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Decentralisation, Participation and Pedagogy: Learning for Empowerment

Angela W Little*

It is an honour and a privilege to have been invited to give the key note address at this Second Anil Bordia Memorial Policy Seminar on 'People's Participation and Decentralised Educational Governance.' I stand before you today with considerable humility, for I am aware that I am in the presence of several who knew the work of Anil Bordia much better than I, and are therefore rather more qualified to reflect on it. I first met Anil Bordia at the Jomtien conference in March 1990, and subsequently in the early 1990s at the Ministry of Education in Delhi when he was the Union Secretary of Education and I was working with the primary education project in Andhra Pradesh. I worked with him again in 1993, shortly after his retirement from the IAS and in his role as inspirational leader and Chair of the Lok Jumbish Parishad. At that time, I was a member of a Lok Jumbish joint review team, working on behalf of the Government of Rajasthan, the Government of India and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).[1][2] I met Anil Bordia last a few years ago when I was writing a monograph on the politics, policies and progress of access to elementary education, as part of NUEPA's collaboration with the CREATE research consortium (Little, 2010).

In this paper I do five things. First, I reflect on the meanings of the two key terms underpinning our seminar – decentralisation and people's participation; second, I outline the historical context in which some of the most interesting Indian examples of decentralisation and people's participation have occurred; third, I outline the aspirations of the Lok Jumbish project in which Anil Bordia played a central role; fourth, I evaluate some of the Lok Jumbish outcomes based on the available evaluation literature; and fifth, I suggest that while our

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1 This is an edited version of the keynote address Second Anil Bordia Memorial Policy Seminar on People's Participation and Decentralised Educational Governance: Policy Reforms and Programme Practices held at National University of Educational Planning and Administration, February 16-17, 2015.

2 The Team was led by Gabor Bruszt of the ISO Swedish Management Group. The Indian members of the team were Ms Sujata Rao then IAS Joint Secretary, Dr Rukmini Rao of the Deccan Development Society, and the late Dr. M.M. Kapoor of NIEPA, who was the first to introduce me to the school mapping approach then being developed within Lok Jumbish. The other members of the team were Ms Cecilia Palmer of the ISO Swedish Management Group and myself.

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discussions of decentralisation and participation must focus on the role of community members in supporting the efforts of schools to attract and retain students and raise levels of achievement, we must also focus on the role of decentralisation and participation in the nature of interaction between teacher and student in the classroom. I will suggest that the nature of pedagogy lies at the core of Anil Bordia's body of work for which he will be remembered.

Decentralisation and People's Participation

Decentralisation may be described simply as the transfer of authority from central to local bodies. It is customary to distinguish four types: deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatisation (Cheema and Rondinelli, 2007). *Deconcentration* involves the smallest degree of transfer of authority: privatisation the greatest. Deconcentration spreads central authority without transferring the authority to decide rules to other bodies. For example, a national government may establish offices for test administration in provincial capitals. This shifts authority for the implementation of the testing, but not the authority for decisions about test content. *Delegation* involves a shift in authority over rules and procedures concerning certain aspects of education but with responsibility still lying in the centre. Using the Mexican education decentralisation reforms of 1979 as an example, McGinn and Welsh (1999) describe how representatives of the Central Minister, known as delegates, were assigned to state or provincial capitals and given some authority over education. While the delegates consulted with state officials, they remained responsible to the Central Minister. *Devolution*, by contrast, involves a transfer of decision-making powers to local units of government. In the case of India, where, historically, control over education lay with the states, this has involved transfers of authority for decision making to *panchayat raj* bodies and the concomitant establishment of structures and some decision-making powers at the village level – village education committees, school management committees, parent-teacher associations. *Privatisation*, the fourth type of decentralisation, involves a substantial (though not complete) abrogation of responsibility for education by democratically elected bodies and transfer of financing from the state to households.

People's participation in education can take many different forms. Many attempts at community participation have been 'largely extractive in nature... money, materials, labour' (Shaeffer, 1994: 196). Others have involved communities in management or control; for example, in needs diagnosis, the development and implementation of school policies, the design of educational content, or the delivery or evaluation of such content. These are often 'seriously constrained, either because of the energies consumed in the community's struggle for survival or because the school's disinterest or resistance to community or parental involvement in what are often seen as specialised and professional matters' (Shaeffer, 1994: 196). Other constraints on community participation are heterogeneous communities with multiple interest groups, a history of united or conflictive relationships, high levels of poverty, fatalistic vs. optimistic attitudes, an unwillingness of local leaders to devolve some of their traditional authority to ordinary people, and a lack of informal and formal local organisations capable of effecting change.

Background Context

Anil Bordia was one of several involved in the development of the landmark national policy on improving access to and the quality of education in 1986. The policy called for improvements in access to education of girls and women and for improvements in the quality of basic education for all, calls that were to be reiterated in the policy review of 1992.

Over the years in India, we have seen processes of both centralisation *and* decentralisation at work in the delivery of primary education. We have also seen an increase in the number of stakeholders. Until 1976 the central government contributed funding to the states through the planning commission process and provided annual incremental plan allocations. Responsibility for the interpretation and implementation of policy was devolved to the states. From 1977, implementation responsibility lay jointly *de jure* with the state *and* the centre, and, through the 1980s and the 1990s, central government gradually began to play a much more directive role in programmes for primary school development through the modality of *projects* which in turn promoted decentralisation strategies at the village level.

From the 1980s, and some years before the production of the 1986 national policy on education, a small number of foreign-funded projects, for example the Andhra Pradesh Primary Education Project (Ravi and Rao, 1994), and the Shiksha Karmi project (Mehti and Jain, 1994), designed to improve access and quality at primary education level, were initiated in various states. These would become the forerunners of the more extensive Lok Jumbish project, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) of the 1990s and the country-wide *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) programme of the 2000s. The 1980s and 1990s were also a time when, in Anil Bordia's own words 'activist entreaties for women's equality were being heard in all parts of the country' (Bordia, 2000) and when domestic and international non-government organisations were also becoming more actively involved in the implementation of educational programmes in partnership with and working under contract to government and other non-government agencies. The involvement of many different groups working to improve access and the quality of education has created myriad constellations of deconcentrated, delegated, decentralised and privatised power relations between central government, state governments and non-government partners.

Anil Bordia developed much of his insight about how to promote education from the grassroots with support from non-government organisations from a small-scale project run during the 1970s by the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) in Tilonia, in which students in three experimental primary schools were taught by village youth who had trained at night schools to work as teachers. The experimental programme was expanded gradually to new sites with support from SWRC and other NGOs and the government of Rajasthan, and was expanded to become the Shiksha Karmi project in 1987 (Methi and Jain, 1994). One of the underlying drivers of the Shiksha Karmi project was the extremely low level of literacy in Rajasthan, a rate that was especially low among girls and women. As late as 1991, Rajasthan had the second lowest literacy rate in the entire country, 37 per cent; and the lowest female literacy rate; 21 per cent (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993). The Shiksha Karmi project was a collaboration between the Governments of India and Sweden and the Government of Rajasthan. It sought to counter teacher absenteeism in remote schools, increase enrolment, especially among girls, and reduce dropout. The innovative strategies were the substitution of frequently absent primary school teachers by two *Shiksha Karmis* (educational workers) who resided in the villages where they taught across

the grades of primary education, the establishment of residential training schools for the training of female *shiksha*, the involvement of village education committees in school decisions and the establishment of an autonomous society to manage project funds and provide flexibility and openness to innovation The formal head of the society was the State Secretary of Education.

The Lok Jumbish Project

The first draft of the *Lok Jumbish* (People's Movement) Project appeared a few years later in 1988. Lok Jumbish sought to transform the mainstream system in Rajasthan rather than improve it by incremental reforms. The leaders of Lok Jumbish developed a politically radical strategy and complex design which saw the project as 'developer, demonstrator, catalyst and transformer of the mainstream education system from the outside' (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993). Like the Shiksha Karmi project it attracted support from the Government of India, the Government of Rajasthan and the Government of Sweden, but on a much larger scale, and in the proportions 1:2:3. The Swedish government continued to fund the project until 1998 when, because of objections to India's nuclear tests, it withdrew its support. After a hiatus, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) stepped in and funded the programme until its closure in 2004.

Lok Jumbish had three major, overlapping components – the quality of learning, community involvement and the management of education (Figure 1). Although Figure 1 did not appear in early Lok Jumbish documents, it emerged through dialogue between the 1993 Joint Assessment 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and provided the outsiders with a simple sketch map in which to locate Lok Jumbish practices and aspirations.

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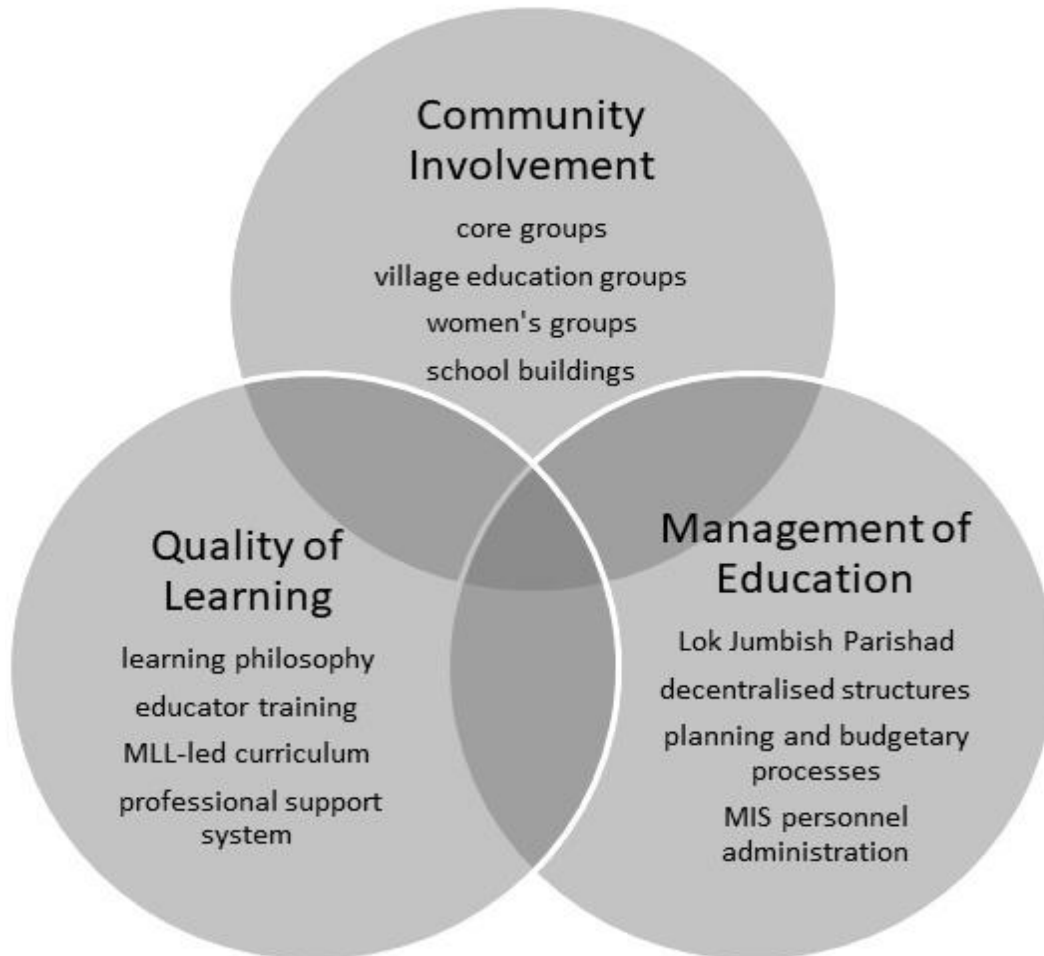
FIGURE 1

The Main Components of Lok Jumbish



The Programme for Community Mobilisation was radical and involved the mobilisation of the community through public debate, the sharing of information and knowledge to create informed decisions, and village household surveys to establish the numbers of children not attending schools and the reasons for non-attendance. Mobilisation involved, *inter alia,* the establishment in the village of a core group (*Prerak Dal*) who became the key activating agency within the village, the involvement of women's groups in educational decision-making and the involvement of male and female adults in the design of school buildings, construction and maintenance. Members of the core group were identified and supported in their work by external mobilising agencies, non-government organisations located at

the Cluster (within the Block) level (e.g. The Women's Development Programme, the Ajmer Adult Education Association, Sarva Seva Farms and Seva Mandir).

The Lok Jumbish management philosophy and modus operandi were also radical. Central to the management structure was the Lok Jumbish Parishad --- a non-governmental agency chaired by Anil Bordia. The Lok Jumbish Parishad was registered in 1992 and assumed full powers to create positions and recruit staff, approve budgets and incur expenditures, and to frame regulations and by-laws for the implementation of activities. Considerable power over purpose, direction and implementation lay with the Parishad which co-opted a further 13 non-government agencies at cluster level to work in villages with non-government village committees. The management philosophy was founded on the belief that

> for reviving the educational process, it is essential to re-establish the partnership between the parents, the child and the teacher. The value of the teacher needs to be restored by improving her ability to nurture skills and knowledge in the community and in the child. The deep rooted social and cultural factors that inhibit access to education among the socially backward communities need to be addressed. Processes and appropriate instruments that will create conditions for the equal participation of women in the system and thereby, increase access of education to girls need to be established. Thus, Lok Jumbish is a significant departure from the norm, as it perceives education to be an integral part of social development (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993:14).

Many lower level management structures were established including, inter alia, the core teams (Prerak Dal) and clusters mentioned already, building construct committees, women's groups, village education committees and block level management committees.

The Quality of Learning component involved the training of teachers and teacher educators. It promoted a curriculum and pedagogic package of reforms shaped by the recently introduced the Minimum Learning Levels (MLL) that specified outcomes, and a system for professional support for teachers. The strategies adopted were not especially radical in themselves, even if they posed considerable challenges of implementation.

So to what extent were the aspirations realised?

Community Participation

Let us start with community participation. In Lok Jumbish grass roots people's participation was considered a *sine qua non* of a social movement necessary to influence establishment policies and practices and to improve access to and the quality of basic education. In its early assessment of the community involvement component the Lok Jumbish joint assessment team of 1993 noted the need for more rigorous dialogue with community members about girls' enrolment and attendance, especially those of low status, restricted access and those with security concerns and sibling care responsibilities.

A key element in the community participation approach was school mapping. As Govinda (1999) explains, Lok Jumbish school mapping differed in several ways from that practised elsewhere. As well as being used as a guide by centralised decision makers in locating schools in ways that balanced available resources and the demand for school places,

Lok Jumbish used the school map to mobilise and articulate that demand. Instead of using the block or districts as a basic unit of the map, Lok Jumbish focussed on the village. Instead of the map being drawn by a local administrator (such as by a district education officer) Lok Jumbish school maps were drawn up by villagers who drew up action plans based on their diagnosis of need. The village core teams and women's group members were central to the process of empowering village members and they in turn were trained for this work by the NGO community mobilising agency. The training was codified in a handbook and involved not only the creation of a map, but also a village education register with information on the education status of every child up to 14 years of age within households. This was intended to be used to track the progress of each child and to identify dropout and effect remedial action and the education records were held by the village.

Govinda's overall evaluation of the school mapping process was that it had

> brought the community members and primary education much closer together... has effectively broken the invisible barrier that existed between the government-sponsored primary education and the needs and aspirations of the rural community... (and has made) the participation of all children in primary education the social responsibility of the whole village (Govinda, 1999:159).

However, along the way a number of challenges were encountered. First, helping villagers to break their culture of silence and articulate their own ideas about education and other matters was no small task given the embedded social structure of rural Rajasthan. Second, handbooks that codify procedures for school mapping can ritualise the participatory process and rob it 'of the essential vitality and spontaneity that characterises voluntary community participation' (Govinda, 1999: 155). Third, there were variations in the quality of the initial maps and registers, and even more variation in the quality of their maintenance and updating. Field functionaries encountered difficulties in reconciling enrolment and attendance figures in the school and the village education registers, and in identifying the children who were not enrolled in or attending school. Fourth, school teachers needed to become active partners in the construction of the village registers – but how could this be done without traditional community deference to the teacher undermining the active involvement of community members and placing them in a subordinate role?

Management

In its early assessment of the project in 1993 the Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment team recognised that work had started in the right direction and had created built-in mechanisms for self-reflection and self-improvement. Concerns were raised about the overall management strategy and the integration of the project into the education mainstream in the longer term. There was no doubt that Lok Jumbish was already playing an effective role in developing, demonstrating and catalysing new approaches to access to education. However, 'as LJ expands, the questions of mainstream integration in a manner which does not dilute the LJ philosophy, characteristics and work culture, will assume great importance' (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 1993: 60). The integration would involve the adoption of the ideology, the activities at the cluster, block, district and state levels and a commitment to the recurrent costs. And while Anil Bordia repeatedly asserted to the 1993 team that his strategy

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was to influence the existing education system through system development, interaction and subsequently by absorption into the mainstream, this was easier said than done. The review team invited him to address, *inter alia*, how and where in the mainstream system will the field centres and their personnel be integrated? How should the functions and personnel of the block level be integrated? How will the strategy ensure that the resource units continue to be utilised in the mainstream system? Indeed, the team's final recommendation was that a strategy for integration be tested as early as possible. After the establishment of a district structure Lok Jumbish could try, on an experimental basis, to integrate one fully fledged set-up into the mainstream education system in that district. As you know teams come and go and I had no opportunity to discover subsequently whether this recommendation was ever seriously considered by the Lok Jumbish Parishad. From what would happen subsequently I suspect it was not.

The issue of integration would remain a thorn in the side of Lok Jumbish throughout its life. In 2003 Ramachandran (2003) conducted an assessment of Lok Jumbish for the World Bank. In her report she asked whether the autonomous management nature of Lok Jumbish carried within in the seeds of self-destruction. Notwithstanding the longer-term commitment to integration expressed by the Lok Jumbish leadership back in 1993, she describes Lok Jumbish as 'positioned as an entity outside the government, a programme that competed with and challenged mainstream structures.... the identification of any large-scale programme with a few pioneers carries with it the promise of its own destruction, especially when these charismatic leaders/pioneers fail to create a sense of ownership in the mainstream' (Ramachandran, 2003: 26). Ramachandran's assessment endorses some of the worries expressed ten years earlier – that absorption into the mainstream would not materialise.

But absorption of a kind did happen, less through its active promotion by the project itself and more through developments emerging beyond the state. The District Primary Education Programme which involved central coordination of primary education programmes across many states became the country-wide Shiksha Sarva Abhiyan in 2001. The Lok Jumbish Parishad ceased to exist from 2004, all project staff came under the management of the block and district education officers and parallel systems under LJ ended. Nonetheless, the SSA framework has adopted and adapted some of the philosophy and practices from Lok Jumbish, as well as other Basic Education Projects.

The Quality of Learning

Finally, I comment on the third component of the project on the Quality of Learning. Although I said earlier that the strategies adopted within quality of learning component were not in themselves radical, the education philosophy of pedagogy that underpinned them *was* radical, especially in the context of education in Rajasthan at that time. Discussions with the Lok Jumbish leadership in 1993 had suggested the following prescriptive elements of the philosophy:

- Educators should adopt participatory rather than authoritarian attitudes towards their learners
- Learning must begin from where learners are: educators need to anticipate where these starting points are

- Educators need to treat learners as possessing already a wealth of knowledge and need to show a degree of deference towards them
- Educators need to create the conditions in which learners can enjoy their learning
- Educators need to find ways of providing learning content that is relevant to the lives of learners
- Educators need to plan and organise material which promotes activity-based learning
- The choice of learning content and materials is guided by the goal of achieving 'the minimum levels of learning' prescribed by central government
- Educators feel positive about their work, adopt a constructive approach to innovation and education reform, feel positive towards the communities of the learners they teach, and acquire a sense of mission to transform the primary education system.

