, both of which have virtually no job

value today, the fees in a private college can be as much as from Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000 per year. For a Bachelor of Engineering degree, the fees can range between Rs 1 to 3 lakh and more. An MBA degree in a premium B-School could cost anywhere between Rs 3 to 10 lakh per year for the 2-year course. And if you are cold-blooded enough to be wanting to make money off disease and are aspiring for a seat in a private medical college, that could cost you a cool Rs 1–4 crore.

Scams Unlimited

And then, like in every business, there are also fly-by-night operators, out to make a quick buck.

Fake Degrees

To give one particularly notorious example, after the Chhattisgarh Government passed the Chhattisgarh Private Sector University Act in 2002, a whopping 112 self-financing universities came up in just one year! A UGC inspection found that many of these universities existed only on paper. Others had hardly any infrastructure worth the name. The Supreme Court struck down the Act as unconstitutional, putting the future of over 30,000 students in jeopardy.¹¹¹

While the Chhattisgarh scam is probably the biggest, such scams are taking place in all states. To give another example, in 2013, the CID sealed the offices of the Shillong based CMJ University after it came to light that since its establishment in 2009, *it had awarded over 4,000 fake PhD degrees*. All that one needed to do was pay between Rs 2 to 5 lakh, and the degree would be delivered to your home address.¹¹²

Illegal Foreign Tie-ups

Another kind of fraud being indulged in by India's private universities and colleges, especially technical education institutions, is collaboration with foreign universities and 'education service providers' operating in India, without the approval of the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE). The AICTE is empowered to initiate action against these institutions under the Indian Penal Code for indulging in cheating and fraud. However, all that the AICTE has done is put the names of these unapproved institutions and their programmes on its website, and warn students not to take admission in these institutions. The list includes institutions like ICFAI, IIPM, Ansal Institute of Technology and GD Goenka World Institute, which regularly issue front page and full page advertisements in national dailies about their programmes and also their tie-ups with foreign universities.¹¹³

Illegal Franchisees

To expand their ‘customer base’ and make more ‘profits’, private state universities are entering into collaboration with unrecognised for-profit institutions all over the country, through which they offer their degrees to students unable to take admission in a regular course in the university. Such franchising is illegal, as these centres are for-profit organisations, whereas the law is that a for-profit organisation cannot offer education; moreover, state universities cannot open outreach centres beyond their state boundaries.

Yet, this massive racketeering is openly taking place; the details of these courses are publicly advertised both by the state universities and their franchisees, and information is available on the internet. These outreach centres charge hefty fees, which is many times what the student would have paid had he/she taken direct admission in the university. To give a few examples, International Institute of Business Studies (IIBS), Noida offers a Distance Learning MBA degree from Punjab Technical University (PTU), Jalandhar. IIBS Noida charges Rs 2.95 lakh per student for this degree, whereas the fee for a regular MBA from PTU is Rs 60,000 per annum. IIBS also offers a regular MBA degree from Bharathiar University, Coimbatore for Rs 3.95 lakh. The same Bharathiar University MBA degree is also offered by IBMR Gurgaon for a slightly higher fee of Rs 5 lakh. Tens of thousands of students are unwittingly taking admission to these courses. All that the UGC has done is to post notices on its website, warning students not to take admission to such courses!¹¹⁴

10. ACCELERATING NEOLIBERALISM

WTO, GATS and India

The global education market is considered to be worth 2 trillion dollars. The present global education services market is just 1.5% of the potential (it was valued at \$30 billion in 1998), and is overwhelmingly dominated by the USA and UK.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the developed countries are keen that Third World countries like India privatise their higher education sector and open it up to foreign education providers.

The imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes (or what is more popularly known as globalisation) on the indebted Third World countries by the WB–IMF have made these countries completely dependent on foreign capital inflows to keep their economies afloat.¹¹⁶ This provided the Western service sector corporations, including

education sector corporations, an opportunity to open up Third World markets for their investments. In 1994, the developed countries arm-twisted the Third World countries into signing the Marrakesh Agreements that transformed the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) into the World Trade Organisation (WTO). GATT had mainly dealt with trade in merchandise goods. Under the Marrakesh Agreements, the Third World countries agreed to open negotiations to expand trade globally in sectors that had not earlier been part of GATT. One of these agreements is known as General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). GATS covers international trade in all service sectors, including even education and health.

GATS is a framework agreement. The WTO is mandated to launch negotiations to expand and deepen GATS, and push member countries to commit themselves to liberalising trade in services. Under GATS, member countries are allowed to choose which sectors to liberalise, that is, open up to foreign investors, and to what extent. But once a commitment is made, it is binding, and cannot be rolled back. Further, once a sector is opened up to foreign investors, the government cannot impose any restrictions that would affect the operation of 'free market' in that sector; additionally, the government must give these foreign investors 'national treatment', that is, foreign companies must be treated the same as domestic firms. These rules imply that once a member state commits itself to opening a particular service sector to foreign investment, then it must end all regulation of that service, even if that service is an essential service like water, health or education, and privatise that service.¹¹⁷

At the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Doha, Qatar in November 2001, the developed countries pushed the WTO member states to agree to a new round of multilateral trade negotiations (the so-called Doha Round), one of whose objectives is to pressurise the developing countries to commit themselves to opening up their service sectors to foreign investment.

Fortunately, the Doha talks are in a limbo. The Doha Round operates on the basis that "nothing is agreed unless everything is agreed". This means that negotiations for all subjects are to be concluded as a part of a single package, and cannot be agreed upon piecemeal. Due to sharp differences among the WTO member states, primarily on issues related to agriculture, the trade talks have come to a standstill.¹¹⁸

As mentioned above, under the WTO rules, there is no compulsion on the Indian Government to open up any particular service sector for foreign investors! On top of it, the Doha talks are stalled. Nevertheless, the Indian Government in August 2005 submitted an offer list to the

WTO under GATS, offering market access in 11 sectors and 94 sub-sectors for foreign investors. This offer includes the sub-sector of higher education, wherein the government has offered to allow foreign universities unhindered access to the Indian 'educational market', and promised them national treatment (that is, they would be treated the same as Indian universities).¹¹⁹ India's rulers have become absolute toadies. When asked to bend, they crawl. Nay, they do *sashtang dandvata*.

Opening Up Higher Education to Foreign Universities

In fact, the Indian Government took the first steps to open up the higher education sector for foreign corporations even before the beginning of the Doha Round of negotiations! In May 2010, the UPA Government introduced the Foreign Educational Institutions (Regulation of Entry and Operations) Bill (FEI Bill) in the Parliament. Due to strong public opposition outside the Parliament, and with the BJP and the left parties strongly opposing the bill, it could not be passed. And with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha, the bill lapsed.¹²⁰

While the BJP had bitterly opposed the UPA-II's FEI Bill, like on every other issue, it has made a U-turn on this issue too after coming to power. According to newsreports, the BJP Government is seriously engaged in preparing a framework for inviting foreign universities to set up campuses in India. The Department of Commerce has in fact moved a proposal to revive UPA's Foreign Universities Bill, and the newspapers reported that Prime Minister Modi is personally taking an active interest in this issue.¹²¹

Claims About Benefits of Foreign Universities

According to official spokespersons, the entry of foreign educational institutions in India will:

- expand the choices available to Indian students;
- result in competition which will improve quality and efficiency of domestic institutions; and
- 'benchmark quality'.¹²²

All these arguments are untenable. Let us examine them one by one.

Whose choices will the Bill enhance?

As mentioned in the previous chapters, our GER for higher education is much lower than that of many developing countries, and far below the GER of developed countries. Barely 20% of our students are

able to access higher education, the majority dropping out due to poverty. The foreign universities will obviously come here for making profits, not to provide cheap education to Indian students, and therefore they will only increase the choices for the children of the elite. Their entry is not going to lead to an increase in opportunities for accessing higher education for the majority of our students.

Does competition necessarily lead to better quality?

If it were indeed true that competition leads to better quality in higher education, then higher education would have been in the private sector in the developed countries. But that is not so! In nearly all developed countries, higher education institutions are largely public funded (see Chapter 11 for more on this).

Not just global experience, the Indian experience too proves that high quality higher education is best provided when it is publicly funded. The best higher education and research institutions in India—including the IITs and IIMs, AIIMS, JNU, Delhi University, Indian Institute of Science, TIFR, BARC, ISRO and IUCAA—are all in the public sector.

The argument that we need competition from foreign for-profit education providers to improve the quality of our higher education institutions actually bypasses the real issue. It is true that the quality of India's publicly funded higher education institutions, including some of our best institutions, has been deteriorating in recent times, but the real reason for that is the gradual reduction in government funding for these institutions. Therefore, what we need for improving the quality of our higher education institutions is not the entry of foreign educational institutions, but increased government funding.

Will FEIs benchmark quality?

This brings us to the third argument: What kind of quality will foreign educational institutions benchmark for India?

Philip Altbach, the well known American educationist and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, USA, points out:

*Institutions using the term "American" and often teaching in English are proliferating throughout the developing world, joined recently by institutions with "German," "French," or "Canadian" in their names. . . . Many of (these sellers are) sleazy recruiters, degree packagers, low-end private institutions seeking to stave off bankruptcy through the export market . . .*¹²³

In other words, it will only be the two-tier and three-tier universities which would be interested in coming to India to exploit the huge market here. They will offer low quality programmes, taking advantage of the loopholes in our rules and regulations and weak regulatory mechanism. Even if some top ranking universities do come to India, they will only come, as Philip Altbach points out in his above mentioned article, because they are “forced by government funding cutbacks to enter foreign markets for profit making.” In recent years, governments of developed countries have reduced their higher education expenditures, forcing even top ranking universities to open special wings whose mandate is to go abroad to raise resources on a business mode. However, the quality of education that will be offered by their branches in the developing countries will be much inferior as compared to the education imparted in their parent universities. This is admitted in a joint document of the World Bank and UNESCO (The Task Force, 2000). It pointed out that prestigious universities from developed nations are offering shabby courses in poor and developing countries, using their renowned names, without assuring equivalent quality.¹²⁴

To conclude, the global experience is that high quality higher education institutions can only be built by the government, with public funds. It cannot be built by the private sector. J.B.G. Tilak, the eminent Indian educationist, points out:

*There is no evidence of any developing country having prospered educationally or economically by relying on foreign universities. In fact, the evidence is abundant to show that strong and vibrant higher education systems are built mainly by the governments and with public funds.*¹²⁵

Foreign Educational Institutions Bill 2010

Let us now a look at the provisions of the FEI Bill 2010 that the BJP Government is seeking to revive, to gain an insight to the extent to which our rulers are willing to genuflect before Dollar Almighty and the high priests in Washington.

