

**TRANSFORMED EDUCATION SYSTEM UNDER LPG REFORMS AND  
SCHOOL CHOICE IN INDIA**

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SURVI



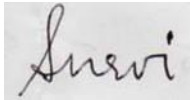
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## DECLARATION BY THE SCHOLAR

This is to certify that the M.Phil. Dissertation/Ph.D. thesis being submitted by me on the topic titled '**Transformed Education System under LPG Reforms and School Choice in India**' has been completed under the guidance of **Dr. Naresh Kumar**. It is declared that the present study has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship or Fellowship to this or any other University.

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## **CERTIFICATE OF THE SUPERVISOR**

This is to certify that the dissertation/thesis entitled '**Transformed Education System under LPG Reforms and School Choice in India**' is the work undertaken by **Ms. Survi** under my supervision and guidance as part of her M.Phil degree in this Institute. To the best of my knowledge, this is the original work conducted by him/her and the dissertation/thesis may be sent for evaluation.

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## **List of abbreviation**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
DFID	Department for International Development
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
EFA	Education for All
EFNA	Economic Freedom Network Asia
EPIS	Education Promotion Society of India
Et al.	Et alia (and others)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOI	Government of India
IFI	International Financial Institution
IFC	International Finance Corporation
LFP	Low fee Private
LPG	Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education in India
RTE	Right to Education
SAA	Structural Adjustment Agreement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSA	Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan
TANs	Trans National Advocacy Network
U-DISE	Unified-District Information System for Education
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural organization
USA	United states of America
UP	Uttar Pradesh
Vs	Versus
&	And

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The LPG reforms that were introduced in the 1990's in India have led to wide ranging transformation in the education sector. The liberalization of education has led to increased privatization; consequently a new phenomenon of the 'low-fee-private' (Srivastava, 2007) schools is expanding in India, (De *et al.*, 2002, Aggarwal 2000, Tooley 2006, Harma, 2010). The rapid expansion of the private schools is in response to or is a reaction to the failure of the government provision of education in the country (PROBE 1999, Tooley 2006, Harma, 2010). The expansion is such that they are said to be 'mushrooming' in the country attracting the lower and middle income groups and serving as an alternative to failing government schools. These schools are owned and run by private individuals and are funded entirely by the parental fee payments. They are also run at the lowest fees possible and are therefore termed as the 'low-fee-private' schools (Harma, 2011, Nambissan, 2003). The other defining feature of these schools is that they have complete autonomy in terms of management of school, hiring teachers and pedagogy (De *et al.*, 2002). The growth of LFP's which was an urban phenomenon initially has now reached the rural parts of the country and one can see a considerable growth of these schools today (Kingdon, 1995). The growth and expansion of the LFP's is believed to be the way forward and has been argued in many studies that these schools are essential in order to meet the EFA and other educational goals (Tooley, 2006, 2009). There are technical reports available suggesting the education performance which is believed to be better than the government schools and the preference of unrecognized forms of private schooling by lower income households (Majumdar & Vaidyanathan, 1995; Probe Report, 1999). There are other technical reports that showed that during the span of the Jomtien and Dakar, 'Education for All' commitments have led to a 58% growth in private education globally (Patrinos *et al.*, 2009).

Education today is defined as a commodity and is highly marketised. The growing commercialization of education has been made possible by various National and