The themes of participation and decentralisation were necessarily central to the community participation and management components. Although the Lok Jumbish leadership did not explicitly link them to the quality of education component, a close reading of the aspired-to education philosophy outlined above suggest a shift towards increased participation and greater decentralisation in the interactions between teachers and students. The philosophy outlined an enhanced role for learners as agents of their own learning. The philosophy called for educators to adopt participatory rather than authoritarian attitudes towards their learners. But the philosophy also implied a shift in power, a devolution of power, away from the teacher and towards the learner. In principle learners were to have more opportunities to make their current level of knowledge apparent to the teacher, more opportunities to value the power of the learning they have and build on it, more opportunities to engage actively rather than passively in learning and more opportunities to provide the teachers with learning feedback which influences what she teaches next. At the same time the teacher was to have more opportunities to become a *facilitator* of learning rather than the sole authority for learning (Lok Jumbish Joint Assessment, 2003).

In Lok Jumbish, as in most reforms of education, there were several sets of learners and teachers – not simply children and their teachers, but also teachers and their master trainers, NFE instructors and their master trainers, master trainers and resource persons. Did the implied devolution of power from teacher to learner manifest itself in the interactions between teachers and learners in the teacher training courses, in the training courses for NFE instructors or master trainers and resource persons, as well as in those between teachers and learners in school classrooms?

Very little evidence on Lok Jumbish pedagogy is available. Ramachandran, Pal and Mahajan (2004) provide some evidence from one of the Lok Jumbish sub-components, the Balika Shikshan Shivir (BSS) programme. The BSS programme was a catch-up programme for girls and young women, intended to bring the girls to a Grade 5 standard of learning in 7 months. The researchers report positively, that

> Balika Shikshan Shivir has been able to achieve the near impossible, get girls out of defined roles, enable them to access education and give them a chance to re-claim a lost childhood. It has given young girls freedom (albeit for a short period) from the drudgery of work and sibling care..... we heard several cases of delayed *Gauna*

> (premarital ritual) and even marriage, no mean achievement in Rajasthan!... sending a few girls to school had a ripple effect; many more girls are now attending school. These young girls come back and cajole and bully their parents, neighbours and relatives to send their daughters to school... the most significant and tangible outcomes are the enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence of the girls. As the children settle down... they transform slowly. This magic is palpable... the key to this is an atmosphere devoid of fear... the bonding between the children and the teachers is evident and perhaps one of the most beautiful aspects of the BSS process (Ramachandran *et al*, 2004: xiii-xiv).

These very positive outcomes may be described as 'incidental gains.' They were neither planned nor targeted in the formal project design.

But what about the BSS processes of teaching and learning? Here the evidence is more disappointing. Ramachandran *et al* (2004) report that almost 30 per cent of the seven-month programme was devoted to preparation for formal examinations through memorisation of lessons and answers. And despite the participatory child-centred rhetoric, classroom pedagogy was didactic. There was little time for child-centred learning or group learning. Much time was spent on memorisation of questions and answers, multiplication tables, repeated drills and copying. The image was of a learner who 'follows teacher's instructions, engaging in mechanical tasks of reading aloud and reciting multiplication tables in chorus and copying from the blackboard' (Ramachandran *et al*, 2004). This is disappointing. There is even less evidence on the impact of Lok Jumbish on learning outcomes.

Conclusion

In this paper I have reflected on the experience of the path-breaking Lok Jumbish project. Three questions of relevance arise.

- From the past twenty-five years of innovations in decentralisation and participation in basic education, what has been learned and adopted in the present, what has been forgotten and discarded, and what could have been learned but has not?
- What evidence is available on the impact of these basic education innovations on access and learning outcomes?
- And what evidence is there to suggest that the concepts of decentralisation and participation have percolated the pedagogy of teaching and learning in schools and training centres in programmes across the country?

This final question has particular importance, for it is in the interactions between learners and educators that learning takes place, that respect for the other is formed, that self-esteem and self-confidence are nurtured, and that a love of learning is established. If that love of learning can be sustained into the future then empowerment – the goal and passion so central to Anil Bordia's work –- will take place. As educators, the creation among our students of a love of learning throughout life remains our challenge.

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Education and the Complex World of Culture#

Neera Chandhoke*

"There is cultural subjection only when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. This subjection is slavery of the spirit." --- Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya.[1]

Educators are usually burdened with impossible tasks. On the one hand, we have to bring to students not only information but also knowledge systems that enable them to make sense of that information. This information and knowledge have to be drawn from all parts of the world. On the other hand, governments tell us that we have to familiarise students with Indian culture which is roughly translated as the culture of the majority Hindu community. This responsibility raises a troubled and a troublesome question. How do we understand and represent the culture of a society that has undergone two hundred years of British colonialism?

The Homogenisation of Hinduism

The late nineteenth century witnessed the politicisation of religious identities that followed investigations into, theorisations of, discussions around and consequent awareness of belonging to a wider community called Hinduism. The same process occurred later for Islam. Historians tell us that before the late eighteenth century and the establishment of colonialism, Indians did not, in general, identify themselves as Hindu or Muslim in the religious sense. But by the turn of the twentieth century, they were defining themselves predominantly in terms of a religious identity.

In history, the biography of the term Hinduism has been a fluid one and, in pre-colonial India, people tended to identify themselves on different occasions as members of a *jati*,

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This is an Edited Version of the 10th Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture delivered on 11th November, 2019 for National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

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1 Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya (1928/2011): 'Svaraj in Ideas,' in Nalini Bhushan and Jay L Garfield (ed): *Indian Philosophy in English: From Renaissance to Independence,* Oxford: Oxford University Press (OUP), pp 101-114.

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of a caste, of a linguistic group, and/or as the residents of a region. Etymologically, Hinduism stems from a Persian term --- *Hind*, or *Al-Hind* in Arabic --- which was first used by the Achaemenid Persians to indicate people who lived beyond the river Indus/Sindhu, in the region of Hind. References to this term are found in the inscriptions of Darius I and other rulers of ancient Persia from 6 century BCE. The term Hindu was used by Alberuni (1030 CE) to refer to Brahmanical Hinduism. Three centuries later, Ziauddin Barani made frequent references to the 'Hindu' in his history of India. However, in his hands, the term Hindu denoted a politico-administrative as well as a religious category.

In his *Constructions of Religious Boundaries*, Harjot Singh Oberoi argued that the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which today are seen by many as the defining religious texts of the Hindus, do not employ the word Hindu.[2] And the historian Romila Thapar pointed out that even in classical texts like the *Dharamshastras*, communities are defined by reference to location, occupation, and caste, none of which are necessarily bound together by a common religious identity.[3] Moreover, in the annals of Sanskrit, a classical language, Hinduism does not refer to the identity of people who belong to a religious community.[4] Religion was just one of the affiliations Indians subscribed to. By the end of the nineteenth century, marked on the one hand by the introduction of a census that required respondents to unambiguously state their religion, and on the other hand by political mobilisation on religious lines, the term Hindu came to be deployed as a social category of self-identification, and of identification with a community.

The making of a collective identity was strengthened in the period of high nationalism and competitive nation-making projects that stretched from the late nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century. Affinity with the larger religious community enabled individuals and communities to identify with each other, and thus establish the foundations for the nationalist and the anti-colonial struggle. By the first two decades of the twentieth century, we see the eruption of competitive nationalism, the two-nation theory, and the demand for a state of one's own. The nation-making project and competitive nationalism that hinged around the demand of a 'state of one's own' culminated in the blood-drenched Partition of India. The project was and is deeply problematic, because colonial investigations into and translations of upper-caste Hindu texts had narrated the religion as highly intellectual, Sankritised, and Brahmanical. This tradition, as will be suggested later in the argument, excluded much more than it included.

Interestingly, the idea that standardised Hinduism is a product of colonialism was catapulted onto intellectual and political platforms as a puzzle, as a paradox, as a doubt, and as a contradiction in the 1980s and 1990s. The debate erupted against the background of the demolition of the Babri Mosque on 6 December 1992. Scholars in departments of religious

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2 Harjot Singh Oberoi (1994): *The Construction of Religious* Boundaries, University of Chicago Press, introduction.

3 Romila Thapar (1989): 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity,' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 3, No 2, p 220.

4 Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich Von Stietencron (ed) (1995): *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, Introduction, New Delhi: Sage, pp 2, 17-34; Vasudha Dalmia (2007): 'Introduction,' in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Steitencron (ed): *The Oxford India Hinduism Reader*, OUP, pp 1-28.

studies, anthropology, and history in mainly western universities suggested that the glorification of Hinduism was, in essence, the glorification of a conceptual category that was assembled, privileged, and theorised by various agents of colonialism. These agents ranged from Indologists to Christian missionaries, to colonial administrators, to ethnographers and to philologists. Indian advisors were complicit in the interpretation and codification of Hinduism. The project was not steered by Western scholars and administrators only. Brahmins who were familiar with Sanskrit texts of ancient India, and Kayastha scholars who knew both Sanskrit and Persian, helped identify, translate and privilege selected sacred texts, and tutor the administrators of the East India Company on what an authentic Hinduism looks like. Resultantly, a differentiated body of religious beliefs and practices was collapsed into a mega-category of a peculiarly upper-caste Hinduism. Some western scholars came forward to suggest that there is no religion in India that corresponds to what we understand by the term.

The 1990s debate on the nature of and indeed the existence of a category called Hinduism, drew upon an earlier work authored by W C Smith in 1962*, The Meaning and End of Religion.* Smith argued that Hinduism refers not to an entity; it is a name that the West has given to a prodigiously variegated series of facts.[5] Taking their cue from Smith, scholars focussed on the colonial project of flattening out a plural tradition, and casting it in the image of Abrahamic religions. For instance, Stietencron suggested that rather than the development of a uniform and centralised religious doctrine and practice that was characteristic of other religions, in Hinduism a number of factors promoted fragmentation and regionalisation. None of the traditions of the religion developed an all-India institutional body invested with the power to judge correct exegesis of sacred scriptures except for *Advaita Vedanta*. Divergent interpretations of religion could not be banned, because authority was not vested in a church but in the individual charisma of a teacher. Even dominant *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism* were divided into numerous *sampradayas* or sects, which were further distinguished by regional differentiations in theory and practice. These sects would only come together on occasions when the meaning of a scripture was disputed. The *Vaisnanvas* worship a different god than the *Saivas*; they use different holy scriptures in prayer, ritual and mythology; and even their paradise is located in a different mythical world. Why then should we insist, he asked, on a verbal unity of Hinduism?[6]

The problem with western scholarship is that Hinduism has seldom been studied on its own ground; it has been investigated and evaluated through the conceptual lens of Eurocentric theory. Many of these scholars preferred to explore and define Hinduism by the Vedantic textual tradition which is theistic, abstract, and marked by lack of rituals and superstition. This tradition neatly conformed to European notions of religion which were inspired in a large part by Protestantism. Consequently, Hinduism, which is composed of plural and often incommensurable traditions, was neatened out and reduced to one strand that cohered closely to the western notion of what religion is and what it should be by colonialism. More significantly, not only were various philosophical schools of Indian thought collapsed into one, philosophy itself was held to be synonymous with Hinduism.

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[5] W C Smith (1963): *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*, New York: Macmillan, pp 144-49.

[6] Heinrich Stietencron (2007): 'Religious Configuration in Medieval India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism,' in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinreich Stietencron (ed): *The Oxford India Hinduism Reader*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 50-89, p 73.

It is, therefore, surprising that in the 1990s critics of the colonial construction of Hinduism used the same concept of religion and similar methods to evaluate non-Christian religions as the colonialists did. If a community of faith does not have one sacred text, one founder and one church, the presumption was that it could not be called a religion. We could not but conclude that the power of colonialism to constitute traditions, history and culture, and therefore identities had to be taken seriously.

Whether the colonialists succeeded in flattening a multihued and complex philosophical system and a system of beliefs to one cohesive strand is another story but an important one. It is equally true that till today Hinduism lacks a core or essence, monotheism, a single sacred text and a church that can serve as a unifying symbol. It is, as T N Madan points out, best conceived of as a religious tradition which resists incorporation into the idea of religion as defined by the Abrahamic religions --- Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The lack of a single text, or mandatory rituals of performance, or monotheism, does not mean that Hinduism is not a religion as western scholars tell us, even as they critique colonial efforts to construct a unified religion. It can be thought of as a network of high traditions, localised gods and practices, webs of mythology co-existing easily with one of the most sophisticated philosophical systems, and Godmen or Gurus, the extent of whose followings challenges the very concept of a unified Hinduism. The idea that a religious community can be decentred, composed of diverse traditions each of which follow their own faith, their own practices and their own beliefs, has simply not been accepted by western scholars.[7]

The debate on whether Hinduism is or is not a religion is a fascinating and a complex one, but this particular theme requires another sort of argument. We should note that the debate has hinged around the non-resemblance of Hindu traditions to western categories of religion. The debate might exaggerate the extent to which Hinduism can or cannot be considered a religion, but it signposts the ways a colonised society is understood, or rather misunderstood, by scholars of another tradition. In short, it is, as we see, the west that identifies sacred and other texts considered definitive of Indian religion and culture, translates the text and interprets it as definitive of the religion. Two, we have to distinguish between Hinduism as a faith and Hinduism as the anchor of a political identity to which was hitched the project of the nation-state. In sum, whatever had been the complexities of Hinduism as a faith, a unified homogenous Hinduism served to anchor the nationalist project.

Interestingly, an intellectual debate on the nature of the religion created a political identity for unifying the people under a nationalist flag. The referent point of these debates was religion as faith, or practices of personal salvation, rituals, and devotion. But over a short period of time Hinduism as a mode of faith was transformed into a mode of politics: politics as colonial domination, the politics of discrete identity formation, and the politics of nationalist resistance. The colonial project fed into nationalist and subsequently power projects.

Since then, Indians have had to view themselves through the frames set by debates amongst the agents of colonialism. These debates not only legitimised colonialism; they also shaped the strategies of national resistance. And they continue to influence policy and politics

7 T N Madan (2003): 'Hinduism: An Introductory Essay,' in Nirad C Chaudhuri, Madeleine Biardeau, D F Pocock and T N Madan, *The Hinduism Omnibus*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp xi-xxxvi, xiv-xv.

in an India that has been independent for over seventy-two years. There was more to the story of colonial domination than the one registered in history text books.

The Colonial Encounter

Every story has a beginning, even if the end is left to the imagination of the reader, or to the vicissitudes of history. The narrative of Europe's engagement with India goes back to the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. This is the time when European scholars began to take interest in a rich and complex philosophical tradition. Christian missionaries and Indologists proceeded to examine Indian civilisation through studies of art, architecture, philosophy, science, and religion. German Romantics, for instance, saw in Hinduism a corrective to the malaise of modernity that had swept Europe in its grasp. Indologists who engaged in the philological study of South Asian languages, had been for long fascinated with the Sanskrit language, which many saw as the root of European languages. They were enamoured by the philosophical sophistication of the textual traditions of ancient India, particularly the *Vedas* and Sanskrit hymns.

In other words, as agents of colonialism set out to decipher a complex civilisation and unravel the plural threads of its dominant religion --- Hinduism, they inaugurated a project of cultural and intellectual domination. S N Mukherjee suggests in his work on the Indologist Sir William Jones that there was an underlying unity to the different missions of understanding India. Men, he argued, came to the country for a variety of reasons, but a majority was possessed of a missionary zeal to shape the future of the country.[8]

Among the many enduring marks these colonial agents left imprinted on the collective consciousness of Indians, was the homogenisation of a loosely articulated religious tradition of Hinduism. Colonial officials seeking to understand a society which they planned to control and govern, set about reducing its bewildering complexities to manageable proportions. The first move towards homogenisation was the codification of, to use A K Ramanujan's terminology, 'context-dependent'[9] laws into a uniform system.

The codification of an immensely complex system of *sacred texts*, most of which were unfamiliar to the European mind, carried noteworthy consequences. Much of the meaning system of these texts was lost in translation. As the philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy suggested, translations were carried out by scholars who were trained in linguistics rather than metaphysics. The educated man of today, he continued, is completely out of touch with intellectual traditions of Christianity that were nearer the Vedic tradition. A European is hardly prepared to study the *Vedanta* unless he has some knowledge of Plato, Philo, Hermes, Plotinus, the Gospels and finally Eckhart, who with the possible exception of Dante can be regarded by Indians as the greatest of all Europeans.[10]

This makes sense when we recollect that modern notions of religion --- as a system of beliefs and practices that are rational, metaphysical and private --- were a product of

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8 S N Mukherjee (1968): *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth-Century British Attitudes to India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 2.

9 A K Ramanujan (1990): 'Is There an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay' [sic], in McKim Marriott (Ed): *India through Hindu Categories*, pp 41-58.

10 Ananda Coomoraswamy (2000): 'Preface' in Vidya Nivas Misra (ed): *Ananda K Coomaraswamy: Perception of the Vedas*, New Delhi: Manohar, for Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts, p 23.

the Enlightenment. Though the term religion goes back a long way in the history of Christendom, it was the modern, Protestant notion of religion that was universalised as an evaluative and a normative category. The bias in favour of abstract and intensely metaphysical texts is clear in the selection, translation, and privileging of texts that were considered representative of Hinduism by Orientalists. Translations of the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads, Manusmriti*, the works of Kalidasa, the *Bhagvadgita*, the *Mahabharata and* the *Brahmasutras* into European languages were regarded as an interpretive exercise, as providing a window onto Hindu society.

The philosopher Bimal Matilal reminds us that western scholars were fascinated by the highly speculative metaphysical system that occupied the overlap between religion and philosophy. And Indian intellectuals, after centuries of foreign domination, were looking for an identity that could help them assert themselves. Some national leaders sought an escape in the mythical aura of Indian spirituality. As a result, philosophy remained identified with mysticism, and was regarded as inseparable from religion.[11]

The problem is that these texts were abstracted from the social context defined by caste discrimination. They were seen as embodying eternal truths irrespective of the fact that these truths had been contested and challenged throughout the history of ideas, and by biographies of movements. Two, colonialists laid importance on a highly metaphysical tradition within Hinduism as constitutive of religion. They failed to consider and incorporate within the canon critical, rationalist philosophies and oppositional movements. Ironically, Indian public intellectuals and nationalists adopted the same tradition.

The Response to Colonial Appropriations

Given that India's past had already been appropriated by the coloniser, and the present dismissed as the disintegration of a once great civilisation, how did Indians receive, absorb, and negotiate colonial interpretations, critiques, and definitions of India's past, philosophy and religion? How did they speak back to colonialism and its many hegemonies; in what vocabularies?

There can be, of course, no single answer to the question of how Indians responded to intellectual colonialism. Some public intellectuals uncritically absorbed the philosophies of the colonial power, some mediated these intellectual resources in innovative ways, others resisted colonial epistemologies, and still others, like Gandhi, transformed both Indian and western thought. On balance, Indian intellectuals had to accomplish a double recovery. They had to reclaim their own philosophical traditions to answer the question 'who are we.' But they also had to retrieve their tradition from the metaphorically speaking acquisitive grasp of western scholars, administrators, and missionaries.

Consider the thesis that the glories of ancient India were followed by a sharp and precipitate decline of India that continues to hold proponents of the Hindu right in thrall. This thesis was first put forth by western scholars, for example, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Fredrik Hegel, among others. Hegel's dismissive comments were a response to German romanticism. Hegel's professional life unfolded during a period of intense European interest in India in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Hegel inherited from

[11] Bimal Krishna Matilal (2005): *Epistemology, Logic, and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis,* second edition, ed: Jonardon Ganeri, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp xii-xiii.