The stated objective of the Bill is “to provide for regulation of entry and operation of foreign educational institutions . . .” But it does precisely the opposite. It gives foreign educational institutions complete freedom to do what they want, with virtually no government supervision. The role of the government is confined to granting permission to set up the institution. The government will have no role in administration, that is, admissions (forget about reservations), fee policy, etc.; it will have no role in recruitment of faculty or other staff—domestic or foreign, their

qualifications, salary structure, etc.; it will have no role in academic matters—curriculum, methods of teaching, evaluation and examination system, recognition of degrees, etc.; and it will have no role of any kind in the governance of the institution. There will be no accreditation, assessment or examination by any Indian body.¹²⁶ The government's faith in the goodness of foreign educational institutions is touching!

That is globalisation in operation. Barely six decades after we won our independence through the sacrifices of millions of our people, Delhi's Moghuls are once again allowing foreign corporate armies to impudently enter the country and trample over even our most sacred spaces, the 'conscience of the nation', our universities.

11. RETURN OF MANUVAD

Contrary to the general impression that Western countries have large private higher education systems, they actually have strong public higher education systems. In the OECD countries as a whole, only 15% of the students in higher education are in private institutions; this figure is a meagre 8% in the countries of the EU-21 group. This percentage is the highest in the USA, but even here, only one-fifth to one-fourth of the total number of students are enrolled in private institutions. In contrast, the higher education system in India is far more privatised, with 66% of the students in general education and 75–80% in technical education enrolled in private, self-financing institutions.¹²⁷

The second misconception about private institutions is that the quality of education provided by them is very high. Assuming that global rankings are indicative of the quality and standard of higher education, there are very few private institutions that feature in global rankings. With the exception of a few in the US, no other private university in the world features in the top 300.¹²⁸ The reason for this is simple—private institutions are oriented towards maximising profits, rather than providing quality education. Which is why most private higher education institutions have no libraries, laboratories, or research programmes; they have inadequate teaching staff, and even this is often under-qualified and underpaid.

The third problem with privatised higher education is that private institutions prefer to concentrate on courses of study for which students are ready to pay heavily, such as engineering, management and commerce; and disciplines like the social sciences, humanities and basic sciences are ignored. This produces a distorted, unbalanced and unsustainable higher education system.

The Question of Equity

Leaving aside all the above arguments, the biggest problem with privatised higher education is, it can only flourish at the cost of equity. Private higher education institutions in India rely exclusively on students' fees; they invest little to nothing of their own resources, and whatever they do, is recovered in a couple of years' time from the students. Also, they make no attempt to generate any additional funding from society. This is quite unlike private institutions in the USA and other developed countries. Thus, in the USA, in private universities that do not get any funding from the government, students' fees contributes to less than 40% of their expenses, the remaining 60% is met from non-State and non-student sources. Furthermore, many of these private universities, like Harvard University and Stanford University, are not motivated by profit; about one-third of the Harvard University budget goes towards scholarships, compared to almost zero in many private universities in India. More than 60% of Harvard students receive need-based scholarships towards the cost of tuition, room and board.

Consequently, the fees in private universities in India are about 50 to 80 times higher than those in public institutions. In contrast, in countries like Japan and the USA, where there are a significant number of private universities, they charge fees that is 8 to 10 times higher than fees in public institutions.¹²⁹

Since the expansion in higher education that has taken place in India during the last two decades of neoliberalism is primarily private-sector driven, and the private sector is into higher education not for philanthropy but profits, it is the more privileged sections who have benefited the most from this expansion. Higher education is gradually becoming a preserve of children from the better-off strata of society; the weaker sections are finding it increasingly difficult to send their children to colleges and universities. A study sponsored by the UGC bears this out. We summarise its findings below.

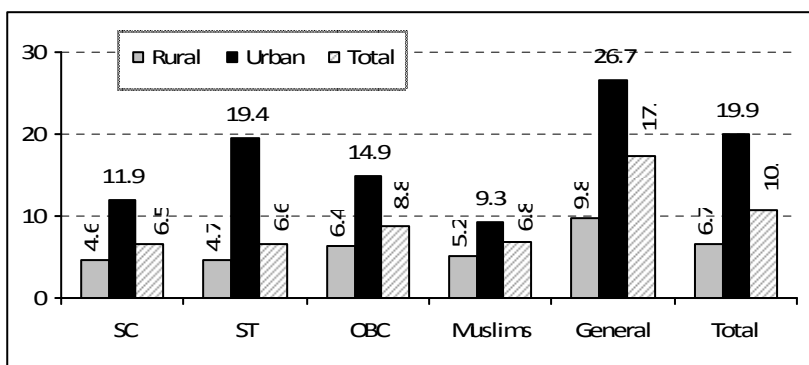
Higher Education Becoming Preserve of the Rich

Access to higher education is measured in term of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), defined as the ratio of persons enrolled in higher education institutions to total number of persons in the age-group 18 to 23 years.

NSS data for 2004–05 estimates the all-India enrolment rate for those pursuing degree courses and above to be 10.84. However, a UGC study shows that this all-India average masks wide disparities in the GER for different sections of society (Chart 11.1):

- i) GER for rural areas was 6.74%, while for urban areas it was thrice this, 19.88%;
- ii) GER for scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and other backward castes students was 6.52, 6.57 and 8.77 respectively, compared to 17.22 for the upper castes—thrice the GER for SC/ST students;
- iii) GER for Muslim students at the graduate level was 6.84—very near the level of SC/ST students.

**Chart 11.1: GER for Graduates by Social Groups
Age Group 18–23, Year 2004–05**



NSS data also reveals that at graduate level, women had a lower GER as compared to men, the difference being three percentage points at the all-India level (males 12.42, females 9.11).

Finally, as is obviously to be expected, there is a wide gap between the rich and the poor in access to higher education. A recent study by the Prof. J.B.G. Tilak, based on NSS data from various surveys and other official statistics, shows that as the income level rises, enrolment rate goes up (Table 11.1). The GER in higher education (including students in both degree and diploma courses) in the country is estimated to have increased from 15.0% in 2000–01 to 21.1% in 2012–13. Tilak comes to the conclusion that this expansion of higher education has benefited the children from the richest sections the most; the GER for the richest quintile¹³⁰ has gone up from 26% in 1993–94 to 62% in 2009–10, a level comparable to that of the developed countries, while the GER for the poorest quintile continues to languish at a low 5.2%.

This inequality becomes even more evident if we consider the rate of higher education attainment, that is, the percentage of adult population (+15) that has completed higher education. From Table 11.2, it is evident that while the poorest quintiles have made very little progress,

and barely 11–20 out of every 1000 had completed higher education, in the richest quintile, 242 out of 1000 had completed higher education.

Table 11.1: Enrolment Ratios in Higher Education, by Household Expenditure Quintiles¹³¹

	Q1*	Q2*	Q3*	Q4*	Q5*
1993–94	2.03	3.03	4.83	9.21	25.93
2004–05	1.80	4.10	6.11	11.87	36.75
2009–10	5.22	8.05	15.64	24.92	61.71

*Notes: *Defined by absolute levels of MPCE as follows:*

Q1: < Rs 359.10; Q2: Rs 359.11 – 461.14; Q3: Rs 461.15 – 587.34;

Q4: Rs 587.35 – 830.49; Q5: > Rs 830.50.

Table 11.2: Higher Education Attainment Among Adults (15–64) by Quintile Groups¹³² (%)

	Q1*	Q2*	Q3*	Q4*	Q5*
1993–94	0.6	1.2	2.4	4.3	10.7
2009–10	1.1	2.0	3.2	6.5	24.2

The same study found that GER for SC and ST students had gone up to 14.8% and 11.8% respectively in 2009–10. While this was below the all-India average, it was nearly double that of 2004–05. This, when combined with the fact that GER for the poorest quintile continues to languish at 5.2%, means that while the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students have benefited from the private sector–led rapid expansion of education under neoliberalism, they have not benefited as much as the upper caste students, and moreover, it is the children from the richer families among the SC/STs who have benefited from this expansion. Both these conclusions are predictable, given that only the more well-off children can afford to access private higher education.

Reduction in Scholarships

The one way in which children from the more disadvantaged sections of society could have been protected from the impact of increasing privatisation of higher education and higher college fees is by increasing government scholarships for them. However, the government is doing the exact opposite; it is scaling down its already limited efforts to promote equity. Even though scholarships constitute a very small percentage of the total government expenditure on higher education, it has made steep cuts in this budget too. The total government expenditure

on scholarships both in higher education and technical education was 20% less in 2002–03 as compared to 1990–91 (Table 11.3).

Table 11.3: Public Expenditure on Scholarships in Higher and Technical Education (*in 1993–94 prices, Rs cr*)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Higher Education</i>	<i>Technical Education</i>
1990–91	15.35	2.72
2002–03 RE	12.17	2.26

The sharp cuts made by the Modi Government in its budget allocation for higher education has led to further cuts in government scholarships for students pursuing higher education, and this has particularly affected students from the marginalised sections. Fellowship schemes like Rajiv Gandhi National fellowship, Maulana Azad National fellowship, CSIR–JRF and UGC–JRF are the only means by which hundreds of students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds are able to continue their higher studies. Many such students also have to send a significant portion of their fellowships back home. The reduction in budget allocation for higher education has affected the disbursement of these scholarships, adversely affecting tens of thousands of research scholars.

More recently, the UGC announced the scrapping of non-NET scholarships for students pursuing M.Phil and Ph.D programmes in central universities. As it is, students get only meagre amounts of Rs 5,000 and Rs 8,000 respectively, and they have been demanding an increase in this scholarship amount and the extension of this fellowship scheme to all state universities; instead of that, the HRD Minister in her wisdom scrapped this fellowship! It is another matter that following nationwide protests, the government was forced to backtrack on this.

While reducing scholarships for students, the main scheme being pushed by the government for making higher education accessible for children from the poorer sections of society is bank loans. Even the CABE committee on financing of higher education has questioned the efficacy of this scheme. It points out that these education loans are operated by banks on commercial lines and are like car loans and housing loans—on top of it, the interest rate on student loans is more than that for car loans! These loans come with collateral and other conditions attached, making it very difficult for students from weaker sections of society to benefit from student loan schemes.