International reforms which are part of larger global reforms. The reforms introduced in 1991, the LPG reforms in India are in coherence with the changing international scenario. The Liberalization, Privatization and Globalisation are policy reforms influenced by a larger ideology of Neoliberalism. The neoliberal ideology had swayed the global politics since the 1980's and had influenced ideas of a globalised world with various policy reforms influenced by the “best practices” across nations for development. The role of the private non-state actors has gained prominence with influential policy actors such as the World Bank, UNESCO and other donor organizations (Patrinos *et al.*, 2009). The globalised world has witnessed a ‘neoliberal globalisation’ with the coming together of powerful networks that aims to expand the private education system and influence as well as shape the education policies in the developing countries (Nambissan, 2014). Neoliberalism has propagated the idea of minimum government and maximum governance which has consequently led to the withdrawal of the government from many sectors to foster development complying with the neoliberal idea of development and governance through new mechanism known as ‘New Public Management’ (NPM). The states while formulating policies have done so keeping in mind the economic perspective of education and therefore keywords such as “school-to-work” and “education for employment” were the main focus of the major policy document of various states, which unveil the marketisation of education by states (Apple, 2000). The neoliberal agenda demands for a conducive environment for investment, privatisation and trade openness (Sadasivam 1997 and Babb 2005). The marketisation, commodification and privatization of education have been the new regulatory norm of education. These reforms are backed by the logic that such reforms would increase the total wealth in the global system which would eventually benefit everyone.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The formation of UNESCO in 1946 marked the beginning of discussing education as a Global issue. The 1950's and 1960's were the heyday of global organizing around the issue of education (Benavot & Resnick, 2006). UNESCO framed education as a global issue and was central to the institutionalisation of many different set of ideas concerning

education. The coming up of multilateral global institutions dealing with issues like education reshaped educational perspective and UNESCO specifically promoted ideas like education led to development (Chabbott, 1999). The liberal developmentalist ideas of the wealthier nation members of UNESCO convinced them that education does not continue to be that profitable and they started to cut aids to education programs (Mundy 1998). UNESCO's funding shrunk and other multilateral institutions within the International Financial Institution (IFI) such as World Bank and International Finance Corporation (IFC) began to overshadow UNESCO's role in the education field.

The World Bank today is the single largest source of Finance along with being a host to multiple other pooled funds. The bank in terms of policies and funding have been dominated by the northern countries which hold the largest voting share in decision making of the bank. Amongst the northern countries, the USA has been a constant in influencing the policy preferences and decisions of the World Bank (Woods, 2000 and Wade, 2002). “USA has promoted neo-liberal orthodoxy within the Bank and IMF as a result of which the focus on poverty in the Bank’s corporate level discourse declined” (Vetterlain, 2012). Under the neoliberal influence the bank had adopted the Structural Adjustment Agreement (SAA) provided loans by imposing conditionalities on the borrowing countries and advocated for a neoliberal economic policy citing them as solutions to poor countries' problems (Babb 2005). The Structural Adjustment Agreement (SAA) imposed the loan conditionalities which emphasized the free market principles of restricted state spending, balanced budgets, market solutions to problems, deregulation, providing environment conducive to investments, privatization and trade openness (Sadasivam 1997 and Babb 2005).

The World Bank today has been using the soft power mechanism such as benchmarking, technical assistance, and dissemination of ideas to influence the policy preferences of member countries and has been extending support to framing of such policies (Stone and Wright 2007; Marshall 2008; World Bank 2005). The World Bank on the basis of its substantial lending capacity, persuasive knowledge production, and transnational political clout, has become a key global governance actor in the education for development field

(Verger & Mundy, 2016). The powerful nations have used the international organization to promote their interests and preferences and hence the neoliberal idea of development has been disseminated through the international organizations.

“Neoliberalism has marked an epochal shift in the political economy from welfare-based government to competitiveness-driven governance (Larner, 2000). It is characterized by a number of principles including, market as the means to allocate the scarce resources efficiently, desirability of international free trade, minimum government intervention and the requirement of labour-market flexibility (Hay, 2004a). Neoliberalism is guided by one form of rationality which is more powerful than any other rationality and that is economic rationality. It is also guided by the idea of a weak state and favours a free Market which refers to a new strain of the 19th century economic liberalism or laissez-faire (Apple, 2000). Because of this economic rationality any money spent on schools that is not directly related to economic goals is suspected. Neoliberals argue that efficiency and cost benefit analysis will be engines of social and educational transformation (Apple, 2000). The market as policy alternative to 'public monopoly education' during the 1970's and which continues even today seems unassailable in the western world. “There is now in educational policy a well-established, powerful and complex ideology of market and linked culture of choice which are underpinned by dangerous idealisations about the workings of markets, the effects of parental choice and 'profit' incentives in education” (Ball, 1993 ). The criticism against public education is with regard to absence of profit or loss motives for the school managers lead to conservative, self-serving, minimalist survival strategies (Morrell 1989).