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the Romantics an attraction for the Orient, but he set out to demolish their assumptions. Accepting that, chronologically, philosophy, religion and art took root in the Orient, that is, in Persia, China, Egypt and India, he suggests that India, like China, is a phenomenon which is antique as well as modern. But it has remained stationary and fixed. "It has always been the land of imaginative aspiration and appears to us still as a fairy region, an enchanted world. In contrast with the Chinese state, which presents only the most prosaic understanding, India is the region of fantasy and sensibility."[12]

However, after explorers, missionaries, traders and commercial companies conquered India, and as the exotic became the known and presumably the mundane, it became clear that India had nothing to offer to the world. European investigation into Indian knowledge systems, and European domination, heralded the end of the search for India's mythical wisdom and 'philosophy.' India cannot teach the West; its tradition is a matter of the past; it has never reached the level of philosophy and science, which is a genuinely and uniquely European achievement.[13]

Hegel did not know Sanskrit, and he had not studied any original Indian text. His considerable knowledge of India was derived from translations of Sanskrit texts, reports of the East India Company, and the scholarship of his contemporaries. Over the years, his knowledge of India, writes Wilhelm Halbfass, became more nuanced and differentiated, and he incorporated this awareness into his later lectures and research on India.

Yet, Hegel's opinion on Indian philosophy was shaped by two factors: his response to the Indologists he drew upon, and his profound ignorance about the great debates that accompanied the consolidation of the four sacred texts --- the *Vedas*. Philosophies, such as *Carvaka, Samkhya, Buddhism and Jainism*, repudiated the moral authority of the *Vedas*, the Bhakti movement challenged Brahmanical authority, and Buddhist philosophers such as Nagarjuna in the second century CE gave to the world a sophisticated and rational philosophy. But the impact of these philosophies on colonial interpretations of Hinduism was practically negligible. The history of philosophy in India, concludes Hegel, is but the pre-history of Europe. "There is nothing left in India, or indeed in the Orient, because philosophy can never return to the past, it can only incorporate the past, it is but the history of philosophy. It is [therefore] the necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans," he wrote.[14] Hegel continued to be taken up by India as the birthplace and seat of philosophical learning almost three thousand years before Christ. After that, he suggested, India stagnated, ripe for conquest.

How did Indian Intellectuals React?

Ironically, Hegel's thesis on decline legitimised the colonial project that India had to be saved from its own collapse. It also motivated the endeavours of Indian intellectuals and nationalists to return to a once glorious past. This is not surprising when we recollect that the philosophies of G W F Hegel, Emmanuel Kant and British idealism, ruled the world of

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12 G W F Hegel (1952): 'The Philosophy of History,' translated by J Sibree, in Robert Maynard Hutchins (ed): *Great Books of the Western World*, University of Chicago Press, p 219.

13 Cited in Wilhelm Halbfass (1988): *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Albany: State University of New York, p 2.

14 G W F Hegel: *Philosophy of* History, p 221.

academics after the establishment of the university system in India in the early nineteenth century. Given the dissemination of western scholarship that travelled throughout the colonised world through journalism, literature, political discourses, and academics, the minds of generations of Indians were bound to be shaped by European knowledge systems and categories of understanding. This is explicit in the discourse of the nationalists that took from European thinkers the thesis of the greatness of ancient India, and consequent deterioration.

It is not surprising that the return to the past inescapably involved the invocation of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* or the *Vedanta*, both as an evaluative measure of the present, and an aspiration for the future. Despite the onset of a restless modernity, and the consolidation of relentless materialism in India, this ambition remains a dominant project for many.

Surprisingly, Indian intellectuals joined the Orientalist acclaim of a rich and sophisticated Vedic tradition without acknowledging its adverse impact upon society, that is, the consolidation of Brahmanical superiority. The philosopher J N Mohanty tells us that the *Vedas* that developed around two thousand years BCE cover an entire range of subjects, but above all they represent an exemplary spirit of enquiry into the "one being" or '*ekam sat*' that underlies the diversity of empirical phenomenon, and into the origin of all things.[15] These themes were philosophically developed in the Upanishads, a group of texts that ranged from 1000 BCE to the time of Gautama. But if the real that we find behind the empirical nature is the universal spirit within, then what is the nature of the empirical world? This, suggests Mohanty, became the leading disputative question among commentators on the Upanishads, and various schools of Vedantic philosophy.

The lessons in wisdom given by the *Vedas* were challenged both by supporters and opponents of the philosophy. The main lines of division were drawn between philosophical schools that believed in the *Vedas*, and those that did not or the *Sramanic* tradition. But within the tradition, according to Mohanty, we see considerable sceptical self-criticism. Both Gautama and Mahavira, the founder of Jainism (599-527] were influenced by intellectual dissenters within the Vedic tradition. These dissidents rejected sacrificial rituals as well as *Upanisadic* monism. For example, an influential philosophy that belonged originally to the Vedic tradition had a strong strain of atheism and naturalism. This was *Samkhya* philosophy associated with the legendary figure of Kapila. The philosophy eschews notions of the Brahman and subscribes to theories of the five elements. Other sceptics refused to accept the claim that the *Vedas* code absolute knowledge, questioned the doctrine of omniscience, and believed that the conclusions of these texts were contradictory, as well controversial.

Also excluded from dominant and metaphysical conceptualisation of Hinduism was the heretical materialist school of *Lokayata* or *Carvaka* philosophy. This philosophy was originally one of the branches of Vedic learning, but over time it developed an anti-Vedic materialism. The origin of *Carvaka* philosophy is the thesis that the self is the body, not the soul. This school of philosophy was left out of the dominant constructions of Hinduism, both by the colonialists and the nationalists. It just did not fit into the model of theism, and of the ultimate objective of the merger of soul with the divine.

The marginalisation of critical and rational philosophical schools, both by the Indologists and the nationalists, gives us cause for considerable thought. If only a rational, materialistic, empiricist and sceptical philosophical school such as *Carvaka* had been given prominence in

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15 J N Mohanty (2000): *Classical Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp 1-5

the forging of a Hindu tradition, perhaps India would have escaped being slotted into the spiritual versus materialist dichotomy. This stereotyping of Indian society as exotic and other-worldly has not helped us forge an equitable future. India, with all its material inequities, communalism and casteism, which erupt into conflict over material needs at the veritable drop of a hat, has been slotted into a spiritual pigeonhole.

Till today, Indian society has failed to accept the enormity of material inequities, fascinated as it is with the metaphysical spirit. In short, the privileging of a highly metaphysical tradition as the public philosophy of India leads us away from social oppressions and power. It cannot help us to pinpoint power equations or remedy the inequities.

A critical tradition could have helped us to challenge the authority of the Brahmins, identified the lacunae in a transcendental philosophy, and become more sensitive to the empirical realities of inequality, injustice, plurality and caste discrimination. Though traditions and figures that had been marginalised by this construction of Hinduism were later taken up by the subalterns, and used to counter the Brahmanical interpretations of the religion, a hierarchy had been created between high and popular Hinduism. This was produced and reproduced over time. The selectiveness with which Sanskrit texts were studied and interpreted, and scholarship on Vedic rituals and superstitions developed, served to privilege one strand of Hinduism, fix the nature of the religion, and fulfil one of the objectives of the colonial project, to standardise religion and culture. A major tension permeated the study of Hinduism in times of colonialism and nationalism, and the construction of a binary opposition between colonialism and nationalism.

The Philosophical Debate

We can see this tension in the debate on the celebrated text *Svaraj in Ideas*, a lecture delivered in 1928 by Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya [1875-1949]. KCB was a distinguished philosopher who held the King George V Chair at Calcutta University [now the B N Seal Chair]. He spoke on the theme to a gathering of students at Hoogly College. KCB began his argument by exploring what today is known as colonialism of the intellect. We, he said, speak of domination of man by man, but there is a subtler and imperceptible domination in the sphere of ideas by one culture over another. The very qualities of subtleness and imperceptibility make this domination dangerous. If we are conscious of domination, we are bound to struggle against it. Not to perceive domination as an evil and to allow it to sink into the deep recesses of the soul is slavery. "This subjection is slavery of the spirit [and], when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth, and that is what I call Svaraj in ideas."[16]

The scales must fall from our eyes because colonialism had paralysed the Indian mind. One would have expected, argues KCB, that after a century of contact with western ideas we could have expected contributions in a distinctive Indian style to the culture and thought of the modern world, to humane subjects like philosophy, history or literature. Countrymen who still retain a hold on the vernacular could have interpreted, say, Shakespeare, in light of the distinctive soul of India. But Indian scholars failed to use Indian epistemologies to contribute

[16] K C. Bhattacharya (2011): Svaraj in Ideas, in Nalini Bhushan and Jay L Garfield (ed): *Indian Philosophy in English: From Renaissance to Independence,* pp 103-120 p 103. It was published, after his death, in *Visva Bharati Journal*, XX, 1954.

to western literature, or aesthetics, or drama, or poetry let alone philosophy. This is regrettable because it is in philosophy that we can attempt meaningful contact between the east and the west. "It is in philosophy, if anywhere, that the task of discovering the soul of India is imperative for modern India..... Genius can unveil the soul of India in art, but it is through philosophy that we can methodologically attempt to discover it." But even if we were to attempt this, how do we confront western ideas with Indian ones? Professor Bhattacharya rejected the idea of a patchwork between two and more cultures. This, he concluded, is as offensive to the scholarly mind as a patchwork of different religious ideas is offensive to the spirit.

In any case, argued KCB, it is not important that in every case a synthesis should be attempted between the East and the West. There are certain ideas and ideals that are the product of specific cultural contexts and that cannot be translated outside these contexts. The community within which ideas and ideals flourish is the product of specific histories and soil. They hold no resonance for other cultures. But then there are also ideas and ideals that carry meaning for us, and these are the ones that need to be accepted. No society or culture can afford to reject other ideas as alien just because they emanate from the foreign soil. This would amount to national conceit and obscurantism. We have to accept some ideas and ideals as universally relevant. The Guru must be respected. This respect has to come irrespective of the society one lives and thinks in.

For someone writing in an intensely nationalist period, KCB showed an unusual tendency towards cosmopolitanism. He was ready to accept ideas from another cultural context provided that Indian thinkers translate these ideas into their own idioms and assimilate philosophies into their own categories, languages and symbols. Europeans had till then assimilated Indian ideals into their own language and fitted them into their own categories. It was time to turn the tide, take some if not all ideals that might prove relevant for our own condition, and assimilate them into our conceptual understanding, categories, and knowledge systems.

The process was cumbersome, accepted KCB, as it involved intense study of both sets of philosophies, finding commonalities, discovery of a system of translation and integration into our own ideals. What we call universality is not a given, it involves a process of bringing together two systems of thought, two sets of assumptions, two philosophies, and two languages. What is significant is that philosophies from elsewhere must fit into our own epistemological schemes and resist appropriation by the coloniser. The only way to appraise new ideals is to view them through our own and the only way to discover a new reverence is to deepen our old reverence. I plead for a genuine translation of foreign ideas into our native ideas before we accept or reject them, argued Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya. Let us everywhere think in our own concepts; it is only thus that we can think productively on our own account. Our own ideas and ideals that pulsate in the life of the masses are the only touchstone for the relevance of other ideas. We can draw upon other traditions and construct a fund of metaphors to assist in the interpretation of our own thought. The moment we learn to do this, he concluded, we achieve Svaraj in ideas. In effect, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya inverted the colonial project of interpreting Indian texts, laws, and practices through the prism of their own commitments.

Furthering the Debate

Interestingly, though KCB elegantly and eloquently problematised ideas and ideals coming from elsewhere, he nowhere interrogated the Indian tradition. This was taken as a given. As a philosopher he must have realised that what was naturalised as the dominant Indian or religious tradition had been constructed through the conceptual lens of colonial epistemologies. Is there one system of thought in Indian philosophy? What about other traditions that do not fit within the dominant philosophical system --- metaphysical, Brahmanical, and upper-caste? For instance, the heretical materialist school of *Lokayata* or *Carvaka* philosophy was left out of the dominant constructions of Hinduism, both by the colonialists and the nationalists. Buddhism, that had gained support as an acute and sharp critique of Brahmanical Hinduism, had been colonised by incorporating it into the Vedantic tradition and by regarding Gautama Buddha as the ninth avatar of Hinduism. KCB refused to question the spiritual ideals of our own culture. They were beyond all scrutiny. Nor did he see that the textual tradition was different from practice. Can we have a theory of Hinduism that is shorn of caste discrimination?

The problem of Indian or even indigenous philosophy versus western philosophy did not leave intellectual debate after independence. In 1984 a special issue of the *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* focussed on the contributions of and critiques of Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya. Let us focus on one set of critiques because they illustrate the dilemma of privileging some authentic version of Indian culture. Which strand of the Indian spirit, asked Dharmendra Goel, is representative of the Indian self? We, he accepted, can endorse KCB's thesis of colonisation of the mind and intellectual slavery that has eroded the autonomy of the colonised soul. But there are blind spots in his non-discriminating sleep-walk through the long and hoary spiritual legacy and cultural identity of Indian society. There is a problem with his bland affirmation of unique spiritual values that India possesses. KCB, argued Goel, hardly took the trouble of grasping the non-ideational features of Indian civilisation. He reifies ideals, but whose ideals? Those of Vedic Sanskrit Pandits? Are these everybody's ideals?

The panorama of India's past, continued Goel, which extended for more than five centuries, cannot be articulated within the limited perspective of Sanskrit traditions, even if we add to the *Vedas* the *Dharamshastras*, the epics, poetic classics, theatre, dramaturgy *nitishastras*, and even social institutions. The *ahimsa* of medieval Brahmanic *Vaishnavism* is influenced by Buddhism and other non-Aryan sources. The sexuality of Tantric Shaktism is derived from primitive oral beliefs and rituals. Tribals include Brahmanical texts in their oral myths. There is no homogenous and continuous identity of ideals and ideas throughout inconsistent and eclectic traditions. What is dharma? No one seems to know. The great grammarian, philosopher and yogi Bhartrihari of the classical period wrote, like Shankara, erotic and evocative lyrics even as he advocated the purity of desire and penance; those staples of the tradition that came down from the *Vedas*. If one is burdened with tradition, the tradition has to be left unproblematised.[17]

The question is relevant. Does reverence for one's tradition lead to creativity? Does it allow the mind to exercise critical and reflective judgement on what is handed down to us?

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[17] Dharmendra Goel (1984): 'Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya's Svaraj in Ideas: Some Reflections,' *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol XI, No 4, pp 423-436.

Another philosopher, Rajendra Prasad, writing in the same special issue of the journal, pointed to the hero of U R Ananthmurthi's *Samsara-Pranescarya*. Ananthamurthi's protagonist is a reputed, sincere and erudite scholar who is steeped in his tradition. But he is unable to deal with a complex moral situation. What do you do with the dead body of a renegade Brahmin? The Brahmins of the village had refused to let the renegade be cremated in their own cremation ground. But Pranescharya had no answer to this complex issue, though he was celebrated as a learned man. His reverence for the *Vedas* had enslaved his mind to the extent of depriving him of man's natural equipment of reason. This might have allowed him to find a solution. People like Pranescharya can only regain Svaraj in ideas, suggested Prasad, when they shake off an indigenous tradition.[18]

We see the problem. An escape out of colonised tradition does not imply that our tradition has been left unproblematised. The west versus the rest is a false equation. What we call the cultural-religious tradition is plural and incommensurate. The dominant tradition, which we equate with Hinduism and with culture, is a product of the nineteenth century. In order to construct a homogenous Hinduism, not only the colonialists but our givers of knowledge and our nationalists had excluded other, more critical and interrogative traditions that would have helped us to come to terms with our political predicaments. A postcolonial scholar has to shake off not only the western but the chains of one's own tradition. This is not to renounce our culture but to view it with a sense of scepticism and enquiry, to use it as a resource to think with and think through human predicaments.

Conclusion and a Suggestion

How do we approach our own tradition? My suggestion is that we familiarise our students with the fact that there is no easy answer to the dilemmas of the human condition. Life is messy and chaotic, we cannot rely only on what we call culture, and we have to think imaginatively to get out of this grip. Perhaps we should be able to understand our culture as a resource for telling us that life is a set of paradoxes and dilemmas that cannot be solved but, as the philosopher Bimal Matilal suggests, only resolved.

Dilemmas, wrote the philosopher Bimal Matilal, are like paradoxes, and genuine paradoxes are seldom solved. "They are generally speaking, resolved or dissolved. Those philosophers and logicians, who have tried over the centuries to solve the well-known logical and semantic paradoxes, have more often than not created new problems elsewhere in the conceptual apparatus, which exposes the non-existence of a universally accepted solution. Can moral dilemmas be put into the same category as unsolvable paradoxes?" Theologians, ethicists, and "strong-minded moral philosophers," he goes on to argue, have often been reluctant to admit the reality of moral dilemmas. If there can be genuine unresolvable moral dilemmas in a moral system, then it would be good as courting defeat in any attempt to formulate rational moral theories.[19] But we are, suggests the philosopher, fated to inhabit a world of irresolvable dilemmas.

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[18] Rajendra Prasad (1984): 'Reverence and Creativity,' *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol XI, No 4, pp 485-512.

[19] Bimal K Matilal (2014): 'Moral Dilemmas: Insights from Indian Epics,' in Bimal K Matilal (ed): Moral Dilemmas in the Mahabharata, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, for Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, pp 1-19.

Matilal illustrates his argument with a story found in an Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. A hermit named Kausika had vowed to always tell the truth because he wanted to go to heaven when he died. One day he was sitting near a cross road, and he saw a gang of bandits pursuing a group of travellers. The bandits asked the hermit the direction in which their quarry had fled. Kausika, faithful to his vow, gave them the direction. People were looted and killed. And Kausika did not ascend to heaven. His duty to tell the truth had violated his duty to uphold non-violence.

Moral dilemmas, suggests Matilal, arise when the agent is committed to two or more moral obligations, but the obligation to do X cannot be fulfilled without violating the obligation to do Y. Dilemmas present irreconcilable options, and our decisions cannot be but irrational, or based upon grounds other than moral. This is contrary to the system of Kantian ethics. For Kant, objective practical rules should form a harmonious whole and a consistent system. The system presumes that two mutually opposing rules cannot be necessary at the same time. In Kantian ethics, truth telling gets the highest priority, as does keeping of promises. This is equally true in the Indian systems of ethics that extol truth telling as *satya-rakhsa* (protection of the truth) along with *ahimsa* or non-violence. But when two equally strong obligations --- that of truth telling and that of saving lives --- conflict, we have to make a choice.[20] It is here that we have to think imaginatively.

For instance, suggests Matilal, Kausika could have told the bandits that though he knew which way the travellers had gone, he would not share this information. He could simply have kept quiet. But he interpreted his commitment to truth unthinkingly and unimaginatively, and innocent lives were lost. We learn from Matilal that the dilemmas we find ourselves in might well prove intractable, but there is no reason why we cannot negotiate them with some degree of resourcefulness and ingenuity. We have to think deeply before we adopt a course of action; we have to enter into a debate with ourselves, we have to understand the significance of doubting our own state of knowledge. The advantage of the philosophical virtue of doubt is that it forces a rethink, forces us to know that we do not know enough, forces us to sometimes retract, and if we proceed, proceed cautiously, particularly if valuable human lives are at stake.

The poet W H Auden was to write in another context:

> *Whether conditioned by God, or their neural structures, still/*
> *All men have this common creed, account for it as you will/*
> *The Truth is one and incapable of contradiction/*
> *All knowledge that conflicts with itself is Poetic Fiction.*[21]

Contradictions are not only a feature of poetic fiction; they permeate the understandings of our history and of our culture. We must teach our students culture, but we should also teach them that in an imperfect world there are no easy interpretations of culture. After all, Raymond Williams was to suggest that culture is one of the most difficult words in the dictionary.