Limits to Growth

Due to the huge poverty levels in India, the rapid expansion of education that took place during the initial two decades of neoliberal educational reforms obviously cannot go on for long. The slowdown has already set in. There has been a sharp decline in the percentage growth of number of engineering and management colleges in the country: in the case of the former, this has come down dramatically from the high of 43% reached in 2008–09 (academic year) to 8% in 2010–11 and 3% in 2012–13; likewise, for business schools, growth declined from 33% in 2008–09 to 17% in 2010–11 and 3% in 2012–13.¹³³

Despite this slowdown in opening of new institutions, in the academic year 2015–16, as many as 50% of the seats in engineering colleges across the country were lying vacant. Because of this, the newspapers reported that AICTE was considering cutting the total number of undergraduate engineering seats by as much as 40% (from 16.7 lakh now to around 11 lakh) over the next few years by pushing for the closure of some colleges and reducing student intake in some others.¹³⁴ The situation is no better for B-schools—in Maharashtra alone, more than 50% of the seats were lying vacant in 2015–16.¹³⁵

This means that the GER for higher education that presently stands at around 20% is not going to increase very much in the coming years. Whatever growth that is possible under privatised education has been achieved.

In contrast, the GER in higher education in the developed countries is way higher, and is above 75% for most countries. India's GER is also much below the world average of 31% (in 2011).¹³⁶ As we have mentioned above, all developed countries have achieved a high GER in higher education based on strong public higher education systems; even in the countries with private higher education institutions, these account for only a small percentage of the total student enrolment. That is perfectly understandable. Private higher education institutions are oriented towards making profits, and so charge high fees. How can a large number of students access higher education if it is overwhelmingly in the private sector, as is presently taking place in India?

The stock of higher educated people in the country is considered as the most reliable indicator to describe the status of higher education in any society. In India, barely 8% of the population in the age group 15–64 has acquired higher education. The corresponding figures for other advanced countries are: 42% in the USA, 54% in Russian Federation, 51% in Canada, and 45% in Japan. The Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development (OCED) average is 31%, nearly four times that of India (all figures for 2009–10).¹³⁷

The conclusion is obvious. Privatisation and commercialisation of higher education is not going to transform India into a knowledge superpower.

Skill India

The BJP is seeking to drain the higher education system of whatever little vitality that still remains in it. While on the one hand, it is seeking to introduce courses on Vedic Mathematics and astrology in our universities, on the other hand, it is striving to transform higher education into a corporate handmaiden.

Two important slogans of the Modi Government are ‘Skill India’ and ‘Make in India’. Over the last two decades, the giant corporations of the developed countries, also called multinational corporations or MNCs, have been shifting their production from developed countries to developing countries, taking advantage of their cheap labour costs. And the developing countries are competing with each other to provide cheap labour for them. Thus, in China, workers do high intensity work in 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week, in poor working environments, with the result that in 2010, there were 363,383 serious work-related accidents in China, which included 79,552 deaths. The US MNCs earn huge profits by getting their goods assembled in China, as manufacturing workers in China are paid just 4% of the wages of US workers.¹³⁸

The Modi Government has also entered into this race to entice MNCs to invest in the country and ‘Make in India’. For this, on the one hand, it is relaxing labour laws, so that MNCs can hire and fire labour at will, and pay them the lowest possible wages. And on the other hand, to impart the necessary skills to our youth so that they are ready for employment in the assembly lines of the MNCs as per their needs, it has given the slogan ‘Skill India’. This is not education; it is preparing our children to become cogs in the corporate wheel. The Draft National Education Policy 2016 released by the HRD Ministry promises more initiatives in this direction. It says: “skill development programmes will be integrated in 25% of the schools and higher education institutions.”¹³⁹

We Need to Save Our Universities

The Kothari Commission had stated way back in 1966, during the days when there was still some idealism in Indian society, that:

Universities are pre-eminently the forum for a critical assessment of society . . .

and that

The character of a university as a society of teachers and students engaged in the pursuit of learning and discovery, distinguishes fundamentally the regulation of its affairs from, say, the profit-motivated management of commercial or industrial concerns or the administration of a government department . . .”

But now, the university has become precisely that which the Kothari Commission had envisioned it should not be. The university has become a profit-oriented industrial concern. Teachers have become mere casual wage workers in an education factory which trains students to take their obedient place in society and become cogs in the wheel—they are trained not to look at what they are doing, not to indulge in critical enquiry, while the wheel spins them around. This is destroying the very nature of universities as centres of creation and dissemination of knowledge in a spirit of academic freedom with special stress on independent research. The priority, quality and content of higher education and research is now being determined by corporate interests, and not broad public interests. Another casualty of this is going to be that it is gradually going to lead to the extinction of many important disciplines of study that serve as the basic foundation for the development of any humane society, such as natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, languages, etc., as profit-oriented private universities are mainly interested in offering only marketable and revenue generating courses.

The Kothari Commission had visualised the universities to be institutions that promote equality and social justice. Privatisation of higher education has transformed our universities into the exact opposite, into institutions that are becoming the preserve of the rich.

Commodification of higher education transforms the entire relationship between the educated and the rest of society. Our nation’s founding fathers and leading educationists at the time of independence had visualised the university as an institution that would provide society with competent men and women trained in various professions, who will also be individuals imbued with a sense of social purpose. However, a private higher education institution oriented towards profit making cannot instil such a sense of social purpose in the students studying in its portals. Students graduating from such institutions do not consider themselves to be a part of society to which they must contribute so that

the well-being of the entire collective is promoted. On the contrary, they look at everything, including life objectives, from a cost-benefit perspective. They look at society as a market place from where they have to not only recover their cost of higher education, but also from which they must extract the maximum possible benefits for themselves. This is precisely what is happening in Indian society today, where most intellectuals are only concerned about promotions and awards, and are willing to betray the interests of the people and side with corporate interests.

To conclude, higher education institutions are not just centres of learning, that engage vigorously and fearlessly in the pursuit of truth, that interpret old knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries, that preserve and promote much cherished attitudes and values. They also play a key role in nation-building; they are centres where a society can mould its younger generation to take up the tasks of building a more humane, democratic and harmonious society. Neoliberalism is now threatening to destroy these institutions.

We must join hands to prevent higher education from being transformed into a commodity to be bought and sold on the market place, and our higher education institutions from being transformed into business firms . . .

12. SAFFRONISATION OF EDUCATION

The early 1990s mark a watershed in the country's post-independence political scenario. On the one hand, the country's worsening economic crisis led to the Rao–Manmohan Singh economic reforms that heralded the globalisation of the Indian economy. On the other hand, it has also led to a gradual growth of extreme right-wing or fascist forces in the country, that is, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the innumerable front organisations it has spawned. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political arm of the RSS, in fact formed a coalition government at the Centre in 1998 that lasted for six years, and now has come to power again in 2014, this time with an absolute majority.

Since the BJP is a political party that contests elections, it has to function within the overall frame provided by the Constitution. In contrast, its parent, the RSS, is a semi-secret organisation. Indian population comprises of thousands of distinct communities, marked by differences in customs, language, caste, religious beliefs, cuisine, location, and what have you.¹⁴⁰ The RSS believes that despite these diversities, 80%

of the Indian people are Hindus (and the original inhabitants of India, the others are all foreigners), and it wants to weld them together as such so as to transform secular and democratic India into a Hindu Rashtra. This is the essence of Hindutva, the political ideology of the RSS.

The RSS, from the time of its founding in 1925, has been an admirer of Hitler and Mussolini and their fascist ideology. Several aspects of its ideology have been copied from Nazism and fascism: defining nationalism on the basis of religion and race; uniting the nation (i.e. Hindus) by preaching hate against an imagined enemy, the minorities (i.e. Muslims and Christians); contempt for democracy and democratic norms; and strategic use of force and violence to achieve its aims.¹⁴¹

As indicated in the previous chapters, there is no difference in the economic agendas of the BJP/RSS and the Congress; on the contrary, the BJP is implementing neoliberalism more ruthlessly and at an accelerated pace. The difference between the two is in their political and cultural agendas—the BJP is seeking to use its political power at the Centre to additionally implement the RSS agenda of transforming the country culturally, politically and socially into a Hindu Rashtra. One of the key stratagems adopted by the BJP for this is saffronisation of the country's education system, and using it as a tool to propagate Hindutva.

The Hate Network of RSS Schools

The Nehruvian education system, for all its limitations discussed in the previous chapters, did try to promote secularism, respect for all religions, scientific temper, democratic values and humanism—all fundamental values enshrined in our Constitution. The values the RSS wants to foster in children are in exact opposition to these Constitutional values. To spread its Brahmanical or Hindutvawadi ideology among children in the guise of education, and poison their minds with hatred and distrust about minorities, especially the Christians and Muslims, the RSS began to create its own network of schools immediately after independence. Helping the RSS spread its educational network was the government's inadequate educational expenditure and hence limited spread of government schools, especially in the more backward areas of the country.

The RSS inaugurated its first school, called Saraswati Shishu Mandir, way back in 1952, in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. Since then, the number of its schools has steadily grown. In 1977, when it set up Vidya Bharati as an all-India coordinating body for these schools, it was running 500 schools, with 20,000 students on their rolls.

In the 1990s, the BJP formed governments in several states, and in 1998, came to power at the Centre. This enabled the RSS to use State patronage to spread its educational network, and as of 2012–13, Vidya Bharti had expanded to 13,465 schools (mostly primary and middle schools, with a few higher secondary schools too), 31.2 lakh students, 1.3 lakh teachers, 49 colleges and training schools, and 9,806 schools for providing informal education to children unable to attend formal schools (called Sanskar Kendras and Single Teacher Schools) with 2.4 lakh students and 8,900 teachers. Other RSS fronts providing education include the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), which specialises in hostels for Adivasi children among other activities; Sewa Bharati (for Dalits), and the Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation (EVF) which runs single teacher pre-school centres where children are taught basic reading, writing, Sanskrit and ‘sanskars’ or good behaviour. The RSS has indeed created a mindboggling network of educational institutions to spread its ideology among the young.¹⁴²

In these schools, in order to indoctrinate students in Hindutva ideological values, much attention is focused on everyday rituals that punctuate the school day. Thus, Sanskrit terms are used to address teachers (‘Acharya’); students are taught to touch their feet as mark of respect; classrooms are named after Hindu sages; birthdays of Shivaji and Jijabai, Vivekananda, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya and Savarkar are celebrated as special days; during the morning prayers and at the end of the school day, children chant Brahmanical shlokas in Sanskrit such as the Gayatri Mantra; and so on.¹⁴³

The systematic rewriting of history is a critical component of Hindu nationalist ideology. The fascists blatantly manipulate and often even fabricate historical evidence to spread their version of history that renders India as an exclusively Hindu nation and Indian culture as Hindu culture, totally denying the pluralistic nature of India. For propagating this falsehood, their pet themes are:

- i) Aryans are the original inhabitants of India, and from here went out to civilise the world. They are the founders of Indian civilisation, which is synonymous with ‘Vedic civilisation’, and is the oldest civilisation in the world, dating to 5000 BC. Everything of value was first discovered by ‘indigenous’ Indians, and has its origins in the Vedas; therefore, the RSS does not recognise contributions to Indian civilisation by other cultural or philosophical or religious strands that have their origins outside the Vedic corpus, such as Buddhism, Jainism, Dravidians or the Bhakti movement.