The absence of profit or loss motive and the state monopoly of education generate an inefficient and stultifying bureaucracy which encourages waste and inhibits responsiveness to parental concerns (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The criticism against the state monopoly of education with regard to inefficiency, lack of competition and value of resources resulting in waste of resources to which Chubb and Moe (1990) add another dimension that “the democratic control of monopoly schools involves an imposition of the policies of dominant interest groups and office-holders on the community as a whole, thus creating system of winners and losers”. The private provisioning of school that

started on the West have been followed by many developing nations today who have sought privatization of education to be a solution to many concern regarding failing public education system within their countries and to provide for quality education for all to meet the educational needs of all.

Drawing upon economic theories concerned with market functionality, policy discourses since 1990's have favoured the market based reforms to education in the name of quality and social equity. This has led to emergence of an education market which works towards fostering parental 'choice', viewing parents as rational choice makers in the market setting (Gurney, 2017). The rational choice models within the school choice literature hypothesise that parents are utility maximisers who make decisions on the basis of clear value preferences, weighing up relative costs and benefits of particular choice sets (Bosetti, 2004). Globalization has had a significant impact on education system worldwide. The international institutions have generated powerful ideologies of how education should be delivered and have led to economic restructuring of world economy (Blum & Ullman, 2012). The larger ideological package includes but is not limited to decentralisation and privatisation, choice and accountability, testing and assessment which affect education. There are a range of nongovernmental actors which includes the private corporations, private foundations, think tanks and also the media which are actively promoting new forms of privatized education (Verger, 2018).

### **1.3 Literature Review**

Neoliberalism has swayed global politics since the 1980's and it was only in 1990's, a decade later that it began to influence the foundations of education. The neoliberal strategy shifts production from nation-state function to a global one and so the states power to intervene is significantly altered (Lakes & Carter, 2011). Based on the neoliberal ideology in 1991 the Indian government introduced major economic reforms in the direction of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation. The LPG reform as it is popularly known was based on the belief that economic globalization/liberalization worked toward the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment, short-term capital flows, international flow of workers and humanity, and flow of technology. The onset of economic liberalization has

politically extended the scope of markets even in the fields such as education and health to a larger extent. “The neoliberal ideology insists that the invisible hand of the market will inexorably lead to better schools and quality education” (Venkatanarayanan, 2015). “The market” acts as a metaphor rather than an explicit guide for action. They are considered to be natural and neutral, and governed by effort and merit. And those who are opposing them are also opposing effort and merit. It is believed that markets are insulated from political interference and bureaucratic procedures. As the markets are grounded in the rational choices of individual actors, they along with the guarantee of rewards for effort and merit also, produce neutral and positive results (Pollard *et al.*, 1997).

For decades now neoliberal economics has been reshaping democratic agendas by invoking market discourses such as 'choice' to describe both the utility and problem of public schools (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). Neoliberal discourses commodify public education by depicting it as economic drain linked to an unsustainable welfare state (Burchell, 1996) and demand privatisation of education. Although neoliberal economics demand for free market and choice that is unfettered, the choice so being talked about is not simply based on consumption and is a political project that employs 'language of choice' in which rights, duties, responsibilities and choice are all welded together to encourage parents to become active choosers (Bowe, Ball & Gewirtz, 1993). The reported deterioration in quality of public schooling in many developing countries has resulted in increased private provision for better schooling (De et al., 2002; Glick & Sahn, 2006; Tooley & Dixon, 2005). In the Indian context too, dissatisfaction with the government schools is a driver of demand for private school (Srivastava, 2008). It is believed that the quality of education in private school is better than the public school (Kingdon, 2007). Lower pupil-teacher ratio and higher test scores are markers of better quality in the private schools (Goyal & Pandey, 2009).