[20] *Ibid*, pp 8-9

[21] W H Auden (1945): *The Collected Poetry of W H Auden*, New York: Random House, Dedication.

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Social Exclusion and Special Educational Interventions among Muslims of Bihar

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Social exclusion is a phenomenon of cumulative deprivation faced by individuals or groups. It is a multidimensional concept that captures different forms of social disadvantages of how individuals or groups are partially or fully deprived of different things at the same time. People may be excluded from education, employment, livelihoods, public goods, cultural, economic, and political participation etc. that transact with different intensities cutting across various social and cultural groups, population segments and geographical boundaries. Social exclusion is inherently an outcome of a particular kind of social, economic and political arrangement that involves social relations between groups, causing deprivation for one group while favouring the other group. Social exclusion is not only a process but also a state of condition of being the 'outsider' the 'other.' the 'excluded.'

Post independent India witnessed multiple education schemes, programmes and strategies that have led to the increase in school expansion and enrolment for all children across social groups. However, on the downside, India continues to remain a home to the largest number of illiterate people in the world; accounting for about one third of all illiterates in the world (India, Human Development Report, 2011). This indicates that India's multiple education policy programmes have not necessarily translated into educational inclusion and success for all marginalised children. Of late, India became a signatory to the Education for All (EFA) declaration, the Dakar Framework for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, while civil society actors play a watchdog role and campaign for bringing disadvantaged children into the ambit of basic education. Further, through 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India, education for all children in the age group of 614 is made fundamental right, in which the right is as pious as right to life. The right to education, rooted in the universality of human rights, asserts that meaningful educational participation by all children is possible only when all children can access to a schooling system of equal opportunity. The concept of equal opportunity is, however, profoundly challenging, since it embodies the notion of egalitarianism — the idea that everyone ought to receive education as a right, not merely by chance or charity. In this context, the state has sole responsibility to

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fulfil its duty in ensuring all people possess rights. Therefore, the state must provide conditions that enable all children to access equitable quality education, while ensuring a reasonable standard of living for all. This, in turn, forces the state to be hugely responsive in translating its policies and commitments into legislation, against which citizens have legal recourse. This further implies that the major responsibility is thrust upon the state[1], requiring it to do everything possible to ensure children's basic entitlement to education. However, despite such significant policy developments, various socio cultural, economic and governance issues present huge challenges in the Indian context. As such, there remains many disadvantaged children, who are perfectly capable and eager to learn, remain illiterate, with profound consequences for their future lives.

Analysts of social exclusion of the marginalised community look upon poverty as primarily the main constraining factor of participation in the larger social and political processes including education. However, existing data on poverty level and educational participation reveal ambiguities in the presumed relationship between poverty and schooling. Hence, poverty factor is highly an inadequate explanation of poor school participation of children hailing from disadvantaged families (Bhatty, 1995 and PROBE, 1998). Therefore, a priori set is whether poverty or discriminatory treatment of the marginalised social group is a fundamental issue to be addressed. Discrimination is often associated with prejudice, of which disadvantage is an outcome. Sociologists would describe prejudice and discrimination as an expression of ethnocentrism as cultural phenomenon. Most of these analyses treat discrimination as a pattern of domination and oppression, a form of struggle for power and privilege by the dominant group, whose social and political framework tend to become enshrined in the macro institutional orders and provide the moral framework of operation of the larger social system, including that of the state. In the process, the 'others' become excluded from the body politic of the established kind. Thus, as against the conventional approach of social exclusion to poverty and destitution that inhibit the disadvantaged from their meaningful participation in the larger society, it often goes beyond the economic aspects of poverty alone and embraces political and citizenships rights. Therefore, equity of education of all is fundamental to equal citizenship because education is what primarily creates the capacities to be equal citizenship irrespective of one's social, cultural and economic standing.

One of the most crucial indicators of social exclusion in India is the magnitude of a large number of illiterate populations who mostly belong to the historically, socially and economically discriminated groups such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and

[1] Rooted in Western European tradition of social democracy, the idea of welfare state became much more pronounced after the Second World War. The concept can be traced to the developments that took place in Britain in the 19th Century. It is identified with several state interventions in social and economic affairs to alleviate mass poverty. After 'the system of poor' was rationalised and placed under state control, many welfare programmes became a rational concern. Consequently, upon these developments, it was in 1870 that the Education Act brought primary education under the realm of state responsibility. In USA, educational reform based on compensatory programmes was the most efficient mechanism for breaking the vicious cycle of poverty among the poor. The intense debates among its advocates such as Tawny, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, John Rawls and T.H Marshall, all project the welfare state to be a system that helps the poor more than any other known system (Barry 2002).

Muslims as the religious minority. These social groups have been the victims of multiple forms of silent emergency (UNICEF, 1994) such as widespread poverty, hunger, morbidity, malnutrition, and illiteracy. The fundamental argument is that when the state fails to act upon a high level of silent emergencies experienced by children and social groups living under certain socio-political and economic conditions, it imposes unfair educational disadvantage and deprivations on children of disadvantaged communities. In that, social exclusion is a denial of or non-realisation of civil, social, and political rights of citizens (David Byrne, 2005). The institutionalisation of exclusion of marginalised communities from the larger social, cultural, political, and economic processes is both a historical and everyday experience. Therefore, the root of their educational deprivation is fundamentally related to their exclusion from the larger social, economic and political processes. Conversely, it is the expansion of educational opportunity that typically counters the forces of various form of social exclusion faced by these groups as there are significant returns in terms of economic, social and political to be reaped through meaningful educational participation. Furthermore, expansion of basic education is an essential requirement for the rapid elimination of gross inequalities, in as much as the strongest impact education has on the economy, governance and a host of factor including social stratification (Apple, 1982). Hence, educational deprivation to the young generation of the disadvantaged group is, in some ways, more dangerous than the deprivation of food and other basic social securities (Gathia, 2000), because, reduction of exclusion in other areas of social security is less likely to be if unaccompanied by education.

The phenomenon of social exclusion is also an intergenerational process. The disproportionately low level participation or lack of educational participation among school age going children from these communities is an indication that that many adults from similar social background did not have the schooling opportunity. Social exclusion can also be both subjective and objective because its phenomenon is not always skin deep and may not be visible at all. For example, language of the disadvantaged children remains an important site of exclusion in schools. There are instances how school and school processes largely ignore the diversity of cultural traditions including learning opportunity of a language that essentially belongs to the disadvantaged children. When schools pay little attention to the practical needs and almost none to their cultural reality, the curriculum policy appears to treat these differences as cultural deficit[2] that essentially belongs to the marginalised, forcing the marginalised children to face dead time[3] in school. The exclusion of sociocultural and historical reality of the disadvantaged children in curriculum and pedagogy fail to give meaning to their learning process in school. The estranged, unwanted school experience leads to their overall failure from school participation and withdraw from school. Going further, when access to one’s own language is denied, it limits one’s access not only to education but also to one’s own cultural roots and civilisation. In other words, the exclusivist state education policy can build up a massive categorising force to the extent of identifying the disadvantaged as the ‘other’ or the ‘excluded.’

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[2] Deficit culture implies the culture of ‘others’, while the term ‘others’ represents those social groups, who strain under the weight of various forms of oppression and exploitation (Giroux, A Henry and McLaren, 1989).

[3] Death time refers to schools that have no relevance for the lives of students, belonging to ‘others’ (Ibid 1989).

Muslims in India constitutes a significant segment such as 13.4 per cent of the total minority population of almost 19 per cent. Yet, they suffer from severe deprivation and disadvantage when compared with other minorities (Hasan, 2009). The cumulative deprivation faced by the Muslims has been reiterated in various Committee Reports, notably, the Gopal Singh Krishna Report and the Sachar Committee Report. These reports highlight the acute backwardness of Muslim community and the urgent need of state intervention in tackling their social and economic backwardness. Although Muslims are not a homogenous community in terms of socioeconomic characteristics, most of them suffer from the common problem of low income, widespread illiteracy, and several other socioeconomic, and cultural disadvantages. Hence, educational exclusion of the Muslim community is to be seen from their cumulative deprivations which are both historical and ever present reality. According to the Census of India (2011), the literacy status of Muslim is 59.1 per cent, well below the national average of all communities. Further, according to the Sachar Committee Report, Muslims have the largest percentage share of children in the age group of less than 10 years with 27 per cent as against the 23 per cent of all India average. The data on their literacy status reveals a massive number of Muslim children in the primary school going age group as being deprived of formal schooling. Within the same social groups, gender discrimination represents another crucial basis of massive educational deprivation; because, besides being women, they also face various disabilities commonly experienced by their own community. To add to this, many prescriptive customary religious practices operate far more harshly against Muslim women.

The backward situation of Muslims of Bihar reflects a part of this overall national phenomenon. Bihar has a history of oppressive social structure of entrenched hierarchical social relations, deep rooted extensive impoverishment and continued state apathy to overall social development including education. Currently, Bihar's literacy status at 63.8 per cent (as against the 74.04 per cent) is at the bottom of the heap. Though literacy rate in the state is dispersed by social groups and districts, the literacy status among Muslim dominated districts is extremely low. Educational deprivation among Muslims in Bihar is attributed to a combination of factors. Of the total Muslim population of Bihar, almost 87 per cent live in rural areas and exist without any sustainable means of livelihoods. Majority of them do not own land, work as unskilled migrant labour force and many of their habitations remain beyond the reach of any development project of the state. Quoting Asian Development Research Institute's report (Ghosh, 2004), the rural population of the Muslims in Bihar derives their income mainly from low wage occupation of agricultural labourer (39.6 per cent), remittances from out-migrant members of the households (24.5 per cent) and 'other self-employment' category (19.1 per cent). Despite, the fact that 87 per cent of the Muslim population in Bihar lives in the rural areas and about one third of the households own some land, barely 9.3 per cent of the total income comes from cultivation. The pattern is somewhat different in the urban areas where nearly half of the total income (48.0 per cent) comes from wages or salary, 33.0 per cent from 'other self-employment' category and only 9.3 per cent from remittances. These observations reveal that in Bihar, poverty levels are higher among the Muslims than the general population. While factors such as poverty, deprivation of both basic and elementary necessities often play an obstacle for their educational participation, dramatic absence of schooling opportunity in Muslim habitations, exclusion of their sociocultural reality including the use of Urdu language in formal education, lack of modernisation of Madrasas and discriminatory treatment of Muslim

children are found to be crucial factors causing educational deprivation and exclusion among them. This clearly indicates that Article 30 of the Indian Constitution that guarantees Muslims, as minorities, to exercise their right to freedom of religion, conserve their language, script and culture and to establish and administer their educational institutions is not translated into reality and remains non-operational on the ground.

The present research study was conducted in 16 habitations across the blocks of Muraul, Pusa, Phulwari and Kochadhaman of Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Patna and Kishanganj districts respectively.

Chart Showing Habitations (Tolas) in Blocks and Districts under study

Name of district	Block	Name of habitations
Muzzafarpur →	Muraul	Chaksen Muslim Mohamadpur Badal Boria Paswan Gokul Paswan Muslim
Samastipur →	Pusa	Dhunia Dhobi Deeh koari Fazilpur Koari Narwara
Patna Urban →	Phulwari	Naharpar (Ward No. 16) Isapur Hussain Nagar (Ward No. 25) Taj Nagar Lal Miyaka Durgah Mahapura
Kishanganj →	Kochadhaman	Churakurtti Goramani Baliya Kasibari

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Objectives of the Study

Several government documents and research studies conducted have identified Muslims of Bihar as one of the most disadvantaged communities, with follow up recommendations for their socioeconomic development. However, these studies are generic, rather than specific. The present study was conducted to mainly understand the special educational needs among extremely backward Muslim communities of Bihar and develop action plan. These special needs are assessed by understanding the aspirations and expectations of parents and community leaders from the present education system and Learning Support Centres (LSCs) of Aga Khan Foundation.

Methodological Issues

The study is an in-depth qualitative study based on personal interviews with primary target groups such as parents, adolescent children and Muslim leaders, focus group discussion and general interaction with other secondary target groups such as parents, Maulavis, Panchayats, clerics, teachers, VSS members and NGO members. Personal interviews were conducted with parents, adolescent girl children, Maulavis and Panchayat. Focus group discussions were held with parents, Maulavis, Panchayats and clerics while the interactive sessions were held with teachers from Learning Support and Early Childhood Development Centres, NGO members, Panchayat leaders, Maulavis and Village Shiksa Samiti members.

The Setting

The habitations under study are sparsely populated; and economically backward areas with lack of basic amenities — poor road connectivity, poor infrastructure, and relative isolation with populations, living mostly in scattered hamlets and impoverished social and economic conditions. During rainy season, roads connecting to most of the habitations remain submerged under water and hence hardly accessible. The only social group whose economic condition is slightly better off than the rest are the inhabitants of Koari Narwara of Samastipur district. The community occupy the upland portion. Their main occupation is cattle and sheep rearing and hence milk production is high. However, milk and dairy products do not add economic value due to non-availability of marketing facility. In the community, there is remarkable deprivation of basic and elementary needs such as food, safe drinking water facility, health, education, work, employment opportunity and livelihood options such as possession of land or livestock. Impoverished and unhealthy living conditions, together with chronic poverty due to worklessness, lack of employment opportunity, cumulative deprivation of basic and elementary needs such as food, safe drinking water, health care etc. take a heavy toll on the community and even end up in deaths.

The phenomenon of worklessness, lack of opportunity to work and unemployment are distinctive features of the community in general. According to Amartya Sen (2004), unemployment and worklessness are perhaps the single most important contributor to the persistence of people's exclusion in large and momentous scale. Considering this observation, the community under study across urban and rural habitations can be rightfully

considered as socially excluded victims or social groups at risk of exclusion. In all the habitations, there are overwhelming community concerns and demands for the need to impart vocational/skill education among its members. It is further observed that mothers across all habitations showed concerns that their adolescent children, especially girls must be provided with lifelong employable skills to later earn a living and enable them escape from the trappings of intergenerational poverty while they themselves are eager to learn adult vocational skills of some kind for immediate meeting of livelihood means. Some of the vocational skills/trades for interventions include weaving, tailoring, embroidery carpentry, incense making, soap making, stitching, handicrafts, bamboo related crafts, poultry, agro and fruit processing, construction, basic computer skills & computer aided drafting, soft skills, electronics, auto mechanics, repairing, crafting, fitting etc. The Maulavi of Pilikhi Gajpali Panchayat, Gokul Paswan Muslim tola, also a father of young school going children, raised his concerns:

> "Almost all the population living under my habitation (tola) are poverty stricken. They're yellow card holders. Women, especially mothers are in dire need of some vocational skills training for productive engagement to enable them earn even if it's minimal.

"Similar stories of poverty, worklessness and aspirations for skilling of community members including children are reported from other habitations as well. One parent, Samida Khatun from Deeh Koari habitation narrated:

> "In my community, dropout is a serious concern because our children leave school early as they don't have the opportunity to learn at the right age. My 16yearold daughter, Aazmir left school because of over age. She feels offended to be among younger children. My daughter works in the field during the agricultural season. She must learn some skills like embroidery, tailoring, stitching."

Even if children are able to complete the primary stage of learning, they are abruptly forced to stop from pursuing further schooling since there are no schools available in their own village or nearby area as narrated by an adolescent girl, Aajmin Khatun:

> I left Hindi school after class V since there is no school nearby. After leaving school, I remain busy with daily mundane household chores, cattle, and sheep rearing, sibling care, firewood collection. My mother wants me to learn some useful employable skills like basic training in computer.

Families of all mothers interacted are steeped in subsistence poverty. All of them poses different types of poverty ration cards such as yellow, green, and pink which indicates their poverty level. While males constitute the bulk of casual migrant workforce, majority women work as maid servants in other's homes and daily wagers in beedi industry or farm. Few women and girl children in Patna Phulwari block (slum) were found engaged in incense making. Daily wagers who work in beedi industry and agricultural farm, earn very low income, just to eke out a living or else remain workless for most of the time. Women who work in beedi industry were hugely exploited by their employers as they were paid disproportionately low wage, such as Rs 30/50 for rolling 500 beedis a day as narrated by mothers from Boria Paswan of Muzaffarpur district. These women, because of the nature of

work engagement in unhealthy environment suffer from severe lung disease and other associated ailments such as acute back pain. There is high incidence of deaths as reported from almost all habitations. In habitations such as Charakurti of Kishanganj district, there are deaths due to kidney infection. The population group residing in Charakurti habitation regularly consumes cheap oil imported from Nepal and Bangladesh as the habitation is located near the borders of both the countries. The regular consumption of adulterated oil has caused health risk for these social groups. In almost all habitations, water born related disease was common due to heavy presence of iron in drinking water. This is compounded by overall poor living, and unhygienic and inferior health conditions. Additionally, it is generally noticed that households in rural areas having livestock such as cattle, use a portion of the verandah of their house as cattle shed, which is also used as a resting place where one takes food. There is every possibility that parasites that feed on the cattle shed infect the food consumed by them. In both rural urban households, sanitation facility is extremely poor or non-existent. There are no proper toilet and latrine facilities. Women relieve and defecate in the open. In consequence, villagers working on barefoot are exposed to hookworm. During rainy season, the parasites that thrive on human waste are washed into soils, drainage, and sewage. Both in rural and urban households, there is open drainage system. The open drainage system and its filth both could cause several deaths from preventable diseases compounded by lack of food and nutritional intake. Most diseases suffered by these communities are tuberculosis, cholera, dysentery, vomiting, kidney, and liver infection. In this constant threat of disease and health risk, there is remarkable absence of basic healthcare service system.

In urban households such as Patna Phulwari, most of the houses are single room houses that are quite congested and overpopulated. These houses are thick clusters of small, dilapidated mud huts, with roofs and ceilings, made of scraps of wood, tin, gunny sacks or waste materials. The streets are narrow, full of filth as the sewage water stagnates in open surface drains, emitting foul smell and where children play around. In Patna Phulwari, a single latrine facility is provided for about 2500 to 3000 residents. This is one of the poorest sanitary conditions that put the community to various forms of health risk. Similar dwelling pattern exists among households of Baikho Muslims in Taj Nagar block of urban Patna. One can reach the habitation of Baikho Muslim community after crossing agricultural fields which is few meters away from Patna Phulwari. Among this community, there are households living in open tents, perform household chores such as cooking and cleaning in the open. The Baikho Muslims living in this part of Patna city are culturally and socially different from other Muslim communities. They are endogamous groups, marry within their own group and marriage relationships among close blood ties are common although such marriages could cause health risk such as congenital diseases. There is frequent marriage among adolescent boys and girls in the age group of 1213. Women can marry several times. Men and women work as vendors while children are always on the lookout for family functions/ gatherings to collect food and money. Access to the habitation is restricted. In the absence of schools and other health care systems, there is only one Maulavi who reside in the habitation to impart religious teachings and overall counselling guidance for regulating the behaviour of children and young adults of the community.

Widespread familial poverty, hunger and absence of public service system such as the opportunity to acquire functional literacy, learning opportunity of a skill/trade/ vocation across rural habitations, compounded by a lack of connectivity play strong push factors for

the adolescent boys as early as 1314 age group to leave their habitations and work as casual labour force in places such as Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai and Punjab. Most of them have not acquired primary school level. Parents from Gokul Paswan Muslim habitation narrated the plight of their children:

> In our tola, there 're around 200 children. There's no Anganwadi or primary school facility. A good number of Hindu children attend Learning Support Centre while majority Muslim children attend Madrasa. After this, they've nowhere to get education. We parents don't have financial capacity to send them outside like travelling to Muzaffarpur daily for 20 kms. Boys have no choice but to migrate, looking for work outside while our girls wait to get married when they attain 1415 years old.