- ii) In contrast to the previous period that is called by them as ‘Hindu period’, and the golden age of Indian civilisation, the period of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire is dubbed by RSS historians as Muslim period, and Christians and Muslims are labelled as foreigners. This period is called by them as a dark age, wherein Muslims exploited the wealth and surplus of Hindus, carried out large scale massacres of Hindus, indulged in forcible conversions, and Muslim kings revelled in temple destruction orgies. RSS history claims that Qutub Minar was constructed by Samudragupta; three lakh fifty thousand Ram bhaktas sacrificed their lives to liberate Ram temple between 1528 and 1914 AD; and that child marriage, jauhar, sati and various superstitions were all due to the fear of the Muslims. In this monochromatic version of history, all evidence of syncretism, of the enormous contribution of Muslims and Islam to Indian culture, is excised from historical memory.¹⁴⁴ Ironically, this historiography of the RSS is essentially a colonial construct, first propagated by the British historian James Mill in the early-19th century, who divided the history of India into Hindu, Muslim and British periods, and argued that Hindus had suffered under Muslim despotism, thereby projecting British rule as having freed them from this tyranny.
- iii) A third crucial component of the RSS distortion of history is their attempt to erase their past as collaborators of the British colonial rule, their opposition to the Constitution and the national flag at the time of independence, and their role in the partition of the country. And so, today, they are proclaiming themselves as the truest ‘nationalists’; in the books written by RSS ‘historians’ on modern India for schools, the RSS is shown to have played a key role in India’s freedom struggle and Keshavrao B. Hegdewar (the founder of RSS) is portrayed as a one of its tallest leaders. RSS sponsored history books place the entire blame for partition on Jinnah and the Muslim League, whereas the truth is that the RSS too upheld the Two-Nation Theory of the Muslim fundamentalists, and its sole agenda during the freedom struggle was to disrupt the unity of the Indian people’s struggle against colonial domination through its slogan of a Hindu Rashtra.¹⁴⁵

The key component of the school curriculum in RSS schools is to indoctrinate students with this distorted, communalised history.

Way back in 1993–94, a National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation set up by the NCERT, consisting of widely respected eminent

scholars, conducted an evaluation of school textbooks prescribed in Vidya Bharti schools, and made the alarming diagnosis that many of these textbooks were “designed to promote bigotry and religious fanaticism in the name of inculcating knowledge of culture in the young generation.”¹⁴⁶

Communalisation of the Government School System

With the coming to power of the BJP at the Centre in 1998, the RSS got a golden opportunity to spread its ideology within the government school network. As the first step, it replaced heads and key personnel of all institutions that had anything to do with education, such as the National Council of Research and Training (NCERT), University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), with people who were willing to implement the saffron agenda.¹⁴⁷

The next important step was the trashing of National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 1988. The NCF provides the framework for making syllabi, textbooks and teaching practices within the school education programmes in India. In November 2000, the Union Minister of HRD released a new curriculum framework prepared by the new authorities of NCERT—the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE), more popularly known as NCF-2000. In a significant departure from NCF-1988, which stressed democratic values, social justice, and national integration through appreciation of the commonalities of different subcultures, NCF-2000 had a strong inject of the texts taught in Vidya Bharati schools that propagate hatred towards minorities. In the name of value education, it shamelessly introduced Brahmanical religious education.¹⁴⁸ The NCERT even sought to downgrade the natural sciences by introducing ‘Vedic mathematics’ in the school curriculum, which, as several eminent scholars have pointed out, is neither Vedic, nor mathematics.¹⁴⁹

This was followed by deletion of passages from the existing NCERT history books written by eminent secular historians of the country such as Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma and Satish Chandra, most probably on the recommendations of RSS ideologues. The Education Minister, M.M. Joshi, even went to the extent of branding the history written by these scholars as “intellectual terrorism unleashed by the left” which was “more dangerous than cross border terrorism”.

Despite nationwide protests, the ‘Talibanisation’ of education continued. A new syllabus based on NCF-2000 was adopted. New textbooks based on this syllabus were introduced in the 2002–03

academic session. Most notably, the existing history books written by some of India's best known and internationally acclaimed historians were withdrawn altogether, and replaced by books written by people whose chief qualification was their closeness to the Sangh ideology. The BJP ruled states too moved quickly to implement the new NCF-2000, and revised their textbooks to incorporate the Hindu nationalist framework.¹⁵⁰

UPA and NCF-2000

The BJP lost the 2004 Parliamentary elections and the Congress-led UPA came to power in May 2004. It moved quickly to draft a new NCF-2005 to replace the BJP's communal NCF. However, the BJP ruled states refused to implement the new NCF-2005, and continued to use their own communal textbooks.¹⁵¹ Not only that, they have also introduced additional textbooks written by RSS ideologues as supplementary reading in schools. Thus, in Gujarat, where the BJP has been in power since 1998, the state government has prescribed nine textbooks on the importance of Bharatiya Sanskriti (Indian culture) and the 'Hindu' code of conduct as supplementary reading for primary and secondary schools in the state. Eight of these books have been written by Dinanath Batra, a long-time RSS activist. Even more disturbing, yet not surprising, is that all eight books have been endorsed by the then Chief Minister and now Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who writes a message in each of the texts. These books contain anecdotes like the story of a king who was unable to have children and was advised to worship cows, after which he was blessed with several children. One of the books advises that one of the ways of creating an ideal society is for the youth to visit an RSS shakha daily, while another blames the communists and Orientalists for the "bad" education system that is prevalent in India. Some of his gems on science are: Pushpak Viman, a flying chariot used by Rama, was the first aeroplane in the world; Vedic Maths is the real mathematics and must be compulsorily taught in schools; Rishis (sages) were scientists whose inventions in the fields of technology, medicine and science have been appropriated by the West. The ninth book, *Tejomay Bharat*, is equally bizarre. It claims that stem cell research originated in India thousands of years ago, and as proof for this, gives the story of Rishi Dwaipayana Vyas, who preserved the aborted flesh from Gandhari in a cold tank with specific medicines, and then divided it into one hundred parts and kept them separately in a hundred tanks full of clarified butter (ghee), from which, after two years, one hundred Kauravas were born. The book also claims that what we know as the motor car existed during the Vedic period.¹⁵²

BJP Back in 2014: Saffron Agenda Back Again

In 2013, during the last months of the UPA Government, the NCERT began a process of revising the NCF-2005. But soon after, in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP swept to power once again. One of the first acts of the new government was to force out the upright and independent-minded director of the NCERT, Parvin Sinclair, put the revision of NCF-2005 on hold, and initiate a process of drafting a new NCF according to its ideological leanings.¹⁵³

Saffronising Educational, Cultural, Research Institutions

The aim of the fascists is not just communalising school education; they want to communalise the entire educational and cultural atmosphere of the country. And so, the RSS is systematically and brazenly replacing the heads of all important academic, cultural and research institutions with individuals from the parochial Hindutva stable. It does not matter if these individuals are not suitably qualified to head these important institutions, the RSS is not concerned about the fact that the academic quality of these institutions is going to be seriously compromised by such appointments; all that matters is that they must be capable enough to transform these institutions into vehicles for saffron propaganda. According to newsreports, the RSS has drawn up a list of 680 top academic, cultural and research posts in the country that need to be filled with saffron supporters; by mid-2015, 160 appointments had been made.¹⁵⁴

One of the first appointments made by the new government was to appoint Y. Sudershan Rao, the head of the Andhra Pradesh chapter of the RSS's Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY) and notorious for his anti-Muslim views and support for the Hindu caste system, as chief of the prestigious Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). In June 2015, the government reconstituted the Central Advisory Board of Education, now headed by the new HRD Minister Smriti Irani, a scholar whose qualifications are shrouded in mystery, and filled it with yoga teachers, Sanskrit scholars and even actors. Lokesh Chandra, an 87 year old man, has been appointed head of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR); his sole qualification for the post: he claims that Modi is a greater leader than Gandhi and is "an incarnation of God". Baldev Sharma, former editor of the RSS mouthpiece *Panchjanya* has been appointed Chairman of the National Book Trust. The chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification, the respected Leela Samson, has been forced to resign and has been replaced by Pahlaj Nihalani, who

crafted the BJP's election slogan "Har Ghar Modi, Ghar Ghar Modi". Similarly, the heads of the Lalit Kala Akademi, the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, and the National Museum, all headed by eminent scholars, too have been shunted out.¹⁵⁵

Probably the most doozy of the BJP Government's appointments is the choice of Gajendra Chauhan, a C-grade actor with no inclination to arts and aesthetics, to head India's premier institution of film and television, the Film and Television Institute of India; his sole qualification for the job—he has served as the joint convenor of culture in the BJP.¹⁵⁶

The RSS is appointing its men as Vice Chancellors of universities across the country—from Allahabad University to Hyderabad Central University to even the Jawaharlal Nehru University. It has even forced Nobel laureate Amartya Sen to resign from the chancellorship of Nalanda University.¹⁵⁷

Even India's best science and technology institutions are not being spared. In December 2014, the Director of IIT Delhi, Dr. R.K. Shevgaonkar, put in his papers, in all probability because of the growing interference of the RSS in the institution. Two months later, nuclear scientist Anil Kakodkar resigned as chairman of the Board of Governors, IIT Bombay, accusing the HRD Ministry of a casual approach and "wrongdoing" in the selection of IIT Directors.¹⁵⁸

It is not that there was no interference by previous regimes in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. But what is new with the purges being effected by the Modi Government is their systematic, organised, communally driven and ruthless character.

13. WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?*

Many people in India, who are supporters of capitalist competition, nevertheless agree that all children in society should be provided genuinely free, compulsory and equitable education of good quality.