Another parent, Subrah Khatun from Mohammadpur Badal Muslim tola narrated:

> I'm now 30 years old, married, and illiterate. I got married at the age of 15. I don't want my children or other children to share my destiny. Given the right opportunity, they would be able to learn up to any level of their aspiration. They'd be empowered to take care of their own future life. But there's sudden break from learning continuity, as there're no upper primary schools in our village. As our children enter to early adolescence stage, boys migrate to other states for work outside while girls get married off.

Similar stories have been shared from across habitations especially Chaksen Muslim, Dhunia Deeh Koari, Koari Narwara, and Churakurtti. There are also parental and community concerns concerning the high number of out of school children who are forced into cheap labour by recruitment agents as found among communities such as Dhunia tola and Deeh Koari tola. Among the communities, what can be observed is that without acquiring the much needed skills to earn a decent wage, a disproportionately high number of boys — almost 80 per cent leave their place of birth to be employed as casual labourer elsewhere. This in turn is most likely to trap them in their marginal livelihood. There is thus immediate connection between familial poverty, state failure and poverty trap of generations. Further, the nature of exclusion of these people manifests in group/community phenomenon, not individual households. Hence, it is likely that there are institutionalised agents/forces that are instrumental in enforcing the cumulative deprivation faced by these communities.

Another immediate concern faced by majority community in the study is, high incidence of rampant child marriage and hence the plight of adolescent girls is indeed worrisome. Adolescent girls before/without getting the desired level of learning or a lifelong skill to support themselves get married off at the cost of developing their personhood. They end up burdening themselves with repeated childbirth. This is accompanied with high health risk such as malnourishment, anaemia, premature birth, low birth weight, maternal, infant and child mortality, congenital anomalies, lack of lactation, associated complications in delivery and hypertension are cumulative primary health risks when girls are married off at a young age with severe social and psychological consequences. Average Muslim women in the age group of 3045 have children not less than five, while maximum number of children was found eleven. There is high fertility rate; yet none of the women interviewed was found to be using birth control measure. They were extremely undernourished and hence even if a woman wanting to opt for birth control measure; it was not possible due to extreme

poor health condition. Narrations from mothers reveal that male members conveniently use religion as prescriptive means in women's sexual regulation and reproduction. Mothers across habitations have strong concern and demand that their adolescent girl children should be able to escape from the trappings of intergenerational vicious cycle of poverty by acquiring lifelong employable skills. From Chaksen habitation, one parent narrated:

> Aajmari Khatun and Rijwana are 15 years old; they're married, couldn't continue education after class V due to non-availability of upper primary schools in or nearby our tola.

The parent further stated:

> Like the experience of Ajmari and Rijwana, many adolescent girls remain uneducated, marry at young age as there is no schooling facility. Our daughters need some skills for sustainable livelihood, there's no such opportunity in our area.

Similar parental concerns were raised from other habitations. A parent, Samida Khatun from Dhobi habitation stated:

> In our community, educating girls after class VIII is unimaginable since our girls have to walk a long distance of more than 5 kms to reach a functional school, while 80 per cent of our boys in the age group of 1215 years move out of the village as migrant workers. Our adolescent girls need skill education to earn a living for lifelong.

Parents from Koari Narwara too expressed overwhelming aspiration for the education of their children, especially functional primary and upper primary schools in their locality and skilling of adolescent children by utilising the locally available potential resources and generate income and sustainable livelihoods.

It was also observed that living in perpetual deprivation, they easily adapt to the culture of poverty, and are able to adjust the sordid conditions of poverty; have a subculture of their own as in the words of Oscar Lewis (1960), remain myopic in their outlook, have strong feelings of fatalism, helplessness, dependence, inferiority and tend to be socially isolated. Their isolation also means lack of participation in the activities of the society such as political, social, and economic. Amartya Sen (2004) identifies two forms of exclusion — active, e.g., the case of immigrants/refugees who have no political status or rights, and passive. Sen uses passive form of social exclusion as primarily a form of deprivation resulting from a process in which there is no deliberate attempt to exclude, e.g. poverty and isolation of the marginalised group caused by unemployment, lack of purchasing power, assets, resources and hence accentuation of poverty. Among the community under study, children, adolescents, youth and adults alike suffer passive forms of exclusion — an indication of dramatic absence of state in the form of implementation of various welfare programmes, notably, poverty alleviation programmes, public distribution system, and educational development as listed under the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Therefore, it is the state structures and its operational practices that create obstacles and oppositions that work against these population groups and keep them handicapped and estranged. That, almost all of them fail to realise their true potential as human beings. Equally important observation is the unequal distribution of assets, entitlements and surpluses reinforced and appropriated by the power structure of closely knit economic,

political and bureaucratic forces and local vested interest groups whose main interest is fundamentally opposed to uplift the precarious existential conditions of these acutely disadvantaged group. Hence, poverty, and destitution that threaten these groups to the extent of shutting out their existence are not mere economic phenomenon, but also has political and sociological ramifications. Systematic neglect and discrimination of these groups is a reflection of a particular form of patterns of domination and oppression, which are viewed as expressions of a struggle for power and privilege as the state pursues competing agendas that tend to normalise people's grievances, especially vulnerable communities. As also observed by the British political scientist, Steven Lukes (2005) who introduced the concept of radical power of state to convey the idea that state exercises radical power by preventing grievance narratives of vulnerable people in the first place; and then gradually shape their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in ways that the aggrieved people begin to accept their roles and positions in the existing order of things. Thus, issues never arise, so neither do decisions to include or exclude them from the political agenda. This observation lends credence to the grievance narratives and community deprivation of the community under study. Luke's concept of radical power seems to have sociological relevance in the case of the present study of the social groups and how their precarious conditions fail to acquire the much needed attention of the democratic welfare state system.

Poverty, Conservatism and Parental Apathy: A Myth Dispelled

The present study dispels the stereotyped popular myths and perceptions generated about Muslim community that poor Muslims aspire only for religious and Madrasas education. The findings of the present study indicate that Muslim parents and leaders alike have shown strong desire for mainstream, secular education of their children. Reasons for their aspiration for mainstream education include progressive thinking, acquiring employable skills, decent employment, livelihood, and connectivity to the outside world. On the demand of modern education, parents and Cleric from Mohammadpur Badal Muslim tola narrated:

> In Madrasas, no other subjects are taught except about Islam. Yes, there must be Urdu learning facility at Learning Support Centres. Yet, we want that our children learn English, Science and Mathematics since learning these disciplines are essential in today's modern world. We aspire that our children have good quality education (though we are aware it's a remote dream). Our children can become professionals such as doctors and engineers.

Parents from Phulwari Nagaparishad panchayat of Phulwari block raised strong vocal assertion on the need of modern education:

> There's one Madrasa in the locality. Urdu and Hindi 're taught but there's hardly teaching happening. We strongly demand good functional schools where English, Hindi, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Urdu are taught. Good education also means good teachers and healthy environment.

Parents from Isapur Hussain Nagar tola showed similar concerns:

> In our tola, there's one Madrasa where Urdu and Arabi are taught. We're not satisfied to let our children learn only Urdu and Arabi. We strongly want mainstream education for our children. Recently one NGO, Nidhan started intervening; taking care of educational needs of our children starting from the scratch (zero level) but all in the age group of 67 only. The NGO teaches our children how to count, write alphabets, and words in English and Hindi.

Parents from habitations such as Chaksen Muslim, Mohammadpur Badal blocks of Muzaffarpur district and Naharpar from Patna Phulwari showed strong aspiration for quality education for their children. Similar concern was raised by Muslim leaders from Dunia and Dhobi habitations of Samastipur district and Goramani and Balia Kasibari habitations of Kishanganj district. Despite overwhelming parental and community aspiration for schooling and quality education for children, ironically, there is widespread absence of functional schooling opportunity for children across almost all habitations as discussed in the present study. In almost all habitations studied, there are Anganwadi centres and primary schools; however, most of them, especially primary schools remain dysfunctional, while there is dramatic absence of upper primary schools in all the habitations. Due to deprivation of quality learning opportunity in primary schools, parents withdraw children from schools. Anganwadi centres were available in almost all habitations, yet, mal functional in several ways such as overcrowding, serving of adulterated food and systemic distraction to midday meal at the neglect of learning activities. In such situations, parents refused sending children to Anganwadi centres. In some habitations, due to lack of sufficient Anganwadi centres, many children under 6 age group remain out of learning centre. The parents from Naharpur panchayat, Phulwari block further narrated their grievances:

> In our habitation, there are 150 children under the age of six. There're two Anganwadi centres and one primary school. As per the norm, a functional Anganwadi can keep 40 children. Around 7080 children are left out from Anganwadi. Teachers at Anganwandi centres fictitiously examine the age of children; children are randomly thrown out of Anganwandi centres. We pay Rs. 2530 to any person who can teach our children just how to write his/her name only. At the primary school, there are 200 children on register. But physically there are hardly 5060 children in the school.

Acute deprivation of learning opportunity for children were reported from other habitations such as Gokul Paswan in Muzarffarpur and Taj Nagar habitation of Urban Patna district. Of the total 16 habitations under study, children in 15 habitations are deprived of upper primary schooling facility as these facilities are not available in these habitations. Poor road connectivity, absence of public transport system and acute familial poverty posed major obstacles for sending children to upper primary schools outside their village. In the absence of such learning opportunity, Muslim leaders and Clerics expressed their willingness to offer Mosque, Masjid and Maktab for the education purpose of village children. In almost all habitations, a good number of families send their children to Madrasas. However, despite Madrasas offering some form of learning, most of the Madrasas run in poor conditions as these Madrasas are supported by poor households. Madrasas funded by individuals from Gulf countries are better managed in infrastructure and teaching learning environment but cater only limited number of children. Although almost all children attend

Madrasas, unfortunately, children who complete certain stage of learning from Madrasas face extreme difficulty in learning new alphabets and words when they enter mainstream education at a later stage. Muslim parents and leaders consider the learning of Urdu language and Islamic religious education inevitable for children since such form of learning connects Muslim children directly to their culture and civilisation. Yet, parents and Muslim leaders unanimously asserted the importance of modern secular education at Madrasas although such approach is not encouraged at Madrasa centres.

Special Educational Interventions

To enhance access, inclusive and quality learning opportunities for the marginalised Muslim children, Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), India implemented Learning Support Centres (LSCs) in the districts of Muzaffarpur and Samastipur. The programme was implemented to fill in the learning gaps of children and demonstrate a model of quality education with active involvement of the communities. Hence, LSCs main role is to provide inclusive environment and after school learning support to early childhood education and primary grade children. Therefore, LSCs deliberately operate outside regular school hours because its purpose is to supplement learning activities. Apart from involving the local community, the use of innovative and pragmatic methods of teaching learning such as joyful learning in the form of songs, citing rhymes, dance, body movements etc. have been proved to be extremely successful for motivation of children to learn. Teaching/learning at all LSCs has been made child centred, activity based and quite flexible. Parents and children alike are motivated to participate at LSCs. LSCs today have become extremely successful and popular among poor households of the community under study. It has played a crucial role in enabling children of destitute families to pick up literacy skills. Despite the limited intervention of LSCs, the communities under study expressed their desire for AKF to intervene in children's education by expanding its coverage. This concern was commonly raised by parents from all habitations. Parents have also expressed their desire to introduce Urdu learning opportunity at LSCs where only social science and basic mathematics are taught. For the Muslims, Urdu is considered as their soul language and hence parents expressed Urdu language to be taught at LSCs. In view of the parental support of sending their children to LSCs, make Urdu learning opportunity compulsory at LSCs and introduce separate timings of LSCs in case it clashes with the timings of Madrasas. Another parental concern was the improvement of physical setting of LSCs and strong involvement of Village Shiksha Samiti in the functioning of LSCs as in case of Mohammadpur Badal habitation of Muzaffarpur district.

Improved Access for the Deprived Habitations: School Mapping and Micro Planning

Considering the type and level of educational intervention or its absence in habitations where such interventions are needed, there are suggested key special educational needs and aspirations for intervention. State, with the support of community leaders and parents must introduce and improve child centred learning activities at Anganwadi centres and improve quality of teaching learning in primary schools to prevent forceful drop out among children. To avoid overcrowding at Anganwadi centres and facilitate enrolment of all children in

the age group of 06, state must carry out a carefully planned school mapping to level off existing inequalities in the distribution of Anganwadi facilities across all habitations. Micro planning is an integral process of decentralisation, where decision taken at each level is linked with the planning carried out at the next level such as the district, village, blocks and habitations as the units of planning. Micro planning strategy focuses on local specificity. Both school mapping and micro planning are important steps in the identification of habitations which are not served by learning opportunities such as Anganwadi centres and primary schools or where such centres remain dysfunctional. For example, in the present study, there is no Anganwandi centre in Deeh Koari habitation, Samastipur district, while such centres are available in Dhobi tola, but remains dysfunctional with no children around or in habitation such as Fazilpur of Samastipur district where Anganwadi centres serve adulterated food and hence children are withdrawn. Similarly, there are habitations served by primary schooling facility, yet children abandon such schools in hordes due to poor learning facility, instead they attend LSC where there is visible learning outcome in children such as the case of Koari Narwara habitation of Samastipur district. Yet, there are habitations such as the case of Taj Nagar habitation, Patna Urban where neither Anganwadi centre nor primary schooling facility is served. Considering the existing situations and needs, state must make appropriate interventions. In all these Learning Centres including primary schools, the policy of three language formula must be introduced, by making Urdu as the second language so that children are able to connect to their cultural roots.

Education policies in India have undergone many changes over the last decades and more changes are expected in the process of being implemented. The central idea underlying these policy changes is to bring all social groups including the most marginalised into the mainstream formal education system. Through the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 elementary education is made a fundamental and justiciable right. The new policy requires a significant policy rethinking by the state in its implementation strategies; its institutional practices; but also, a clear parental and community understanding on their part as rights holders in claiming education as fundamental right. Like universal adult suffrage, and democratic decentralisation, the RTE Act has tremendous potential for social transformation. Shockingly, the present study indicates that that except one habitation, Boria Paswan of Muzaffarpur district, all the remaining 15 habitations were deprived of upper primary schooling facility for children, denying their fundamental right to education. Even after RTE Act has been enforced a decade ago, in addition to strong parental demand for children's schooling, most children after acquiring certain level of learning at primary stage have no schooling opportunity to continue upper primary schooling. In the widespread absence of upper primary schooling facility, parents have expressed the need for LSCs run by Aga Khan Foundation to upgrade and expand its coverage. The overall scenario indicates complete state failure in responding to educational needs of children and the community as per the RTE norms. As such, it is important for NGOs/CSOs to mobilise Muslim leaders, PRIs, Village Shiksa Samiti and parents for a mass movement to demand for upper primary school facilities as per the existing RTE norms of establishing and maintaining schools. Such a movement must be backed by political and social legitimacy. Fulfilling educational entitlement is a citizenship right that cannot be dependent on or performed by charitable or private organisations. Therefore, state must take sole responsibility of establishing schools within habitations. Another observation is, in almost all the habitations, most children belong to first generation learners. Therefore, it is important to impart additional training

skills to teachers to facilitate the understanding of specific issues and challenges faced by children who are first generation learners. Considering the poor levels of living in maintaining basic health values, LSCs and primary schools must incorporate health and hygiene education so that children can share about basic health value practices with their parents when they go back home. To immediately address hunger due to want of food, midday meal in the form of dry food rations must be distributed to take home in exchange for the schooling of children from poor households. This needs to be supplemented by various existing schemes of antipoverty programmes. Another area needing intervention is, effective operationalisation of Madrasas is feasible with its overall improvement in teaching learning and hence should not be left solely in the hands of poor households in maintaining Madrasas as learning centres. State must help in improving infrastructure and teaching learning facilities of Madrasas by implementing schemes for teachers' training, especially community run schools. State must uphold the liberal tradition of Indian Constitution by promoting and protecting educational and cultural rights of Muslims while Madrasas must be modernised with adequate funding. In case of habitations such as Bhaikho Muslim community, in light of challenging cultural practices of the community, the Maulavi, who is well versed of the community environment can be instrumental for not only educational intervention by opening Anganwadi centres, LSCs and primary schools but also counsel the community for improving their lifestyle and behavioural practices.

Recent policy initiatives on vocational/skill development enterprise have brought a broad range of actors and arrangements such as public private partnerships and corporate social responsibility initiatives to empower vulnerable social groups and address unemployment problems for adolescent youth in particular and adults who are out of work. The formation of the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and several connecting agencies at national and state levels active in skills training and development with quality assurance across a wide range of formal and informal sectors illustrates the growing importance placed on imparting relevant vocational skills training among different disadvantaged social groups and improve livelihoods. Intervention programmes must be done on sustainable development model by taking community aspirations into consideration. The policy is clearly stated in the Brundtland report (1997) that conceives of sustainable development as a blueprint of promoting social justice for all keeping in mind each of the matrixes — socio-economic and environment with an overriding focus on the poor and vulnerable sections of community. With the pledge that 'no one left behind,' the state is expected to play a proactive role in effective implementation of all development goals.

The community under study has shown desperate concerns to acquire vocational skill interventions in some of the traits (as also discussed earlier) such as weaving, tailoring, embroidery carpentry, incense making, soap making, stitching, handicrafts, bamboo related crafts, poultry, agro and fruit processing, construction, basic computer skills & computer aided drafting, soft skills, electronics, auto mechanics, repairing, crafting, fitting etc. Considering these need based demands and aspirations on skilling adolescent children through vocational education, as demanded by parents and communities from all habitations, various skill intervention stakeholders must introduce suitable skill development programmes by utilising locally available potential resources on sustainable mode. The main thrust of the new skill policy aims to enhance employability of adolescent youth through demand driven competency based vocational skills by employing several

nationally and state designed frameworks to implement vocationalisation of education, linking vocational education and employment in various skill sectors by involving key stakeholders on public private mission mode. Thus, to equip adolescent boys and girls with necessary appropriate and employable skills in all habitations, state and non-state actors must introduce such vocational skills in all habitations including learning centres and schools on urgent basis. This being an important area for urgent intervention requires primacy over other elementary needs. The policy can be implemented by involving local community leaders — Panchayats, clerics, Maulavis, Village Shiksa Samiti members, community activists, volunteers, learning centres/schools and NGO representatives. Furthermore, to realise the vision of skilling of Bihar (20162020), Bihar Skill Development Mission, Department of Labour Resources, government of Bihar is currently engaged in implementation of various skill development programmes by involving several key stakeholders. The skilling mission strategy is also supplemented by several related schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, Kushal Yuva Programme, etc. The state must ensure that the implementation of these programmes benefit the most marginalised adult mothers who remain worklessness and who are in desperate need of training of basic employable skills for sustainable livelihood. When worklessness and livelihood challenges are addressed, poverty reduction, improvement in living conditions, reduction in childbirth and deaths are important consequences.

One significant observation is, creating an enabling environment and livelihood means by introducing job oriented education and need based vocational skill education for the community; advances their sustainable livelihood and raises the overall levels of living by exploiting local potential resources — natural resources, main community economic activities, vocational training institutes, local cultures, and social capital which indeed forms a collective asset that encourages trusts, communication and collective identities for the community. It is argued that communities with strong social capital can respond to participatory learning opportunities that increase their collective empowerment (Bhola and Oduaran, 2006) and promote socio-economic and political rights through participatory democracy. The logic of community aspirations of development, poverty reduction and empowerment must be considered justifiable. As the famous anthropologist Appadurai in his work “The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition (2004),” rightly stated, the people’s capacity to aspire is conceived as a cultural in which the ideas of the future, as much as those about the past are embedded and nurtured. It is this culture that shape collective horizons that constitute the basis for collective aspirations located in the larger map of local ideas and beliefs that hold good for community themselves.

In conclusion, fulfilling the educational needs, promoting equity and inclusion of the excluded community requires equal safeguarding of their social, cultural, economic, and political rights. The startling phenomenon of educational deprivation and exclusion of children and community as discussed in the present study can be attributed to a host of factors, which are complex and deep rooted in society’s exploitative social structure and state exclusionary practices as the present study has shed light on the dramatic absence of state presence in undertaking various important welfare measures. These measures include developing suitable designs and intervention mechanisms in promoting educational development programmes, antipoverty schemes, imparting emerging vocational skill opportunities and geared towards endowing sustainable livelihoods for the most vulnerable

social groups as these policy interventions and awareness creation mechanisms are designed to counter the various forces of social exclusion suffered by excluded social groups.

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Higher Education Policy Approach in Karnataka: Government's Response Inconsonant with its own Commissions' Recommendations[#]

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Abstract

The trajectory of higher education policy in Karnataka defies general premises of policy trends seen in other states where recommendations of commissions and committees would often form the basis of government measures in higher education. Karnataka has been inconsonant in its policy response vis-à-vis commission/committee recommendations, simply not acting on many issues like over-centralisation and government control on the university in all its functions, reneging from the grant-in-aid commitment to government aided colleges that educated over 60 per cent of students, etc. In certain respects, government response was paradoxical: tsunami like sanctioning of 19 private universities in just two years, 2012-13 while no expert group had made any such recommendations. This article offers insights into the hitherto little known policy landscape of higher education in Karnataka.

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Introduction

Policy making in democracies is usually practiced by setting up commissions and committees of experts and by considering their reports and recommendations for acceptance by the government. In some cases, the recommendations of such expert groups pass through the motions of being considered by policy advisory structures like, in the case of education at the national level, Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE). In the case of Five Year Plans, with respect to education as in other sectors, it is usually based on the Working Group Reports. This is generally the case at the state level too, except that expert groups' recommendations are dealt directly by the Department concerned. The reports of the commissions and committees on education, as in the case of other sectors, are submitted to the Minister or the Secretary of the concerned Ministry/Department, and in the Demand for Grants in the Budgets, the outlay required for the scheme, as suggested in the report of expert groups get reflected. Or it may be in the form of government announcement, by way of Gazette Notification, of the scheme by the concerned Ministry/Department.

From the point of view of policy evolution for any sector of education, the problem arises when there is dearth of evidence between policy recommendations of committees and commissions or expert groups, and its reflection and adoption in the strategies and schemes in the education system on the ground. It is probable that at the level of state governments, such layers of policy formulation may or may not be there depending upon convenience. But there may be immediate or delayed government action by way of a regulation or announcement of rule, regulation, and amendment to existing provisions in a programme or scheme in the education system. The commissions and committees or expert groups set up in respect of different levels, aspects of a scheme or programme or the Working Group Reports of the Five Year Plans do generally throw light on policy coherence after the previous commission or committee reports and Plans. That is one way of discerning policy evolution about any level or sector of education system, as in case of other sectors. If such evidences lay buried in file notations only, for the decision of the government at the state level or in the form of communications to the Central Government for the purpose of funding or for accountability, policy analysis becomes a difficult and problematic exercise. An attempt has been made here to understand the policy sequence and coherence with respect to higher education (HE) in Karnataka after its formation as Karnataka State in 1956.

The Trend – Against Conventions

A cursory perusal of *Universities in Karnataka: Report of the Review Commission* (1980), the *Strategy Paper on Shaping Education in Karnataka: Goals and Strategies* (2002), and the *Report of the Task Force on Higher Education: Shaping Education in Karnataka* (2004), on university and higher education in Karnataka reveals a reiteration of recommendations on a range of persistent issues. The more prominent among them include the exit policy on grant-in-aid to private aided colleges on account of the government's greater priority on primary and middle school education and the adult education programmes and the consequent inability to increase the allocations to higher education. The related issue has been the government's predisposition to persuade the government and aided colleges to become more and more self-supporting, while giving a free hand to the private un-aided sector to establish higher education institutions (HEIs) in different sectors

and subject areas, i.e. the courses offered. This implied the government notion of higher education as an elite service which the relatively better off of the society could afford.

There were besides a host of issues relating to pedagogy, curriculum, curriculum relevance with reference to emerging IT needs and evaluation of general, technical and professional education. There have also been expert groups on specific aspects/sectors of HE in the post-National Knowledge Commission phase (2006). Some of these included *Karnataka – A Vision for Development* (2009), prepared by the State Planning Board, *Vision 2020: Higher Education in Karnataka* by Karnataka State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) and the *Report on Higher Education Vision 2020* by the Mission Group on Higher Education Policy set up by Karnataka Knowledge Commission (KKC) in 2012. This article also examines the major issues as underpinned by these various commissions and expert groups on higher education, both general and technical and professional, and how far have been accepted by the government and implemented on the ground.

There is an issue about government response to the recommendations of expert groups on higher education. This is the contradictory position taken by the Government to the recommendations of commissions and expert groups. One could also notice complete silence of the government on most of critical issues like pedagogy, curriculum, curriculum relevance with reference to emerging IT needs and evaluation and also contrary response with respect to other recommendations. The expert group recommendations and government response is revealing: the government policy response is not necessarily guided in most cases by expert groups' view of either the problem or the solution, as indicated above. This paper tries to highlight the recommendations on which the government took contradictory positions and those accepted and implemented as well as those on which the government action was contrary to the expert groups' recommendations. For that, a small brief of current HE scenario sets the backdrop.

Current Scenario of Higher Education in Karnataka: Snapshot

Universities and Higher Education: As on 2018-19, there were 28 State Public Universities. Besides, there were one Central University, four Institutions of National Importance, one State Open University and four Deemed Universities, taking the total to 38 public universities. There were 16 Private Universities and 11 Private Deemed Universities, totaling to 27 private universities and university level institutions (MHRD, 2019:T-1).

Collegiate Education: In 2019, there were 671 Government Colleges, 461 Aided Colleges and 2462 Private Un-aided Colleges (PUACs) in the State, totaling to 3594 colleges. The PUAC accounted for 68.5 per cent (MHRD, 2019: Table-5). The number of students enrolled in government colleges were 4,25,978, and 3,29,400 in aided colleges. The enrolment in PUACs was 7,77,067, accounting for 50.7 per cent in the total, 15,32,445 (MHRD, 2019: Table 5[a]). The social composition in the enrolment stood at 2,61,279 SCs (13.1 per cent), 95120 STs (4.7 per cent) and 9,86,130 OBCs (49.5 per cent) and in the total of 19,88,494 (MHRD, 2019: Table 14).

Technical Education: In 2009-10, there were 11 government, 3 university, 14 aided and 149 unaided engineering colleges, totaling to 174, i.e., 85.6 per cent. There was no difference in the number of government, university and aided engineering colleges in 2018-19, but the unaided colleges increased to 215 out of 240, accounting for 89.5 per cent (GoK, 2010; GoK, 2019: 617).

Critical Policy Issues in HE during 1980-2004 from Expert Groups

With respect to university and higher education, Karnataka had three major review and re-visioning exercises from its formation in 1956 and until about 50 years. The first one was titled as *Universities in Karnataka: Report of the Review Commission* (1980), and the second one was the Strategy Paper on *Shaping Education in Karnataka: Goals and Strategies* (2002) which is a synthesis of 9 Sub-Sector Reports from Pre-Primary to Collegiate Education. The third one was the *Report of the Task Force on Higher Education* (2004).

While the Review Commission on Universities in Karnataka (hereafter referred as Karnataka Universities Review Commission – KURC) was constituted by the Chancellor, the Strategy Paper was conceived as a Sector Report on Education by the Government of Karnataka. A Task Force on Higher Education 2004 was also constituted by the Government of Karnataka on November 30, 2002. Between 2009 and 2015, there were at least three documents dealing with Vision 2020 for Karnataka and its higher education: (i) *Karnataka – a Vision for Development* – with focus on Vision 2020, prepared by the State Planning Board in 2009; (ii) *Vision 2020: Higher Education in Karnataka* prepared by KSHEC's group; and (iii) *Report on Higher Education Vision 2020,* prepared by KKC's Mission Group on Higher Education Policy in 2012.

The issues dealt by the KURC (1980) included the relation between government, universities and colleges, especially the proposed amendment in the Karnataka Universities Act, 1976 relating financing of universities and colleges and proposals for improvement in appointment of teachers in universities and colleges; academic management and administration and a case for decentralisation; review of the present system and proposed course structure and evaluation at undergraduate and post-graduate and research levels; role of non-formal education including correspondence courses under the universities and colleges; student welfare and teachers and non-teaching staff service condition related matters.

The Strategy Paper on *Shaping Education in Karnataka: Goals and Strategies (2002)* is a synthesis of 9 Sub-Sector Reports from Pre-Primary to Collegiate Education, including technical education, etc. The issues dwelt by the paper on Collegiate Education and Technical Education relate to expansion without regional imbalance, radical restructuring of the curriculum and the courses, role of private sector, especially the self-financing colleges and the role of the government, open and distance learning, equity and quality in technical education, etc.

The Task Force on Higher Education (2004) dealt with issues like Academic Programmes; Granting Autonomy to the Colleges; Technical Education; Grant in Aid Policy; Strengthening Governance in Higher Education; Implementing Quality in Higher Education; Amendments to Karnataka State Universities Act 2000; Research in Universities; Equity and Gender issues; and Reservations in Higher Education.

The KURC (1980) observed that the most striking development in higher education over the previous two decades was of course the rapid growth in numbers: of students, teachers and colleges. More important than the numerical growth in student enrolment was the catchment area and the broader range of society they were drawn from. Till the 1950's, facilities for higher education were available only in the cities of Bangalore and Mysore and a few larger towns. Since then the colleges offering undergraduate degree courses had increased considerably, from about 120 to nearly 300. Though there was still a heavy

concentration in the larger urban centres, a number of colleges were opened in smaller towns close to rural areas from where students were drawn (Karnataka Universities Review Commission [KURC], 1980: 2-4).

Role of Higher Education

The Report of the KURC did not deal with the aims and objectives of higher education in any great details. The Task Force (2004) chose to take a broader view, viz., the social context and address some issues. Even with 6-7 per cent GER, the Task Force observed a shift in HE from elite to the masses, with students entering from district and taluka towns. It noted that many of them being from first generation learners, they faced serious handicaps with poor academic inputs and preparation for HE. At the entry point in college and university, they need special inputs/bride programmes, including language and writing skills, etc. In this context, the Task Force felt that meritocracy needs to undergo considerable modification as a concept as there is no level playing field. The universities must come together and rethink their method of admission if access and equity are to become actualities (GoK, 2004: 22-23).

The Task Force noticed that after entry into the globalisation process, with liberalisation and privatisation, where survival of the fittest is shaped by the resources at their command, level playing field becomes difficult for students from the poor and weaker sections. Instead of support to make education available and affordable to all, the government is withdrawing its funding support, and axing teaching positions. Technological changes reside side by side with obscurantism, feudalism, exploitation and injustice. "Increasingly, there is emergence of negative forces of wasteful consumerism, sectarianism, fundamentalism and violence, particularly affecting vulnerable groups of women and children. These social realities need our attention if education is to bring social change" (GoK, 2004: 22-23).

The Task Force was convinced that "Education should help mould human beings who are responsive to community concerns and issues, sensitive, caring, not exploitive of relationships, and practices probity in public life." Education must include emphasis on values, especially those enshrined in our Constitution, like social justice and equity in a democratic structure and a pluralistic social order, understanding of human rights (obverse is duties), the value of life, respect for the worth and dignity of the individual including gender justice, respect for environment and its sustainability. The curriculum should aim towards a human being, who will not only be a subject specialist, but also a contributor to civil society (GoK, 2004).

The KHSEC's *Vision 2020: Higher Education Karnataka* felt that: "The main aim of education is to serve humankind. Hence, teaching-learning process in higher education should concentrate on issues such as patriotism, national integration, understanding one's own culture and concern for environment (based on the Indian concept of "Panchabhootha")… A university graduate should be educated in such a way that he should lead an independent life of his own and serve society" (GoK, n.d.: 40).

The KKC's *Vision 2020* felt that the very first objective of higher education is "to provide opportunities to pursue education to all and remove disparities by promoting the inclusion of socio-economically deprived sections, women and differently abled persons (GoK, 2012: 10). The Vision 2020 sought "To transform Karnataka into a vibrant knowledge society and a centre of excellence in higher education, comparable to global standards, with universal and

equitable access, wider choice, flexibility and quality, in an educational environment that promotes creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and a sense of responsible citizenship," It felt that the aim of education would be mainly a preparation for the world of work and reflect students' aspirations (GoK, 2012: 18). There were no Acts and GOs on aims and objectives of HE in Karnataka.

Expansion of Higher Education

Expansion of HE as a specific and focused strategy did not figure either in Karnataka University Review Commission (1980) or the Task Force on Higher Education (2004). The Strategy Paper on Shaping Education in Karnataka – Goals and Strategies (2002) did not take a position in favour of large-scale expansion of HE to boost GER that became the theme song of the expert groups set up from 2009 to 2012. The KKC's Mission Group on Higher Education maintained that India needs to expand its GER and skill its youth to take advantage of its demographic dividend. The Mission Group felt that Karnataka needs to expand nearly double of its existing position, viz., 18.15 per cent to attain 35 per cent GER (GoK, 2012: 10). The mission of the HE system in Karnataka for 2020 is "expanding the capacity of existing institutions or creating new institutions that provides education, engaging more faculty, increase in resources and increase in the depth and diversity of the kinds of courses offered" (GoK, 2012: 20-21).

In the context of declining enrolment in general arts and science courses at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels, enhancing the institutional capacity, the Mission Group felt would be possible only if those eligible and aspire for HE from the homes of first generation learners as well as those from poor families gain access to HE This entails a paradigm shift of HE from elite to mass character, and access to HE is the most important element for building a vibrant knowledge society. In order to address the aspect of expansion in higher education in the State, the Mission Group suggested some strategies related to enrolment and retention, introducing innovative ways of access and facilitation of more public-private institutions of higher education (GoK, 2012: 22-23). With respect to the state role, the Mission Group recommended opening of colleges and hostel facilities for women students and offering them scholarships, transport and mid-day meal facilities; opening evening and weekend colleges/institutes with special focus on skill development to encourage enrolment of women, SC/ST and minorities and differently abled in backward regions to reach 35 per cent of GER; establish District Universities with predominantly practice-oriented educated manpower according to local employment opportunities.

Government Response to Expansion, Inclusion and Equity in Higher Education: Apart from the tacit approval given to self-financing institutions in higher education – general, technical, professional and medical, the government pressed the accelerator on expansion of higher education by establishing more than a dozen new state universities during the first decade of this century (KSHEC, n.d.: 6-7). Meteoric increase in the number of private universities: in a matter of two years, i.e., 2012-13, the Karnataka government sanctioned 19 private universities. The objects and rationale cited for establishment of these private universities were that these were seen to be reputed agencies, and these universities would enhance the GER in the state (http://dpal.kar.nic.in/actsOrdinance.htm.).

Internationalisation of Higher Education

Emphasizing the need for Indian higher education to come under the GATS regime, the KKC's Mission Group recommended to replicate the European 'twining model' to ensure a two-way exchange/mobility of students/faculties; establish international relations office/cells in all major HEIs and put on university website comprehensive information about the courses and facilities offered; the focus of internationalisation to be on Asian and African countries that would have major say in the coming years; the government to form a single regulatory body to regulate courses and policies on internationalisation of higher education; and putting in place an easy visa process for academic and research purposes (GoK, 2012: 35).

This was somewhat similar to the model of internationalization suggested by the State Planning Board in 2009 in its document *Karnataka – a Vision for Development* – with focus on Vision 2020. This was the shift from the existing 'plate-meal' approach where courses for each programme are fixed to a 'cafeteria' approach where students have opportunities to choose from a variety of courses under broad guidelines, as in Europe. The European Credit Transfer System is shown as a model for emulation. In the official circles, this is the recipe for the vision of a transformed Karnataka in 2020 (GoK, 2009: 33).

Strengthening Governance in Higher Education

The working of the State University Act of 1976 was perceived by the KURC to be at the root of all problems affecting university and higher education in Karnataka. In its own words, "an important effect of the Act was to curtail the powers of the highest policy-making and executive authorities in the universities (particularly of the Senate and the Syndicate), change their composition in such a way as to reduce the weightage given to academic elements drawn from within, diminish the role of the Vice-Chancellor as the de facto executive head, concentrate vastly more powers in the Chancellor…, and widen the scope for intervention by the State Government in matters relating to the management of the universities; these have been detrimental to the effective functioning of the universities and colleges." The KURC felt "it is only by reversing the changes made in this direction and permitting greater scope for academic management from within that a process of regeneration of universities can be initiated" (KURC, 1980:118-19).

For greater decentralisation of the universities and colleges, the KURC strongly recommended to bring an amendment in the University Act to remove the clause of Chancellor's approval of Ordinances and Regulations and to vest them with Syndicate and Senate respectively. It felt that Senate is the body to pass Statutes and Syndicate make ordinances and AC to frame regulations regarding courses of study. The jurisdiction of the Chancellor should be limited to approving the statutes only. The power to create teaching posts should rest with Senate and not Chancellor. Therefore, the Chancellor's approval of appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff should be removed and vested with Syndicate. The KURC was emphatic that greater representation of academics should be ensured in AC and Syndicates (KURC, 1980: 120-21).

The Strategy Paper on *Shaping Education in Karnataka: Goals and Strategies* (2002) dealt with governance issues relating to school education. The Task Force on Higher Education (2004) observed that the education sector as a whole, including higher education

had remained under strong control of the state administrative machinery in Karnataka, as indeed in the rest of the country. The reason for this was that much of the money for this sector has come from Government. Learned educationists of the country have over many years deplored this heavy bureaucratisation of the education sector and have called for maximum autonomy to be given to the Vice-Chancellors and heads of academic institutions. While some of the leaders in Government concede the virtues of academic freedom in the abstract, in reality in the five decades after independence, the education sector has become heavily centralised and bureaucratised. The education sector bears all the hallmarks of being archaic, outmoded and subject to various ad-hoc interventions by civil servants and politicians (GoK, 2004: 6).

The KSHEC's *Vision 2020 Karnataka* document stated that one of the most important issues is the governing of self-financing and private institutions. Cadre and recruitment, quality of services, student welfare and infrastructure are all issues, which require special attention under the issue of governance, not to mention transparency of process and answerability of governing boards of institutions to the larger public (GoK, n.d. : 21-22). It recommended that a Students' Charter, similar to that of the Citizen's Charter could be introduced to ensure that institutions deliver on their promises and maintain standard procedures and measures for providing quality education. Alongside this, it is important to think of peer-review and peer-feedback system between different educational institutions within an education ecosystem such that greater checks and balances are built into the system (GoK, n.d.: 22).

The KKC's Mission Group on Higher Education (2012) treated the strategies related to Governance, Administration and Services in an integrated fashion. It reasoned that "Governing the mammoth and complex system of higher education is a demanding task. It demands constant reforms and their implementation." Some of the major issues discussed with regard to governance in higher education are: lack of autonomy in the real sense, over-centralisation, less accountability, concern over the increased political intervention, lack of financial support, lukewarm response to private institutions and reforming intra-institution administration.