However, simultaneously, they also argue that there is no alternative to sending children to private schools because government schools are of

* In this and the following chapter, we discuss only this question: Is there an alternative to privatisation of school education? If it is possible to build such an alternative, and we have a society sensitive enough to be concerned about providing genuinely free, compulsory, equitable and good quality school education to all children, then obviously it will ensure that higher education also be accessible to all young people irrespective of their family background.

poor quality and have poor learning outcomes. Let us examine how much truth is there in this argument.

Can the Public Sector Provide Good Quality Education?

The truth is, all developed countries, and most middle income developing countries, have well-funded public (i.e. government) education systems, which provide excellent quality free and compulsory education to all children—at least elementary and secondary education, and in most countries, higher secondary education too. Even though all these countries are capitalist countries, their policy makers realise that if all children, irrespective of their family background and income levels, are to be provided equitable and good quality education, it can only be done in the public sector; the private sector will only invest in education for profit.

If these countries can provide good quality education in the public sector, then why can't we also strive for the same, instead of privatising our public education system?

Actually, in India too, when the government so desires, it does run good schools! After all, even today, the government-run Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas are considered to be amongst the best run schools in the country. And these school networks are not small: there are 1,093 Kendriya Vidyalayas in the country having more than 11 lakh students on their rolls, while more than 1.8 lakh students study in the 595 Navodaya Vidyalayas located in rural areas across the country.¹⁵⁹ So the problem in India is not that the government cannot run good schools; the problem is, it does not want to run ALL its schools well.

What most people don't realise is: the government has deliberately allowed the condition of government-run schools to deteriorate. As discussed in the previous chapters, till the late 1980s, there were very few private schools in the country, and most children, even of the middle and upper classes, used to study in government schools. Virtually all the eminent intellectuals and academicians in the country today aged 50 and above have studied in government schools.

This is not to say that the government schools were in an excellent condition in those days. There was much scope for improvement. For that, a key requirement was that the government increase its expenditure on education to at least 6% of the GDP as recommended by the Kothari Commission way back in 1966, and, along with that, energise and restructure the entire public-funded school education system in the country.

Instead, in the early 1990s, the government accepted World Bank conditionalities, and began a deliberate assault on the government school system, by starving it of funds, and rapidly replacing the cadre of regular and trained teachers by para-teachers, i.e. under-qualified, ill-trained and under-paid young persons appointed on short-term contracts. This resulted in a rapid deterioration in the quality of government schools. Simultaneously, in the name of expansion, a parallel stream of all kinds of non-formal education was promoted.

The decline in quality of government schools, resulting in low learning levels, has shaken the faith of the people in the capability of the government to provide good quality education to children, and they have begun withdrawing their children from the public-funded school system. Those who can afford it have begun to send their children to private schools that are mushrooming all over the country. This in turn has provided an alibi for the government to shut down or privatise its schools. This was the precise objective of the World Bank dictated neoliberal reforms, and they have more than succeeded in their objective.

How to Improve the Quality of Government Schools?

The way to improve government schools was demonstrated by the Collector of Erode (Tamil Nadu), Dr. R. Anandakumar, some years ago. In June 2011, he got his daughter Gopika admitted to the Tamil-medium Panchayat Union (government) School at Kumalankuttai near the Collectorate. His daughter also started taking the mid-day meal served in the school.

What happened next is revealing and provides the cue for improving the government school system. As soon as news spread that the Collector's child was studying in the school, panchayat officials inspected the school to ensure that it had all basic facilities in place—till then, they had not been concerned, as it was only the children of the marginalised who were studying in the Panchayat school! The punctuality of the teachers improved. The sanitary staff began visiting the school and cleaning the toilets twice a day.¹⁶⁰

This means that once senior bureaucrats, MPs, MLAs, middle and upper middle classes start sending their children to government schools, automatically, the school inspection machinery will crank up, school infrastructure and facilities will start improving, pressure will mount on the government to employ trained, regular and well-paid teachers in schools, teachers will start teaching and the problem of teacher absenteeism will vanish. Public pressure will mount on the State to

increase its allocations for education.

Recognising this, the Allahabad High Court in a recent landmark judgement (August 18, 2015) directed the UP Government to ensure that “the children/wards of government servants, semi-government servants, local bodies, representatives of people, judiciary and all such persons who receive any perk, benefit or salary, etc. from State exchequer or public fund, send their child/children/wards who are in age of receiving primary education, to primary schools run by Board... and ensure to make penal provisions for those who violate this condition.”¹⁶¹

[Of course, this is only the first step in the long road to improving the government school system in the country. Along with this, the government will need to substantially hike its educational expenditure, replace all para-teachers with regular trained teachers, and so on. But the key step, the most crucial step, to qualitatively improving the government school system is that everyone, the rich and the poor alike, must send their children to the same schools.]

What we have described above is known as the common school system.

The Common School System

The establishment of common schools in all localities in the country had been recommended way back in 1966 by the Kothari Education Commission. A common school is a school where all children living in a locality/area, irrespective of their class, caste, religious or linguistic background, study together in the same school situated in their locality.

All the developed countries have provided free, compulsory and good quality education to all their children through the common school system. As the Kothari Commission had argued, “the establishment of such schools will compel rich, privileged and powerful classes to take an interest in the system of public education and thereby bring about its early improvement.”¹⁶² How true were its observations, is obvious from the above mentioned example. As soon as the Collector of Erode put his daughter in the neighbourhood Panchayat Union school, the local officials took immediate action to ensure that the school had all basic facilities in place.

Essential Features of the Common School System

If India is to genuinely provide free, compulsory, equitable, good quality education to all children, it can only be done through establishing a publicly funded common school system as recommended by the

Kothari Commission. [And as we show in the next chapter, the country today definitely has enough financial resources to provide genuinely free education to all children up to Class XII.] Such a common school system would need to have the following essential features:

- All schools, including private schools, must become neighbourhood schools; the government will specify the neighbourhood for each school, and the school will compulsorily have to admit all children in its defined neighbourhood.
- All schools, whether privately managed or government-run, will have to provide genuinely free elementary education to all children. This means they must provide all the other things needed by the child, such as uniforms, textbooks and notebooks, and all necessary educational aids like pencils, pens and geometry boxes, free of cost; and they will not be allowed to charge fees under guises such as library fees, computer fees and exam fees—all these facilities must be provided to students free.
- Providing compulsory elementary education for all children also requires that the country abolish child labour, and provide suitable facilities such as residential schools for children of migrant labour.
- The government must define common minimum norms and standards for both State-funded and private schools for aspects like: school land; number, size and design of classrooms; drinking water and toilets; mid-day meals; playgrounds; performing and fine arts facilities; library; laboratories; computers; number of teachers; teacher qualifications; teacher salaries; pupil–teacher ratio; etc. The system of para-teachers will have to be abolished, and the government will need to increase its funding for teacher education.
- Schools must respond to local conditions while deciding curriculum, methods of teaching, teaching aids, etc. In a country like India with so much linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, this is a must. For this to be possible, schools will have to be managed in a decentralised way—only then will it be possible for schools to respond to local conditions. Of course, this decentralisation will have to be within an overall common curriculum framework evolved by the government.
- The government would also need to evolve a uniform language policy, taking into consideration the linguistic diversity in our country, the importance of educating children in the initial years in their mother tongue, and the increasing significance of English in pursuing careers.

Lessons from the World's Best Performing School Systems

Just implementing 'neighbourhood schools' will not be enough to improve the quality of government schools. Several studies of the world's best performing school systems—such as the school systems of Australia, Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore and South Korea—have pointed out that the most important feature which made these school systems achieve excellence was the quality of their teachers and the high quality of instruction given in schools. All these high-performing systems in general have the following features:

- *The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers:* They attract able people into the teaching profession through effective selection processes, and give them good salaries.
- *The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction:* They put in a lot of effort to develop these people into effective teachers; and also select the right people from amongst the best teachers to be principals.
- *They put in place systems to monitor the performance of schools, and intervene when they do not meet expectations; they also keep a tab on students falling behind, and provide targeted support to improve the child's performance.*¹⁶³

This is so much different from what happens in our schools, where only those not able to get good jobs elsewhere enter the teaching profession, where now ill-trained young people are being appointed as para-teachers on low salaries, where the school inspection system exists only in name with officials being the least concerned about the quality of instruction, where if a child falls behind, he / she is failed, and eventually pushed out of school.

All this can be changed. But for that, the key is that the government must hugely increase its expenditure on education, so that:

- i) the infrastructure and facilities in all schools can be improved to at least the level of Kendriya Vidyalayas; and
- ii) well-trained and regular teachers on decent salaries are appointed in all schools—only if decent salaries are given, and job security assured, will able and motivated young people be attracted to the teaching profession.

But the government claims that its social sector expenditure is already very high, and it cannot afford to spend more money on education. Is this indeed true? Does the government really not have the money? We examine this claim in the next chapter.

14. IS THE GOVERNMENT REALLY POOR?

Supporters of privatisation argue that the Government of India is too poor to provide free and good quality education to all children up to at least Class XII. That the Indian Government's expenditure on education, health and other such welfare services has gone through the roof and needs to be curtailed is accepted economic wisdom today.

This is actually a big lie. The fact of the matter is, the Indian Government's spending on welfare services for the poor is amongst the lowest in the world. Not only that, as a part of the nefarious neoliberal reforms being implemented in the country under World Bank dictates, the Indian Government is further reducing its already low spending on these essential welfare services. Why? So that it can transfer the savings as subsidies to the rich!

Sounds unbelievable, but is absolutely true. It is actually India's biggest scam—to the tune of lakhs of crores of rupees!

Subsidies to the Rich

We give below some of the subsidies being given to the rich by the Indian Government, especially the giant foreign and Indian corporate houses. Note that this is just a cursory list; there would be dozens more of such scams.

i) Tax Concessions to the Rich

Every year, for the past several years, the budget documents have included a statement on the estimated revenue forgone by the government due to exemptions in major taxes levied by the Centre. The 2016–17 budget documents reveal that in 2015–16, the Modi Government gave away Rs 5.51 lakh crore in tax exemptions/ deductions/ incentives to the very rich. These major write-offs are in corporate income tax, customs duties and excise duties. To put this amount in perspective, these tax concessions to the country's rich equal nearly one-third of the Union Budget outlay. Of the revenue foregone, Rs 61,126 crore is on account of customs duties exemptions on diamonds and gold alone!

Successive governments at the Centre have been doling out these concessions to the 'corporate needy and the undernourished rich' for the last several years, ever since the economic reforms began. Union budget documents reveal that over the 10-year period 2005–06 to 2015–16, the tax write-offs given by the government to the super-rich totalled a mind-

boggling Rs 47.6 lakh crore! To give an idea of the immensity of this figure, this is one-third of our 2015–16 GDP.¹⁶⁴

India's Tax–GDP Ratio: Lowest in the World

It is because of these huge tax giveaways to India's uber wealthy that India's combined tax-to-GDP ratio for Centre and states put together is among the lowest in the world. The *Economic Survey 2015–16* admits that India's tax–GDP ratio, at around 16.6% of the GDP, is far below not only the developed countries of the OECD (34.2%), but also its 'emerging market' peers Brazil (35.6%) and South Africa (28.8%). Even the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, considered to be one of the poorest regions in the world, have a tax–GDP ratio of 27%.¹⁶⁵

The international credit rating agencies, the IMF and World Bank, the economic czars occupying prestigious chairs in the universities in New York and London, all of whom lecture us every day on the importance of reducing our subsidies to the poor—none of them ever talk of our low tax–GDP ratio and the need to increase it to at least the level of the sub-Saharan African countries by reducing the subsidies given to our super-rich.

(ii) Plundering Resources

The government has been handing over control of our immense natural resources to corporate houses, for them to exploit and mint super-profits—when there was no need to do so; our public sector corporations have all the necessary technology and expertise needed to exploit these resources. This huge 'scam' has resulted in a transfer of several lakh crore rupees of public funds to the private sector. Two examples:

- i) **KG Gas Basin Scam:** In 2000, the Government of India handed over exploration of gas reserves in D-6 block of the Krishna Godavari basin to Reliance Industries Limited (RIL)—gas fields identified by the ONGC, which also has the necessary technology and expertise needed to explore and develop these gas fields. RIL, in naked collusion with the government, through a series of manipulations, has indulged in absolutely mind-boggling plunder of the country's natural gas wealth, resulting in a total loss to the exchequer of more than Rs 2 lakh crore!¹⁶⁶
- ii) **Mindboggling Mining Scam:** Past governments have handed over mineral resources of the country to corporate houses virtually for free, on the payment of very low royalty rates to the government, resulting in colossal losses to the national exchequer. Recently, the

Supreme Court directed the government to adopt a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory procedure, such as auctioning, in the allotment of natural resources. To circumvent this order, the BJP Government in 2015 got the Parliament to pass the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act that legitimises the majority of the leases already in existence, even if they have been granted through questionable procedures! The total loss to the national exchequer due to this exemption granted to existing leases is staggering. There are presently more than 11,000 active leases in the country. In the case of just one mineral, iron ore (total 774 leases in the country), in just one state (Chhattisgarh), the value of exempted deposits could amount to at least Rs 1.71 lakh crore and the losses to the national exchequer could come to at least Rs 1.22 lakh crore.¹⁶⁷

(iii) The Great Land Grab

Tens of thousands of acres of land is being handed over to private corporations virtually for free to set up their projects. For instance, the Gujarat Government has allotted 580 lakh square meters of land in Kutch (whose market price was anywhere between Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 per sq metre) to the Adani Group, for less than Rs 10 per sq metre; and 8 lakh square metres of prime land in the industrial zone of Hazira in Surat to Larsen and Toubro at Re 1 per sq metre!¹⁶⁸

iv) Direct Cash Transfers to Corporations

State governments are competing with each other to give thousands of crores of rupees as subsidies to private corporations for setting up projects in their states. To give an example of the kind of concessions being offered:

- After Tata Motors was forced to move out of Singur by a determined people's movement, Modi rolled out the red carpet to welcome Ratan Tata to Gujarat. The concessions given to the Tatas to set up the Nano car project in Gujarat include: allotment of land at discounted prices; a soft loan of Rs 9,500 crore (for a project whose total cost is estimated to be just Rs 2,200 crore) at an interest rate of 0.10% per annum, with repayment deferred for 20 years; providing 220 kv and 66 kv substations at the plant's doorstep for free; and so on. The total cost to the Gujarat exchequer—Rs 33,000 crore over the next 20 years!¹⁶⁹

v) Robbing Banks: Mother of All Scams

As if giving them tax concessions, cash transfers and control over the nation's natural resources was not enough, the government is allowing private sector corporations to siphon off public sector bank funds too! It is the mother of all scams.

Small time bank robbers are put in jail (if caught); ordinary people defaulting on bank loans have their house / scooter / other assets seized; farmers are driven to suicide for not being able to pay the instalments on their bank loans. But when the super-rich default on their (public sector) bank loans, nothing happens to them, they go scot free, even their names are not disclosed; they continue to enjoy their heated swimming pools, rooftop helipads, foreign homes and fast cars. The banks simply write off their loans. According to figures provided by the Reserve Bank of India, over the 12-year period 2004–15, Indian public sector banks have written off a whopping Rs 2.11 lakh crore of bad loans! Of this, a quarter, or Rs 52,542 crore, has been written off during the first year of the Modi Government (2014–15).¹⁷⁰

Loan write-offs, however, make bad news, both for corporate houses and banks/government. So public sector banks are adopting a new stratagem to provide succour to these 'helpless' rich—they 'restructure' their loans. That's the buzz word today, 'Corporate Debt Restructuring' (CDR). Under its name, the payback period may be extended, interest may be waived, and/or a part of the loan may be converted into equity; the corporation is even given another loan to tide over its 'crisis'. Private corporations whose loans have been approved for restructuring include some of India's most well-known names. Public sector banks have cumulatively rescheduled / restructured loans worth Rs 4.03 lakh crore under the CDR scheme till March 2015.¹⁷¹

Withdrawal of 'Subsidies' to the Poor

After giving away lakhs of crores of rupees in subsidies to the rich every year, obviously, the government has no money to spend on the poor. And so it has been slashing government spending on subsidies to the poor. How has it been able to get away with it, without creating an uproar across the country? By a simple trick! In a deft use of language, while the breathtaking subsidies given to the rich are labelled as 'incentives' and are declared to be essential for 'growth', social sector expenditures of the government—whose purpose is to provide the bare means of sustenance to the poor at affordable rates—are condemned as 'subsidies', as wasteful, inefficient, promoting parasitism, benefiting the

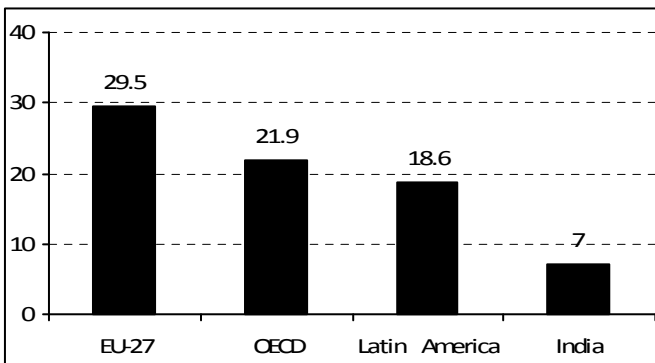
middle classes rather than the poor, and so on. This then creates the theoretical justification for cutting them.

The neoliberal doctrine that each and every sector of the economy must be profitable is nothing but economic rubbish. A society provides free or low cost food, water, education, health, housing, sport, transport and other essentials to its citizens so that they can live like human beings and develop their abilities to the fullest extent. This ‘subsidy’ is actually an ‘investment’ for the future. Human beings are nature’s highest creation, their potential is infinite. However, people must be given the appropriate social circumstances and opportunities to realise their inherent potential. When such human beings pool in their energies and engage in collective labour, they can create heaven on earth. The wealth they will create will be many times the ‘subsidies’ invested on them. This is simple economic commonsense.

India: Already at the Bottom

Most developed countries have a very elaborate social security network for their citizens, including unemployment allowance, universal health coverage, free school education and free or cheap university education, old age pension, maternity benefits, disability benefits, family allowances such as child care allowance, allowances for those too poor to make a living, and much more. Governments spend substantial sums for providing these social services to their people. The average public social sector expenditure of the 34 countries of the OECD is around 20% of GDP, and for the EU-27 is even higher at around 30% of GDP.

Chart 14.1: Public Social Sector Expenditures of Developed Countries and India, 2010
(% of GDP)



The average public social sector expenditure for the 21 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean has risen significantly over the past decade and is presently 18.6% (in 2009–10).¹⁷²

In contrast, the social sector expenditures of the government of India are very low! Jaitley and his predecessors in the Finance Ministry and the ‘Chicago boys’ who are their economic advisors are all blithely lying when they claim that the subsidies to the poor are very high! The total social sector expenditure of the Government (Centre and states combined) of India is barely 7% of GDP (Chart 14.1).¹⁷³

And yet the WB–IMF and the foreign corporate houses and their concubine governments are pressurising the Government of India to further reduce its social sector expenditures, and Delhi’s Badshahs are slavishly implementing their dictates. The Indian Government is cutting its already low expenditures on all social services, from education, health, electricity and public transport, to the public distribution system designed to provide food to the poor at affordable rates, to even drinking water supply. Worse, in the name of improving the quality of these social services, they are also being privatised—either through the infamous PPP route, or even outright. Private corporations are jumping with glee—being essential services, the scope for profits is huge.