The Mission Group contended that governance is the core of all major reforms towards progressive change in the higher education system. It suggested that Karnataka should evolve a policy for entry of foreign universities as per the Government of India's norms; encourage colleges to become autonomous and those with more than 15 years old, should be given special grants to attain autonomy and current norms should be made more liberal to enable larger number of colleges to seek autonomy; all universities and colleges should be accredited within five years and it should be linked with recognition and funding; and each university should set up a Director of Research to nurture and mentor faculty to submit research proposals, identify sources of funding, monitor completion and build a repository of researches and market them (GoK, 2012:35-37).

The original Order dated 6 October 1997, as revised on 7 August 2003 stated the Directorate of Collegiate Education (DOE) had the absolute power on funding and management; with respect to Aided Private Educational Institutions, the DOE will adopt stringent conditions to stop, reduce grants to institutions that violate government norms for admission, to follow non-discrimination for admission; and the managements will have to obtain a Code of Conduct from its staff, and shall dispense with the services of any employee who becomes a member or associates with any political party, takes part in politics, contests

election and becomes an MLA, MLC or Local Authority (GoK, 2006). The essence of the rules is control of private educational institutions. Its Governing Council should be so obedient to all that government rules regarding collection of fee, admission of students without any discrimination, not to open any subject/courses other than those for which affiliation is sought. There is no GO on any of the governance suggestions made by the Vision 2020 Groups.

Autonomous Colleges

Recalling the proposal made by the Education Commission for setting up autonomous colleges within the framework of universities, the KURC noted that though this proposal has received much attention, the progress made so far in implementing it has been very limited. "At the same time, such progress as has been reported from some universities that have started implementing the proposal, such as the University of Madras, are encouraging. In our view, therefore, this is a proposal that still deserves serious consideration from the universities in Karnataka" (KURC, 1980: 55-56). But nothing happened in the matter became evident when the Strategy Paper on *Shaping Education in Karnataka* examined the situation in 2002 and the Task Force on Higher Education reviewed the situation 24 years later.

With respect to higher education, the Strategy Paper (2002) viewed institutional autonomy as the only alternative to the much needed curriculum restructuring in higher education. But, unfortunately, the situation in the state was seen to be one of stagnation, and the general perception that higher education in Karnataka is not of high standard. To remedy this, the Strategy Paper argued that, firstly, the current system of rigid course offerings in colleges and universities at the first degree level has to be liberalised, and secondly, the institutional arrangement, such autonomous colleges is the only answer with the freedom to design curriculum and courses. But given the past experiences when such an initiative did not meet with success, the government should take more effective steps in formulating an appropriate scheme that allows autonomy to colleges (GoK, 2002: 59-60).

The government's response when some colleges did attempt to secure autonomy by directly applying to UGC did not indicate any conducive environment for academic freedom in Karnataka. In a Circular issued on 17th May, 2002, the Director of Collegiate Education drew attention to the applications for securing autonomy for their colleges submitted to the UGC directly through the University "without informing this office or Government." It went on to caution "As per the Government letter cited above it is mandatory for the Government Colleges to obtain prior approval of Government before submitting the application seeking the status of autonomy which implicates a high degree of administrative, financial and academic involvements which will have to be overseen by the Government constantly. Hence the principals of all the Government Colleges are hereby informed that here afterwards not to submit any applications directly either to UGC or University, without obtaining prior permission from the Commissionarate" (GoK, 2006, Part-I: 428).

There is no evidence of any proactive initiative by the government in the matter ever thereafter despite, as would be evident below, the strong pleas of many its own expert groups.

The Task Force (2004) examined the policy perspective through the different commissions and committees and expert groups starting from the University Education Commission in 1948-49 on granting autonomy to colleges. Based on this, the Task Force

deduced up that one of the objectives of autonomy is to provide an opportunity to the college to develop and grow in the right direction by relieving it from the unwanted controls of the State Government, University and Management over teaching and learning. This could be done by making provisions in the University Act wherever necessary to enable the colleges to become autonomous. The state was expected to formulate a scheme of incentives such as special assistance to selected colleges, creation of posts of Readers and Professors, provisions of higher level of grant for development to colleges that becomes autonomous. As on 2002-03, the number of autonomous colleges in India was 131 in states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, etc. *But there were no autonomous colleges in Karnataka.* Government colleges never addressed the issue of mobilisation of resources seriously. Autonomy impels this activity and hence needs proper encouragement from the State Government. And the government should enjoin the universities to issue a Government Order for granting autonomy to colleges (GoK, 2004: 54-55, emphasis added).

Supporting the strategy for autonomy, the KKC's Mission Group on higher education (2012) recommended that the colleges should be encouraged to become autonomous and all colleges more than 20 years old should be given special grants to attain autonomy. Similarly, all colleges and universities within the state should get accredited within five years (GoK, 2012: 36). The Mission Group outlined the initiatives that the universities needed to take up to achieve Vision 2020; this amounted to amending and overhauling Karnataka State Universities Act 2000 with regard to autonomy, and removal of geographical restrictions, flexibility and freedom to students, association between universities and other HEIs to facilitate inter/multi-disciplinary approaches to offering HE. The Act must reflect the new vision of the state and create an educational architecture which is relevant for the 21 century. The Act must also promote innovation, experimentation and flexibility in the governance structure of universities. Otherwise, it will become an obstacle for growth and development of higher education (GoK, 2012: 38).

Quality Improvement in Higher Education

With respect to quality in higher education, the KURC (1980) observed that in the policy followed by state government on private aided colleges, viz., the grant-in-aid, "no funds are available for improvement in the quality of education or for any other development purpose" (KURC,1980:34). It found that the quality of PG and Professional Education and Research in the university departments is below par and does not compare with the best we have in the country or abroad, besides proliferation of poor quality Ph.Ds (KURC, 1980: 80). With respect to technical education, especially in engineering education, the Commission found that the growth in the number of engineering colleges has become unmanageable and this unplanned growth has affected the quality of education badly (KURC, 1980: 82, 92). The Commission did not dwell on the concrete steps needed to mount improvement in the quality of higher education.

The Strategy Paper (2002) observed that strategic investment in quality improvement of the tertiary education system should be considered for top priority action. For this, the Government could act on three fronts, viz., (i) formulate minimum standards – infra-structure and academic facilities - for operating higher education institutions; (ii) promote selected institutions as centres of excellence which could act as benchmarks and models for

further improvement; and (iii) invest in professional development of teachers through such facilities which will have a multiplier effect by directly impacting the quality of the output. This will make Karnataka the destination for students from different parts of the country not because of the additional seats available but because of the quality of education offered (GoK, 2002: 69).

The Task Force on Higher Education (2004) did not mince its consternation that the quantitative expansion had resulted in the erosion of quality. It observed that the government's initiative in direct payment of salary of private aided colleges that contributed to the teaching quality being maintained would suffer if the GIA was withdrawn (GoK, 2004: 4; 7). It said that commitment to quality should be at the core of vision and leadership of the Vice-Chancellors and College Principals (GoK, 2004:14).

The Task Force held that the need for increase in the inputs to improve quality is pervasive to the entire spectrum of higher education, including training for quality of teacher performance. It was convinced that de-concentration of management and decentralisation in governance, especially granting autonomy to colleges and university departments would be the surest way for quality improvement in higher education (GoK, 2004:55). The quality of leadership at the college and university levels is central to the quality of education imparted. The Task Force identified that the quality of an institution depends on the quality of students at intake, the quality of faculty (in terms of qualification, experience, upgradation of their knowledge base), infrastructure (library, equipment, etc.) and relevance of academic programmes (GoK, 2004:65).

The Task Force surveyed the quality mechanisms devised in HE in Karnataka both in general and technical education like affiliation to university and accreditation in technical education, through National Board of Accreditation (NBA), NAAC, and ISO. It argued for setting up a Quality Management Structure with the State Council of Higher Education, as Quality Steering Team, with a five year action plan (GoK, 2004:155). The action plan should include identification of best practices world-wide, contextualise to the Indian situation and deploy across all the institutions. Setting up of a virtual Educational Quality Institute would serve as an environment for recognising and nurturing excellence (GoK, 2004:158).

The Vision 2020 document of KSHEC observed that "younger teachers entering the system are left un-mentored and unguided resulting in serious spiraling-down of research quality over the years. Therefore, it is crucial that teacher research be encouraged at a greater intensity than has been done in the past (KSCHE, n.d. 17). It emphasised selection of quality teaching faculty from outside the state and enforcing global benchmarks for quality of curriculum in universities (KSCHE, n.d.: 29).

The KKC's Mission Group felt that a revolution is needed to achieve the objectives envisioned in the *Vision 2020 for Higher Education* document, including improving the quality of faculty teaching and research (KKC, 2012:5). It was convinced that curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are fundamental for quality in higher education. They go hand-in-hand and are largely determined by the faculty, students and the type of the institutions. Assessment reforms are central to curricular and pedagogic practices in higher education, whereas little attention has been given to the evolution, practice and reform of these core elements at present. It suggested encouraging open courses that are developed by quality institutions to enable faculty from colleges and universities to derive benefits from this exercise. Credit can also be given to them in their performance evaluation/review

(KKC, 2012:32). There are no Gazette Notifications of GOs about any measures by the government about any components relating to quality improvement.

Funding Higher Education

The Mission Group of the KKC emphasised that the budget for HE should be at least 2 per cent of the GSDP and at least 30 per cent of the overall education budget. Universities should be allowed to float long term, 10-year bonds, guaranteed by the State, for creating necessary academic and hostel infrastructure, labs, libraries, etc. The interest for the bond would be paid by the university and the principal paid by the state. The Department of Higher Education should constitute an advisory board with insiders and external stakeholders including representatives of industry, with some professionals taken as Advisors, selected on national/global basis, to help in policy making (GoK, 2012: 39-40).

The Grants-in-Aid (GIA)

The KURC said that it proposed no change in the present administrative arrangements for funding the normal maintenance requirements of government colleges, and for channeling grants-in-aid to the private colleges, and the role of the Department of Education and the concerned Directorates of Collegiate, Technical and Medical Education in regard to these matters will remain substantially the same as hitherto. The Department and the Directorates might, however, secure the advice of the State Commission for Higher Education on issues such as the norms to be applied when making funds available for maintenance. The Commission said that there are also several improvements that can be made by the Department of Education in the administration of government colleges, such as by delegating more powers to the concerned Directorates and giving additional powers to the Principals (KURC, 1980: 124-25).

But the government did not accept the KURC's recommendation of "no change" in the GIA policy. Instead, the government made it sure that since 1987-88, all new degree colleges were started on a permanently non-GIA basis. Since 1991-92, no new grants (sanctioning additional teaching staff posts) were made available, either to the existing courses or for new courses, in the aided colleges. It resulted in stagnation of GIA policy over the years (Narayan, 1999).

One of the first subjects that the Task Force (2004) took up for detailed study was the grant-in-aid policy. As the Task Force commenced its deliberations, it became aware that the State Government was seriously considering recommendations of a committee set up by it, which proposed that no new colleges would be brought under the GIA scheme and favoured an exit policy to phase out GIA to institutions receiving them over a period of time. The proposal favoured stopping GIA to colleges that received the grant for ten years in urban areas and fifteen years in the rural areas. The Task Force noted that private but government aided colleges accounting for 31.60 per cent of the total number of colleges, provided education for almost 60 per cent of the students.

Private unaided colleges constituting 51.20 per cent of the total number account for only 17.50 per cent of the total student enrolment. Direct payment of salaries to the teaching staff of private aided colleges assured them a fair deal and thus contributed to the teaching quality being maintained. The Task Force noted that if the GIA were withdrawn from general

degree colleges, the fees would have to be increased some 21 times than at present. This would certainly affect availability of quality collegiate education to many young men and women in the state. The impact will be especially hard on students from middle- and low-income families and more so on girls. The Task Force recommends that the GIA, as at present, should be continued and indeed extended to other colleges when the state finances permit it. Otherwise, the results would be devastating:

> Thus, the cumulative total number of colleges to be out of GIA in 2008 will be 98.63 percent of GDCs [General Degree Colleges], 100 percent of LDCs [Law Degree Colleges] and 96 percent of B. Ed colleges. Or, 98.46 percent of 325 presently aided colleges will be out of GIA policy by 2008. *In essence, this means that the State Government will take no responsibility for higher education, a position not found anywhere else in the world in either developed or developing countries* (GOK, 2004:96, emphasis original).

The government-aided private colleges, albeit controlled by the government in all aspects of its management, by the Directorate of Collegiate Education, were allowed some leeway in fixing their tuition fees and other fees like library and lab fees, etc.

The GIA Enigma of Karnataka: It was noted earlier, the committed liabilities as seen in actual expenditure far outstripped the initial outlay by several times, and that government was reeling under the weight of GIA, exhausting all its allocation for higher education, leaving nothing for expansion, quality improvement and such other pressing tasks. The exit from GIA was inevitable. The government was not inclined to honour its GIA commitment forever no matter what its commissions and committees felt or said. Between 1981 and 2003 through five GOs it was clarified that: College will become eligible for GIA only when it is 5 years old, rather than 3 years as before; Private colleges started after 1985-86 academic year would be grant less for 7 years; and all private institutes and courses started after June 17, 1987 would be permanently ineligible for GIA (GoK, 2006, Part-1).

Suggestions on Content and Curriculum

The KURC devoted a great deal of attention to the reorganisation of undergraduate and post-graduate programmes to *lend greater relevance to suit the needs of students in their life situation*. At the level of *Undergraduate Programmes* (UG), the Commission advocated to introduce various types of courses to suit different needs of students. It suggested that two types of courses should be offered for Bachelor degree: one *to provide liberal education with some vocational training*, and another, a special programme intended for those to pursue PG education. It emphasised that courses at UG level should have three subjects with supplementary courses and *the education at this level should have practical bias. Project-based courses should be offered so that students apply their knowledge. If adequate training is given to improve students' ability to communicate effectively in a language,* medium of instruction should not be a problem – whether English or Kannada. The Commission suggested that a State Commission for Higher Education should be created to guide the development of HE in the state and it could approach eminent writers to write suitable books to overcome shortage of good text books (KURC, 1980: 59-60). It is humbling to see the concerns in vogue today, viz, the emphasis laid on practical bias and improving language communication ability, forty years ago.

Twenty years down the line did not witness much change in curriculum and courses at the UG level. The Strategy Paper (2002) felt that the current system of rigid course offerings in colleges and universities at the first degree level has to be liberalised. Courses in non-traditional areas as also courses in general liberal education is *necessary to develop creativity and adaptability among graduates*. The Strategy Paper also linked flexibility in courses, integrating non-traditional and traditional courses with institutional autonomy as a critical enabling environment (GoK, 2002: 60-61). In the area of technical education, the Strategy Paper, much like the KURC in 1980, noticed the situation far grimmer: "However, the current curriculum is subject-centred and supply-driven, not competency-based. Relevance of curriculum to meet industry requirement is questionable. Most curricula are rigid. *The response time for need-based curriculum and the mechanism to do it is not in place*. It underlined the *need for relevance and quality to build the interface with the world of work* (GoK, 2002: 66-67).

The Task Force on Higher Education, 2004, noticed that the curricula prescribed at the top by the university and administered in a decentralised manner might have achieved a level of uniformity and standardisation, but this top-down approach had become totally outdated. It emphasised that curricula should developed in a decentralised manner involving the teachers, students, parents and the local community of employers, entrepreneurs and professionals, which was very cumbersome in the existing centralised system. Hence, it recommended that since many people conclude their education at the *first-degree level, it is necessary that the graduates acquire both knowledge and skills required for use in their working life*. A related matter is that while the importance of *career-oriented courses has long been recognised, no sustained effort has been made to popularise them. This situation needs to be rectified urgently; otherwise the dislinkage between academic training and the demands of the employment market will perpetuate* (GoK, 2004: 7-8).

The Task Force wondered that *if 88.8 per cent are enrolled at bachelors degree level, and do not go beyond, how do we prepare graduates with knowledge and skills related to their subject area and useful to the world of work?* It felt that while a basic course could be developed for all faculties at the undergraduate level, the best learning would take place through implementation in action projects undertaken in the field. For example, universities and colleges could have linkages with schools in their area/district for upgrading their quality, as they are the feeder institutions for the higher education system. The students could provide the much-needed co-curricular and extra-curricular activities for the children while the college and university teachers could upgrade the teaching (GoK, 2004: 25-26).

Ruing the lack of dynamic learning goals observed with present day college students, KSHEC's *Vision 2020* document advocated that "it is imperative that instead of focusing merely on developing market-friendly courses, which in the final instance succumb to the very fluctuations in the demand from the market or at any rate narrow down the skill sets of a graduate student to one vocational stream, *it is important to render courseware relevant by instilling in students broad-based competencies and critical thinking abilities*" (GoK, n.d.: 16).

The KKC's Mission Group on Higher Education Vision 2020 advocated that a large part of the curriculum at the under graduate level should be devoted to developing problem solving skills of students, application of knowledge and must move away from rote learning and memorisation. The role of the teacher should be that of a facilitator rather than a disseminator of knowledge. Project work in every course where practical application of

knowledge will be demonstrated should be given at least 25 per cent of the total marks (GoK, 2012: 33). It is disheartening to see no Gazette Notification on curriculum restructuring from the government level, when such powerful pleas were made to connect education with life and employability-oriented skills.

Examinations

The KURC noted the serious problems in the evaluation system at the university level that it was highly centralised at the level of Controller of Examinations, and it needed to incorporate internal and external examinations. The KURC proposed a scheme where the results of college examinations in various subjects will be indicated along with the results of the university examinations in the marks card or certificate issued to a student at the end of each year. The university examinations would serve to act as a check on the college examination results and provide a uniform frame of reference for evaluation (KURC, 1980: 72).

With regard to examinations at university and college education level, the Task Force noted that it is unfortunate that the system has affected teaching and learning to an extent that everything appears to hang on to the examination system with little emphasis on learning skills and most emphasis on memorisation. With the increase in student enrolment, the need today is to support a more decentralised system as is prevalent in some other States. The university may set examination only for third year of undergraduate studies and for second year of post-graduate studies*. The first two years of the undergraduate and first year of the post-graduate programme should be internal to the college/university department. The results obtained should count for 30 per cent of the final results and, as the system develops experience, it could increase to 40 per cent* (GoK, 2004: 35-36). The one reference to examinations advocated by the Vision 2020 document was its strong plea to bring examination reforms to test the competencies and skills of students rather than their memory. It recommended introducing the concept of Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation, after carefully examining the required modalities (GoK, n.d.: 42). There is no specific reference to any GO relating to reforms in examinations and assessment system in higher education since the 1960s till date.

Teachers

The KURC noticed a great degree of frustration among teachers as a large number of them do not get promotions either because available positions are short of eligible number of teachers or due to the social reservation policy. Once they miss one change, it would be very long gap before the next chance. KURC suggested personal promotion scheme and automatic implementation of the UGC pay scales with its every pay revision system. It also found no avenue for professional development of teachers and recommended faculty development programmes like in-service and M.Phil/Ph.D programmes (KURC, 1980: 110-13), Neither the Strategy Paper (2002), nor the Report of the Task Force on Higher Education (2004) devoted attention to teacher development issues in higher education.

As part of the strategy to achieve Vision 2020, the KKC's Mission Group on Higher Education suggested that the universities and colleges in Karnataka should proactively, and independent of state policy, establish an independent academy at the state level on a public-

private partnership basis, for all issues pertaining to teachers like recruitment, foundation/induction training, periodic capacity building, performance assessment, professional development, ethics, research and database management. The Academy should create a one-year MBA programme in Academic Administration to develop capacity for leadership in universities and colleges. All heads of higher educational institutions should undergo this course in order to increase the efficiency and build professional capacity among them (GoK, 2012: 37).

All the GOs from the 1980s relate to recruitment, pay scales of teaching and non-teaching staff, revision of pay scales based on UGC pay revision and its implementation in universities in Karnataka in government and aided colleges. These also relate to the UGC communications to the Director of the Directorate of Collegiate Education regarding implementation of UGC regulations about teachers, their qualification, participation in refresher courses, exemptions, etc. It also deals with pay and service matters of Librarians and Physical Education Directors. The GOs of the 1980s, the '90s and later, do not touch about government's response to recommendations of commissions and expert groups on higher education. Therefore, the issue of government response still remains an unanswered question. Especially from the 1990s, these relate to communications from UGC, addressed to the Director of Collegiate Education and the GoK's GOs. The GOs are mainly from the Directorate of Collegiate Education on pay fixation, consequent upon adoption of UGC pay scales. After 2000, government notification about seniority, said that seniority position should be determined by the length of service notwithstanding promotion on the basis of reservation (GoK, 2006).

Student-Centric Strategies

The Task Force on Higher Education (2004) laid an overwhelming stress to bridge the academic gap of students from weak academic background at the school level from rural areas and poor socio-economic background who enter into HEIs. It is worth recalling the KURC (1980) concern for extending HE opportunities to students from rural areas and from poor families was the reason for its opposition for quitting the GIA regime, because that would entail hiking the fees 21 times, putting it beyond the reach of poor students. The expert groups that dwelt on HE in Karnataka never failed to position this – extending HE opportunities to students of rural and poor households – as the central part of Karnataka HE development. Higher Education, as per the KKC Mission Group's Vision 2020 for Karnataka (2012) should be student centric in design and approach. This document is based on one fundamental principle: higher education should primarily be student centric. Its policy recommendations call for a paradigm shift in Karnataka's HE system to empower the aspiring youth as well as all other key stakeholders of HE to take on the challenges posed by knowledge-centric society (GoK, 2012: 3).

The Mission Group observed: "All of us are pained at the present situation where students are not treated as autonomous adults who can make choices, take responsibility and partake education in partnership with the teachers. Not only are students not allowed free mobility in choosing colleges and universities, they are also rigidly constrained in the choices of subjects they can take and the work for which they can be evaluated. In a changing world these issues are of prime importance. Education around the world has changed by

taking these needs of the students into account. Karnataka cannot afford to lag behind and if it does so, it will only deeply harm our next generation of students" (GoK, 2012: 6).

The Mission Group was forthright in stating that "Students are the heart and soul of the higher education system. They are the majority and also the most vulnerable in the system. To revitalise the higher education system in the State, the students need to be central to the process and their aspirations need to be the driving force as we move along." Therefore, the Group recommended, that: (i) All universities and colleges should start inter/multi-disciplinary courses based on local needs and aspirations of students; (ii) Students should have flexibility to move from one university/college to another within the state along with credits transfer; (iii) Allow reputed private colleges and new private universities to expand capacity freely in all courses and increase student capacity, besides allowing them 15 per cent extra supernumerary seats for students from other states and other countries to usher in cosmopolitanism and internationalisation of HE in Karnataka; (iv) Create quality hostel facilities in all state universities/Government and aided colleges to enable the entry of educationally and economically disadvantaged sections into higher education; and (v) Expand the intake into Masters and PhD programmes, with a comprehensive scholarship programme to cover at least 20 per cent of the UG capacity by 2020 (GoK, 2012: 26-28).

A special emphasis was laid on providing opportunities for women students and the Mission Group recommended incentivising opening of women colleges and hostel facility for women students by offering scholarships, transport and mid-day meal facilities. In addition, liberalisation of opening evening and weekend colleges/institutes, with special focus on skill development to encourage enrolment of women, minorities, Scheduled Castes/Tribes, other backward classes and differently abled people in backward regions to increase the GER up to 35 per cent, must be encouraged (GoK, 2012: 38).

Besides sanctioning 10 state universities and 19 private universities during 2003-2013, there are not Acts, GOs and Gazette Notifications on any of these recommendations.

Private Aided and Unaided Colleges

As seen earlier on growth of university and collegiate education, the state of Karnataka, including its earlier counterpart, the state of Mysore, is one state that started private aided colleges, contemporaneous with neighbours, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu even during the pre-Independence period. Karnataka, in particular, was perhaps a pioneer in starting un-aided private colleges, especially in technical and professional education. The KURC extensively surveyed these institutions and found that "a fairly high proportion of the colleges started under private management over the last two decades (which form nearly two-thirds of all the colleges now in existence)." It admitted "there are of course several colleges that have been established and carefully nurtured by persons and social groups with deep and abiding interests in higher education; they generally, stand out for the relatively high academic standards they try to maintain, and would therefore fall within the 20 per cent of the total…".

The Commission was blunt in stating: "But such concern and commitment are perhaps not easy to find in the majority of cases. Many new colleges seem to have been started by persons, with little interest in or knowledge about higher education, who have been attracted to it mainly by the generous grants-in-aid extended by the State Government to colleges, the patronage they could exercise by being part of the management

(through appointments of teachers, admission for students etc.), and the wider social and political prominence they could gain through activities of this nature. Indeed, a not insignificant number of colleges — particularly professional colleges — have been sponsored in the State by unscrupulous persons interested only in making money by exploiting the system of 'capitation fees' and turning higher education into another arena for black marketing. Though some colleges initially started on the basis of capitation fees have played a pioneering role and have maintained good standards (sometimes better than in government colleges) a large number of the newer ones have shown little regard for academic considerations" (KURC, 1980: 10-11).

Both the Strategy Paper (2002) as well as the Task Force on Higher Education (2004) did not advocate any specific policy change regarding unaided private colleges although they took cognizance of their overwhelming presence in technical and other professional education. The Strategy Paper noted that in 2000, there were 65 Engineering Colleges of which 80 per cent of them were in the private unaided sector, accounting for 76 per cent of student intake (GoK, 2002: 64). But beyond this, the Strategy Paper did not suggest any specific road map with respect to government policy towards the private unaided HE institutions, both general and technical and professional.

The KSHEC's Vision 2020 document was convinced of the need of policy milieu favouring entry of private players in HE freely, the need to take care of regulatory and governance issues regarding private institutions, both Indian and foreign, about the scope of services they would be willing to offer, facilities they need to create, policy of enrolment, etc (GoK, n.d.: 12). The KKC's Mission Group (2012) observed that for the year 2010-2011, 3134 institutes were under collegiate education. More than half (51.9 per cent) are unaided thereby illustrating the growth of the private institutions in the higher education sector.

A majority of the engineering colleges (87.2 per cent) and polytechnics (57.4 per cent) are private institutions. It recommended to (i) allow reputed private colleges to expand capacity freely in all courses subject to meeting norms regarding infrastructure, faculty, maintenance of a suitable faculty student ratio, fees structure and qualitative norms of Government/concerned agencies from time to time; and (ii) allow the entry of new private universities based on objective and transparent criteria to ensure greater variety of courses and increased student capacity subject to an independent and professional regulatory mechanism (GoK, 2012: 26-27). These recommendations were also the same with respect to "Student-centric strategies," as seen earlier. The most recent position when management type is clear can be seen in the following table.

TABLE 1

Collegiate Education Including Unaided Private Colleges in Karnataka

Year	*Government Colleges*	*Private Colleges*		*Total*	*Students*
		Aided	Unaided		
1960	17	25	NA	42	27,338
1994-95	136	267	276	679	4.36 lakhs
1999-2000	151	300	484	935	4.23 lakhs
2003-04	165	300	532	998	3,43,472
2005-06	167	765+67 law		1000	
2006-07	482 + aided				6.75 lakhs
2010-11	574	384	1886	2884	11.78 lakhs*
2013-14	362	315	1764	2441	NA
2015-16	411	321	1764	2496	NA
2018-19	413	319	NA	NA	NA
2019-20	430	319	NA	NA	NA

Note: Management type details and student strength is not clearly available after 2013-14.
Source: GoK, 1996), *Handbook of Karnataka, 1996*; and 2001: 200-02; 2010, pp.390-91; *AIHSE 2010-11, T-5; GoK, *Draft Annual Plan 2014-15*, Vol. I, p. 313; Government of Karnataka (2019), *Economic Survey, 2018-19*, p. 21; and *2019-20*, p. 21.

TABLE 2

Classification of Engineering Institutes in Karnataka

Year	*Govt.*	*University*	*Pvt. Aided*	*Pvt. Unaided*	*Total*
2009-10	11	3	11	149	174
2010-11	11	3	11	162	187
2011-12	11	3	11	170	195
2012-13	11	3	11	185	210
2013-14	11	3	11	181	206
2014-15	11	3	11	180	205
2015-16	11	3	11	196	221
2016-17	11	3	11	202	227
2017-18	11	3	11	209	234
2018-19	11	3	11	215	240

Source: Government of Karnataka (2010), *Annual Administration Report, 2009-10.* p. 30; and for later years 2010-11, p. 30; 2011-12, p. 34; 2012-13, p. 36; 2013-14, p. 54; 2014-15, p. 38; 2015-16, p. 39; 2016-17, p. 46; 2017-18, p. 43, and GoK (2019), *Economic Survey, 2018-19*, p. 617.

Karnataka is perhaps the only state where the crisis in TE, especially in the form of engineering and professional education institutions being closed down, is not severe. The decline from 185 to 181 between 2012-12 and 2014-15 was arrested in the very next year and continues to increase ever year thereafter.

The GOs and Acts about Aided and Unaided Private technical and professional education institutions, as seen from the *Gazette Notifications*, *Part I.* 1962 to 2004, dwell on fixing the limit of tuition fees and the approval for choosing their own head. The Karnataka Professional Educational Institutions Regulation of Admission and Determination of Fee Act, 2006 talks about regulating admission and determining fee in professional colleges so as to provide reservations to SC, ST and OBC students. On more or less same issue, the Act of 2007, 2011, 2013, 2014 and finally Karnataka Act 39 of 2015 were broadened to ensure the government quota of seats in private educational institutions is filled by the Common Entrance Test merit list and single window system of admissions. The seat matrix for admissions was 40, 40 and 20 per cent; 40 per cent is the government quota based on CET conducted by the state; 40 per cent is the management quota, and through the CET conducted by the Association of Unaided Professional Educational Institutions and 15 per cent is the NRI quota, again with the institutions. The Acts from 2007 to 2015 also clearly stipulate the fee structure for different courses so as to ban exploitative and exorbitant fees (full references in bibliography).

Conclusion and Similarities with National Education Policy. 2020

In the case of Karnataka, unlike Tamil Nadu and Kerala, there is no reference in any government documents about accepting the recommendations of the commissions, committees and expert groups on education the government had set up. At the same time, it is surprising to see policy measures initiated by the government that have no sync with the recommendations of the commission it set up. This inconsonance emerges from a study of the Acts, Rules and Ordinances in the Gazette Notification vis-à-vis the many aspects upon which the Commissions/Committees devoted their attention and made specific recommendations. The Karnataka Gazette notifications show a certain peculiarity. That is the pre-occupation with the issues dominating the amendments – Civil Service Rules of teaching and non-teaching staff in public universities, government and government-aided colleges, sometimes stretching over three decades. The other issue dominating the government response is on the regulation of admission processes and norms and determination of the fee structure in unaided private professional educational institutions. As seen in more than 10 critical issues examined by the Commissions/Committees on HE, there is no sync between the recommendations of Commissions/Committees and the GOs. This is why the policy on higher education in Karnataka is seen as inconsonant, contradictory and sometimes paradoxical.

About the aims and objectives of HE, there is an evolving change in discourses of HE Commissions/Committees with a clear demarcation between the pre-and post-XI Five Year Plan and the National Knowledge Commission [NKC] (2006) phase, about the aims, roles and objectives of HE. The pre-IX Plan Commissions and Committees, Expert Groups and Task Forces believed that the aims and objectives of HE should be guided by the social context, which it believed, must shift from its elitist to the mass character with spatial, social and

gender equity and inclusion objectives besides providing academic inputs necessary for the first generation learners.

With the onset of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation, where survival of the fittest is shaped by the resources at their command, students from weaker section must be supported by the government and HE made affordable to them. With the emergence of negative forces of wasteful consumerism and such social realities, education must include emphasis on values, especially those in enshrined in Indian Constitution. The post-2009 era expert groups on HE were guided by the Vision 2020 for Karnakata and its HE, where creation of vibrant knowledge society was posited as the goal of HE and market-friendly curriculum as a vehicle to achieve the Vision 2020. There is no specific Government Order on aims and objectives of HE, save the reservations in admissions to the socially disadvantaged students.

The aims and objectives of higher education that informed the perceptions in Karnataka resemble those envisioned in the new National Education Policy, 2020. Higher education, NEP believes, would help develop India as envisioned in its Constitution ---as a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all. At the same time, much like the perceptions of Karnataka Vision 2020, the NEP stresses that given the 21st century requirements, quality higher education must aim to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals. It must prepare students for more meaningful and satisfying lives and work roles and enable economic independence (Government of India [GOI], 2020: 33).

The new Education Policy is in complete agreement with the concerns and the call for the student-centric ecosystem by emphasising that physical, academic, social, cultural that is conducive for learning and happy academic experience stressed by the commissions and committees in Karnataka. The overwhelming opinion was against the government exit from GIA regime as that would entail 21 times the fees that 61 per cent of students in aided colleges would have to pay. Extending HE opportunities for students from rural areas and poor household was the central piece of recommendations. The NEP lays down that each HEI will integrate its academic plans ranging from curricular improvement to quality of classroom transaction, will be committed to the holistic development of students and create strong internal systems for supporting diverse student cohorts in academic and social domains both inside and outside formal academic interactions in the classroom. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds require encouragement and support to make a successful transition to higher education and there will also be professional academic and career counselling available to all students, as well as counsellors to ensure physical, psychological and emotional well-being (GOI, 2020: 39).

Harassed by the mounting burden of grant-in-aid demands on the fragile state allocation for HE and under the declining funding support from UGC to the State universities, the policy approach of State Government towards HE was not in favour of its expansion of HE besides consolidation, as became evident during VIII to X Five Year Plans. But from the turn of this century and especially the post-NKC phase, increase in GER to reach 35 per cent began to be perceived by the Commission/Committee as an inseparable way to achieve the Vision 2020. The explicit and direct connect between the Commission/Committee recommendations and the government response was seen in the establishment of 12 State universities and 19 private universities within a span of less than 10years between 2003 and 2013. In the case of Karnataka, the expansion was also in sync with the paradigm shift from elitist to

mass character with inclusion and equity objectives, as was seen from the GOs on regulation of admissions and fee structure.

In respect of expansion of higher education, the NEP assures that more HEIs will be established and developed in underserved regions to ensure full access, equity, and inclusion. There will be, by 2030, be at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district. Steps shall be taken towards developing high-quality higher education institutions both public and private that have medium of instruction in local/Indian languages or bilingually. The aim will be to increase the GER in higher education including vocational education from 26.3 per cent (2018) to 50 per cent by 2035. Growth will be in both public and private institutions, with a strong emphasis on developing a large number of outstanding public institutions. There will be a fair and transparent system for determining increased levels of public funding support for public HEIs (GOI, 2020: 35).

The single most distinct USP of Karnataka HE is on the issue of governance. The KURC 1980, the Strategy Paper (2002) and the Task Force on HE (2004) have been the staunchest critics of the over-centralisation by the State government on governance of universities and its colleges. The KURC's recommendation to restore affiliation of colleges from state government to universities was never implemented. There is also no evidence of its recommendation being acted upon that the Chancellor should have no role in framing Ordinances and Regulations and creation and recruitment of teaching and non-teaching positions in universities. On the other hand, when some colleges applied directly to the UGC for autonomy, the Directorate of Collegiate Education came down heavily on them, that they have no authority to do it except through the Directorate of Collegiate Education. This explains why there was no autonomous college in Karnataka well after even year 2000 unlike in all other states.

On governance of HEIs, including universities, the NEP's take is explicit: governance of HEIs would be by high qualified independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy (GOI, 2020: 34). The new regulatory system envisioned by this Policy will foster this overall culture of empowerment and autonomy to innovate, including by gradually phasing out the system of 'affiliated colleges' over a period of fifteen years through a system of graded autonomy. Each existing affiliating university will be responsible for mentoring its affiliated colleges. All colleges currently affiliated to a university shall attain the required benchmarks over time to secure the prescribed accreditation benchmarks and eventually become autonomous degree-granting colleges. This will be achieved through a concerted national effort including suitable mentoring and governmental support for the same (GOI, 2020: 36).

The commission/committees on education, in general, and HE, in particular, never had even one good word to say about the curriculum and evaluation. They found both curriculum and the system of evaluation outdated, centralized and rigid. They were forthright in calling for radical reforms and improvement. It is humbling to see that over 40 years ago the KURC in 1980 was that the curriculum at UG level should lend greater relevance to suit the needs of students in their life situation, and at the first-degree level, it is necessary that the graduates acquire both knowledge and skills required for use in their working life – what is very much in vogue now, in the context of New Education Policy, 2020. The tenacity of the resistance of the higher education system to change, the indifference of government and the heartburn of the successive commissions on the issue is an engrossing duel worth taking note of.

It is a refreshing to notice how the NEP, 2020 represents an endorsement and reiteration of the KURC's passionate pleas. The NEP advocates a complete overhaul and re-energising of the higher education system that is intended to address some of the challenges facing in moving towards a more multidisciplinary undergraduate education; and revamping curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student support for enhanced student experiences (Government of India, 2020: 34).

In respect of curriculum and courses, the NEP spells out that towards the attainment of such a holistic and multidisciplinary education, the flexible and innovative curricula of all HEIs shall include credit-based courses and projects in the areas of community engagement and service, environmental education, and value-based education. Environment education will include areas such as climate change, pollution, waste management, sanitation, conservation of biological diversity, management of biological resources and biodiversity, forest and wildlife conservation, and sustainable development and living (GOI, 2020: 37).

The policy environment in respect of HE in Karnataka presents a contradictory and inconsistent pattern; An intensely argued and articulated position would be taken on key issues relating to higher education like its objectives in relation to society, governance, autonomy, curriculum relevance, evaluation, etc. Radical changes would be suggested. Little would be done by administration administering and controlling the HE system. The dilemma of policy analysis is the non-reflection of the policy recommendations of the commissions, expert groups and Task Forces on HE in any of the government documents and continuation of the same old defects, deficiencies on the ground whether in universities or colleges.

Across the deliberations and recommendations made by different Commissions, Expert Groups and Task Forces, there have been substantial and very wide differences in perspectives, depending on, perhaps, the political environment and party government in power at that time as well as the political environment at the national level and its reflection on the Five Year Plan approach and strategy with respect to higher education. Inbreeding in the universities, bureaucratic and political interference in academic and administrative affairs of universities and colleges, and the Commission's strong recommendations to free academic institutions from inbreeding and outside interference and giving them complete autonomy, the strong disapproval of the state's exit policy on GIA, and the ban on capitation fee based/dependent unaided private colleges seemed more urgent in the context of the 1980s. The concern for providing opportunities to students from socio-economically poorer sections of the society was the underlying concern in the advocacy to continue the GIA policy and the ban on capitation fee-centred private unaided colleges.

The strongly articulated preference for a higher education system embedded in and imbued with the values enshrined in Indian Constitution as the aim of education as a strong counterpoint to job-market ready preparation role of higher education – both could be seen in the same state in a matter of less than 10 years difference. This could be explained by the national policy milieu, sending such signals to the state levels with which political and financial patronage depended. It also explained by the UGC policy approach. The Eleventh Five Year Plan approach of excellence via equity and inclusion rubbed on the state policy directions and future vision of higher education. However, the Vision changed within one year when the Twelfth Five Year Plan heralded the market friendly and pro-privatisation approach to higher education.

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