Table 14.1: Union Budget, 2014–15, 2015–16, 2016–17: Reduction in Expenditures on Vulnerable Sections¹⁷⁴ (Rs crore)

	2014–15 BE (1)	2015–16 BE (2)	2016–17 BE (3)	Reduction: 1–3 (%)
Scheduled Caste Sub Plan	50,548	30,851	38,833	23.2
Tribal Sub Plan	32,387	19,980	24,005	25.9
Schemes for Welfare of Children	81,075	58,017	65,758	18.9
Gender Budget	98,030	79,258	90,625	7.6

The 2015–16 and 2016–17 budgets of the BJP Government are a stark example of this iniquitous policy. We have given above several examples of how the BJP Government is giving lakhs of crores of rupees worth of subsidies to the corporate houses. To compensate for this loss in revenue, Arun Jaitley has further reduced the government’s already low expenditures on social services. Not only has Jaitley cut government spending on education (discussed in Chapters 6 and 9), government

spending on the vulnerable and disadvantaged sections—women, scheduled castes and tribes, and children—have also taken a big hit:

- ☞ More than six decades after the Constitution outlawed the practice of untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste, and guaranteed that every citizen shall have equality of status and opportunity, the scheduled castes and tribes continue to face many forms of untouchability practices as well as social, economic and institutional deprivations. Not only that, they are also subjected to enormous atrocities, ranging from abuse on caste name, murders, rapes, arson, social and economic boycotts, to naked parading of SC/ST women, and being forced to drink urine and eat human excreta. And so the government in the 1970s launched the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) to ensure the flow of targeted funds from the general sectors in the Central Ministries towards the development of the Dalits and Adivasis. The guidelines under these two programmes clearly state that the allocations for them as a proportion of the Plan outlay should be at least in proportion to their share in the total population. The population share for the Dalits is 16.6% and for Adivasis is 8.6%, according to the Government of India Census 2011. However, the manuwadi BJP Government's budget allocations for SCSP and TSP in 2016–17 are lower than the allocations made in 2014–15 BE by as much as 23–26% even in nominal terms. Consequently, the allocation for SCSP has fallen to just 7.06% and the allocation for TSP to a lowly 4.36% of the total Plan expenditure for 2016–17.¹⁷⁵
- ☞ India is one of the world's worst places to be a woman. She may be killed even before being born, or as an infant or a little girl. If she survives, there is every possibility that as she grows up, she may be molested/raped/tortured by her husband. In India, a crime against a woman is committed every 100 seconds: a woman is molested every 7 minutes, raped every 15 minutes, a case of cruelty committed by either the husband or his relatives occurs every 5 minutes, and a dowry death occurs every 65 minutes (reported cases only, actual are obviously much more; all figures for 2013).¹⁷⁶ And yet, the Modi Government's allocation for the Gender Budget (this captures the quantum of budgetary resources earmarked for women by various departments and ministries) for 2016–17 is lower than that for 2014–15 by 21% (in real terms).
- ☞ India is one of the most dangerous places to be a child. We have the

highest under-five child mortality rate in the world, with 12 lakh such deaths in 2015; a majority of these deaths are from preventable causes such as malaria and diarrhoea. Around 37% of all children below the age of five are stunted, 34% are underweight and about 22% are wasted. India also has the largest number of child labourers in the world—according to a 2011 UNICEF report, more than 28 million children in India between the ages 5–14 are engaged in child labour.¹⁷⁷ Appalling figures! And yet, the government’s allocations for child oriented schemes in 2016–17 are below 2014–15 BE by a whopping 19% even in nominal terms!

Secession of the Rich

There is little room for doubt.

India’s Westoxicated elite has abandoned all concern for the tribal child dying of malnutrition in Melghat, the farmer in Andhra Pradesh committing suicide because of his inability to pay his medical bills, the old man dying of cold on the streets of Patna because of lack of social security, the village beauty sold off to pay her father’s debts in Orissa . . . It has also abandoned the dream nurtured by the people of our country during their fight to free our country from colonial rule, and that was encapsulated in the Indian Constitution—to provide all our children free and compulsory education.

15. EDUCATE! ORGANISE! FIGHT!

Consequences: Obscene Inequality

The neoliberal economic policies being implemented in India as a consequence of the IMF–WB imposed Structural Adjustment Programme are having calamitous consequences on the people of the country. They have transformed the country into a ‘first world–fourth world’ society.

On the one hand, the rich have never had it so good! “Its raining billionaires in India”—to quote one newsreport.¹⁷⁸ India now boasts of 90 billionaires with a collective net worth of \$295 billion, as per the 2015 global ranking of the super-rich by *Forbes* magazine. That amounts to Rs 19.2 lakh crore, or one-seventh of India’s GDP for 2015–16.¹⁷⁹

The number of Ultra High Net Worth individuals in India, defined as those having financial and non-financial assets (meaning company shares, real estate, art, cars, planes, yachts, etc.) of above \$50 million (Rs 325 crore or so), also increased by 3% in 2015 to reach 2,080.¹⁸⁰

On the other hand, crores of ordinary people have been pushed down to fourth world immiseration. They have never had it so bad! To give a few statistics:

- 75.5% of the rural and 73% of the urban population were unable to access the minimum recommended 2200 / 2100 calories in 2009–10!
- 40% of the children under the age of five suffer from malnourishment. According to UNICEF, malnutrition is more common in India than in sub-Saharan Africa. One in every three malnourished children in the world lives in India.¹⁸¹
- 42% of the children in India drop out of school without completing basic schooling (elementary education).
- India's under-five child mortality rate is the highest in the world, with 12 lakh such deaths in 2015; a majority of these deaths are preventable.
- India accounts for nearly one-fourth of the deaths in the world due to diarrhoea, one-third of the deaths due to leprosy, and more than half the deaths due to Japanese encephalitis.¹⁸²
- 62.6 crore people do not have access to toilets and are forced to defecate in the open — 60% of the global total.¹⁸³
- More than 44% of the households in the country still have no access to electricity, more than six decades after independence.¹⁸⁴

BJP Accelerating the Divide

The policies of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation implemented in the country over the last more than two decades by successive governments that have come to power at the Centre have pushed the Indian economy into a deep crisis. These policies have led to rising inflation, worsening unemployment, a huge increase in poverty and destitution, and a worsening agricultural crisis which has pushed more than three lakh farmers into committing suicide over the past decade. Taken in by the massive propaganda launched by the BJP, the people, hoping for 'better days' (*acche din*), voted the BJP to power in elections to the 16th Lok Sabha held in April–May last year. However, after coming to power, the Modi Government is implementing the very same policies of capitalist globalisation, only at a much faster pace.

The divisive, communal agenda being pursued by the Modi Government is actually only a cover, to disguise its real economic agenda of running the economy solely for the profiteering of big business houses:

- transferring public money and resources to the tune of lakhs of crores of rupees to foreign and Indian business houses in the name of development;
- cutting welfare expenditures on the poor—whose aim is to provide the bare means of sustenance to the poor at affordable rates, and privatising and handing over these services to private corporations for their naked profiteering.

In pursuing this neoliberal agenda, the country's ruling political class, that is, the political parties that dominate the Indian Parliament, the bureaucrats, the country's leading intellectuals, and the big corporate houses, are actually wilfully and deliberately trashing the socialist vision of our nation's founding fathers embedded in the Directive Principles of our Constitution.

Unite and Fight... For the Future of Our Children!

Yet, there is no reason to despair. Like flowers spring up in every nook and corner with the onset of spring, people are fighting back, in innumerable small–big struggles being waged all over the country. To illustrate, we give a few examples of the struggles being waged across the country against privatisation–commercialisation–saffronisation of education.

Struggle against Commercialisation of Education

Teacher and student organisations, parents and ordinary citizens have been organising and fighting all over the country against the neoliberal assault on the education system. A few glimpses of some recent struggles:¹⁸⁵

- Thousands of students from 18 states across the country organised under the banner of All India Students Association marched to Parliament on August 9, 2012, the anniversary of the Quit India movement, demanding equitable education and dignified employment as fundamental rights.
- In Chhattisgarh, nearly two lakh contract teachers, known as Shikshan Karmis, went on strike in December 2012 demanding regularisation of their jobs.
- In 2013, lakhs of contract teachers in Madhya Pradesh began an agitation demanding 'equal pay for equal work'; the same year, in Bihar, more than 2.5 lakh teachers began an agitation demanding regularisation of jobs and pay parity with government teachers.

- Delhi University students and teachers waged a sustained struggle against attempts by the university authorities to introduce a Four Year Undergraduate Program as a part of neoliberal educational reforms, eventually forcing the government to intervene and push Delhi University to scrap the Program.
- In October 2015, thousands of students from Delhi's universities and colleges launched an agitation called 'Occupy UGC' against the decision of the UGC to discontinue the non-NET fellowship for M.Phil/Ph.D students of Central Universities. The agitation gradually spread to campuses across the country, and later merged with the nationwide agitation against caste discrimination and BJP's fascist agenda after the institutional murder of Rohith Vemula in Hyderabad Central University.
- More recently, in May 2016, teachers from Delhi's universities launched an agitation against a circular of the UGC increasing the workload of teachers, forcing the UGC to backtrack.

All India Forum for Right to Education

In an exhilarating development, several student and teacher organisations, peoples' organisations and many eminent educationists from all over the country have come together under the banner of 'All India Forum for Right to Education' (AIFRTE) to wage a united fight against the neoliberal assault on education and for a genuine right to education Act to establish a fully public funded common school system based on the concept of neighbourhood schools managed in decentralised, democratic and participatory mode. The AIFRTE has organised numerous awareness campaigns and protests across the country on these issues. Two recent examples:

- In 2014, the AIFRTE organised an All India Shiksha Sangharsh Yatra-2014. The Yatra commenced on November 2, 2014 from five different points in North-East, South, West, East and North of India, and after crossing through different regions of our vast country, culminated on December 4, 2014 in Bhopal.
- In mid-2015, the AIFRTE launched a stirring countrywide six-month long campaign demanding that the government withdraw its 'offer' given in the higher education sector to WTO-GATS. The campaign was organised in nearly 250 districts across the country. It culminated in a eight day 'All India Resistance Camp' organised in Delhi at Jantar Mantar from December 7 to 14, timed to precede 10th Ministerial Conference of WTO held at Nairobi from

December 15 to 19, 2015. Thousands of students, teachers and citizens from various walks of life participated in this historic protest.

Struggle against Saffron Assault on Our Universities

A most important component of the RSS agenda to communalise the educational atmosphere is to transform our universities into instruments for Hindutva propaganda. For this, it is not sufficient to appoint Sangh Parivar people as heads of universities. In democracies, universities are meant to be places that kindle concern for the oppressed, defend the idea of pluralism, and foster tolerance and respect for diversity of views. If universities are to be reduced to factories producing mindless automatons in the service of a mind-numbing, virulent Hindu nationalism, then this very idea of a university needs to be destroyed. And so, the BJP has launched a violent assault on our universities, blatantly interfering in their functioning, targeting independent-minded teachers and students, even labelling them as ‘anti-national’ and charging them with sedition. It is not that earlier regimes did not interfere in the functioning of universities; but it is the first time (with the exception of the Emergency) that a party in power at the Centre has launched such a widespread campaign against the freedoms enjoyed by universities, even organised violent onslaughts by vigilante groups, and attempted to silence all deviant voices.

We briefly discuss here three student movements that the BJP has attempted to crush during the past two years, each of which provoked widespread protests by students across the country.

In May 2015, IIT Madras banned a student group, Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle (APSC), following an anonymous complaint forwarded by the HRD Ministry to the institute authorities that it was “creating an atmosphere of hatred among students” and also disaffection against the Prime Minister and ‘the Hindus’. The reality was that while IIT Madras had allowed right-wing organisations like the Vivekananda Study Circle and RSS shakhas to flourish on the campus, the APSC was on the contrary attempting to provoke debate on various issues and promoting scientific temper among students! Nationwide protests forced the institution to withdraw the ban within days.

The Sangh Parivar next targeted the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) in Hyderabad Central University (HCU). It had been active in organising protests not just on Dalit issues, but also against attacks on minorities and saffronisation of education, a dangerous mix. And so, the

Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the BJP's student wing, mounted pressure on the MHRD to initiate action against ASA. The MHRD promptly sent out not one, but five notices to the HCU, a pressure tactic that eventually led to the suspension of five student activists of the ASA in August 2015, and drove one of them, Rohith Vemula, to committing suicide on January 17, 2016.

As news about the tragic death of Rohith and details about the conspiracy hatched by ABVP–BJP–MHRD spread through the social media, massive student protests erupted in campuses across the country. The BJP's anti-Dalit agenda stood exposed, and its plans to win over Dalit students to its Hindutva agenda were in tatters. So, the BJP came up with a new, and an even more sinister, plan to divert attention from its victimisation of a brilliant Dalit scholar and student leader, and win back its student following.

In early February 2016, using the excuse of a cultural program organised by a small, fringe group on the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus, the ABVP /BJP /RSS hatched a plan to subvert it and blow it up as an issue of anti-nationalism in our universities. That it was all pre-planned, and an organised conspiracy, is obvious from the way the events unfolded following the program:

- Some masked outsiders infiltrate the gathering of students watching the program, and shout anti-India slogans (the police has yet to identify and arrest these outsiders); the newly appointed Vice Chancellor of JNU, a known RSS man, gives permission and the police quickly move in and arrest JNU students' union president Kanhaiya Kumar, the face of opposition to ABVP on the campus, on the draconian charge of sedition accusing him of shouting anti-India slogans—when Kanhaiya Kumar was not even remotely involved in the organising of this program; overnight, the BJP releases a doctored video showing Kanhaiya shouting those slogans; some television channels immediately repeatedly telecast this video and systematically whip up mass sentiments of people against him and JNU students, labelling them as anti-nationals; when Kanhaiya Kumar is brought to Patiala House courts in Delhi for bail hearing, BJP goons in the garb of lawyers in a pre-planned and orchestrated attack beat up students, faculty members and journalists within the court premises, and that too twice within three days; a panel of senior lawyers sent by the Supreme Court to investigate the matter is also attacked by these hoodlums; the Delhi police remain a silent spectator to this complete breakdown of law and order, ignoring Supreme Court orders; in the

days that follow Kanhaiya's arrest, students protesting against government action in JNU in universities across the country are labelled as anti-nationals and brutally assaulted by ABVP activists.

Without a conscious strategy, perfect script and meticulous planning, such a perfect show would not have been possible at all.

Despite this State-backed offensive of ABVP hoodlums, students and teachers are refusing to cow down and are fighting back. A great movement is growing and spreading in many universities. It is a combat between critical thinking and silent veneration, between secularism and communal hatred, between democracy and totalitarianism.

But a Lot More Needs to Be Done...

All these struggles have however not prevented the ruling classes from going ahead with their sordid agenda.

Clearly, a lot more needs to be done. We need to involve more people in our struggles. There are a large number of people who are passive spectators to what is happening. Quite a many of them support this or that aspect of globalisation—they have been taken in by the propaganda that foreign cars, expressways, shopping malls and luxury consumer goods are indicators of the development of our country. We will need to have a dialogue with them, explain to them that they should stop looking at the world through the eyes of the rich, and instead examine their own life realities.

Then, there are also not a few people who, instead of fighting the real enemy, have bought into the fascist propaganda and are fighting amongst themselves. Since the ruling class parties today have nothing to give to the ordinary people—no jobs, welfare benefits, programme for rejuvenation of agriculture, etc., they are deliberately dividing people, instilling fear in their minds that they are under threat from the 'other'. With the result that instead of coming together to fight the real and common enemy, people are torching each other's houses, shops, religious places, beating—raping—killing each other.

The largest number of people are those who have given up all hope, who have stopped believing that people can come together and change the world. We will need to inspire them, remind them that history—including the history of our country—has always advanced through people's struggles, that history has its ups and downs, and that while the atmosphere around us may not be very encouraging, the global people's movement against globalisation has taken tremendous strides. The most exhilarating developments are taking place in Latin America, where in

several countries, people's movements have been elected to power and are challenging capitalist-imperialist globalisation and implementing alternate pro-people policies. If they can do it, so can we . . .

Most importantly, for all those of us who are already involved in fighting this or that aspect of globalisation and its twin, fascism—we need to unite our different struggles, and advance our struggle to challenging the entire project of capitalist globalisation being implemented by the ruling classes of the country at the behest of the imperialists. We need to buckle down to fighting for building a new society that will promote selflessness and co-operation, where production will be oriented not for the profit maximisation of a few, but for fulfilling the basic needs of all human beings—healthy food, invigorating education, best possible health care, decent shelter, security in old age, clean pollution-free environment.

This is not utopia. After all, it is we, the working men and women of India, who have created all the wealth of our country. We have all the necessary skills. Our country has enormous resources. Our collective strength, if we create the conditions to properly harness it, can build heaven on Earth. Of course, it is going to be a long and arduous struggle, but it can be won.

Yes, it is possible to build a new world! Every end needs a beginning, only if there is a beginning will there be an end. The innumerable people's struggles building up all over the country are showing the way. Let us support their struggles, and build our own small initiatives.

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ABOUT US: LOKAYAT

The Directive Principles of the Constitution direct the Indian State to orient its policy towards:

- ☞ building an egalitarian society and a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life [Article 38 (1)];
- ☞ ensuring that all citizens have the right to an adequate means of livelihood [Article 39 (a)]
- ☞ minimising inequalities in income and ensuring that there is no concentration of wealth [Article 38 (2) and 39 (c)];
- ☞ regard raising the standard of living of the people, improvement of public health, making effective provision of education for all children as among the primary duties of the state [Articles 41 and 47].

Unfortunately, the major political parties that dominate the Indian Parliament have decided to abandon this vision of the founding fathers of the nation, and secede from the people of the country. Ever since India's ruling classes decided to globalise the Indian economy in 1991, the country is being run solely for the profit maximisation of big foreign and Indian corporations:

- In connivance with the politicians–bureaucracy–police, giant corporations have launched a ferocious assault to dispossess the poor of their lands, forests, water and resources—to set up giant infrastructural projects, build malls/golf courses/villas for the rich . . .
- Public sector corporations, including banks and insurance companies, are being privatised and handed over at throwaway prices to these scoundrels.
- Indian agriculture, on which 60% of the Indian people still depend for their livelihoods, is being deliberately strangulated—so that it can be taken over by giant agribusiness corporations. The consequence: 3 lakh farmers have committed suicide since the 'reforms' began.
- Lakhs of small businesses have downed their shutters.
- Essential services like drinking water, education, health and transport are being privatised and transformed into instruments for profiteering. Even the ration system designed to check speculation in prices of foodgrains is being dismantled.

- There are simply no decent jobs for the youth; probably nearly half the population is unemployed or underemployed.
- the country is heading towards an ecological catastrophe; corporations are cutting down entire forests, over-exploiting groundwater, polluting our seas-rivers-soil-groundwater-air, damage the health of not just the living but also of those yet to be born . . .

These policies have produced the most obscene inequalities, that are becoming worse by the day:

- while on the one hand, the rich are becoming extremely rich – the number of billionaires has doubled from 56 to 90, and their wealth equals one-seventh of the country's GDP;
- on the other hand, the poor are becoming even more poor:
 - 75.5% of the rural and 73% of the urban population are not able to eat two full meals a day;
 - 50% children below the age of 5 are malnourished;
 - 42% children drop out of school without completing basic schooling;
 - Lakhs of children die every year due to entirely preventable diseases; ...

As the economic system becomes more and more sick, the social and political system is also becoming more and more degenerate. All-pervasive corruption; continuation of the age-old caste-based social system because of which atrocities on Dalits take place almost daily, and which is exploited by politicians to make the upper caste youth believe that the reservation system is responsible for lack of jobs; a communal political system that divides people in the name of religion and fills them with hatred against each other; a value system that promotes crass selfishness and unconcern and apathy for others; a society where cynicism and moral bankruptcy permeate every nook and cranny—this is the reality of today.

The common people have not been silent spectators to this betrayal of the Indian Constitution. Ordinary people are coming together all over the country, getting organised, forming groups and raising their voices in protest. Though these struggles are presently small, scattered, without resources, the future lies in these magnificent struggles. As more and more people join them, they will strengthen, join hands, and become a powerful force which will transform society.

We must stop being sceptics, dream of a better future, believe that it is possible to change the world. *Yes, Another World is Possible!* But to make it a reality, we must start our own small struggles. These will ultimately unite, like the small rivulets hurtling down the Himalayas which ultimately form the mighty Ganges, to transform society and build a new society in accordance with the dreams of our freedom struggle that are embedded in the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution. And so, we have started this forum, *Lokayat*.

The deepening economic crisis due to globalisation has been accompanied by a gradual growth of fascist forces in the country. With the coming to power of the BJP in 2014, not only is it implementing the globalisation policies of the previous government at an accelerated pace, it is also implementing a very regressive fascist social agenda, wherein it is attempting to promote backward, feudal, unscientific and irrational and even Brahminical values amongst the people and divide the country on communal lines. It is even attacking very conception of India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic as visualised by our country's founders and enshrined in the Constitution of India. To fight this vicious fascist offensive and provide a political alternative to the people, it is necessary for all progressive forces to unite. At the national level, Lokayat is affiliated with the Socialist Party (India). Unlike the mainstream political parties, Socialist Party (India) has consistently opposed globalisation and communalisation, and has not made any unprincipled compromises to somehow win political power.

We organise a wide range of activities / programs in Pune colleges, schools, city and slums. Dear friends, if you would like to know more about us, you may contact us at any of the contact addresses given below:

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Education is fundamental to human as well as societal development. All developed countries, in the initial stages of their development, focussed on providing FREE and EQUITABLE and GOOD QUALITY school education to ALL their children, and many later expanded it to university education. Recognising that the private sector will only invest for profits, the State took the primary responsibility for this.

There is no other way to achieve universalisation of education, and without that, no society can truly hope to develop.

In India, even today, 41% children drop out of school before Class VIII. The quality of education too is abysmal.

Yet, the Indian government:

- is reducing funding for education: the education budget has been cut by 25% in real terms in just the past 2 years;
- and privatising the education system: school-college fees are going through the roof, teachers are becoming casual workers.

Does the government not have the money to provide free/affordable education to all children up to university level? In just one year, the rich have been given tax concessions of over Rs 5.5 lakh crore – more than 7 times the education budget!

On top of it, the new government is communalising education . . .



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