With such discourses around quality and with policies supporting privatization in India we today witness the emergence of a new private sector of low-fee-private (LFP) schools (Srivastava, 2007). These LFP schools have proven to be solutions to issues of access to quality education among the poorer sections (Tooley, 2001). The advent of private schools usually means choice between schools, often between a government school and a

private school and also between competing private schools (James and Woodhead, 2013). Choice or a market of suppliers is purported to lead to better service at a lower cost, as competing suppliers vie for potential clients (Levin, 1991). The government schools in India are found to be failing on grounds of efficiency and equity, infrastructure, and instruction (PROBE Report, 1999). This has led to unprecedented rise in the LFP schools over the past 15 years (Kingdon, 1994; Tooley & Dixon, 2006; Srivastava 2006 & 2008). However there are contesting claims by other researchers about quality of these low-fee-private schools. One study undertaken 'using multi-level or hierarchical modeling as opposed to straight forward regression resulted in an unclear picture of LFP school quality, calling into question the private school advantage (Bashir, 1997) study by Srivastava (2007) found that managers or owners of these LFP schools are often neglectful of quality matters, (Dreze & Gazdar, 2006) found that the private school teachers are poorly trained, similar were the findings by the PROBE Team (1999) which also found that 80 percent of private school teachers were untrained. On teacher absenteeism it was found that the teachers in these LFP schools are still found to be absent although less often than the government school teachers (Kingdon, 2007).

Despite these weaknesses, there are a number of studies that suggest that LFP schools are perceived to offer better quality than the government schools. The 'mushrooming' of these private schools with an increasing number of people choosing for these private schools over government schools Today is as high as 30 percent in the rural areas (Pratham, 2014) in Hyderabad the enrollment in private schools in the low income areas of the city was as high as 65 percent ( Tooley & Dixon, 2006). With such migration from the public school to private school, 'today the public schools are largely dominated by children from poor, belonging mainly from " lower" caste and minorities' (Nambissam, 2010).

The literatures around choice in schooling have largely focused on predetermined parameters that affect choice like issues of quality, equity and infrastructure. But, choice today needs to be looked at discursively. 'The parental choice' and nature of involvement in education or schooling are subject of social and political debate and are not 'givens' but are political constructs' (Baudrillard, 1990). 'In the post-modern markets, buying an education becomes a substitute for getting an education. Consumers, seek the competitive

edge at the expense of others and look for value-added education' (Kenway, 1992). "How far and in what ways people are captured by the discourse of consumption is thus a matter for any investigation of parental choice" (Ball *et al.*, 1994).

Advocates of 'choice' argue that enhanced parental 'voice' and choice will provide a chance for 'educational salvation' for minority parents and children, Chubb and Moe (1990) claims that the poor will get the right to leave bad schools and seek good ones. The concept of 'voice' and 'exit' asserts that the parents can voice their opinion on inadequacies and dissatisfaction which provides schools an opportunity to improve, upon poor accountability the parents can exercise the exit power and thus schools are under constant pressure of strict accountability hence, efficiency is improved (Hirschman, 1978). However to exercise concepts of voice and exit one has to be in a position to exercise them. The poor do not possess means and resources to exit and choose another (Harna, 2009). Whitty & Power (2000) argues that the assumption that competition will enhance efficiency and responsiveness may be a false hope. Globalisation today continues to intensify the authority of neoliberal policies thorough World Bank and IMF. The World Bank is the world's largest and most influential funding source for education (Tomasevski 2006; Toress 1999). World Bank's ties with neoliberalism was traced in 1980's with its sponsorship during the Washington consensus which aimed at "cutting back the state, open trade, reduce social spending and deregulate and privatise" (Bedford, 2007).

Choice in the context of individualism and liberal market reforms is based on an extension of the concept of homo economicus, conceiving parents as rational thinkers working for self-interest. Baudrillard (1990) views that homo economicus in the market setting are defined by discourse of consumption. The policy document of Planning Commission of India which favoured a PPP model for education sector for fostering a 'clear customer focus' reiterates the fact of market conception of education as commodity and seekers as consumers. "In line with casting parents and citizens within policy discourse as "customers", the framing of choice, as necessary within the contemporary market in India is made explicit" this point towards a widespread disillusionment with government schooling within public discourse (Verger & Vanderkaaji, 2012). There

exists an open discourse on low quality of education in government institutions among the public. The new forms of public sector organization have introduced new players, voices, values and discourses into policy conversations. These new forms constitute “network governance” or governance by networks – that is, “webs of stable and ongoing relationships which mobilize dispersed resources towards the solution of policy problems” (Pal, 1997).

These global policy networks are connected through various think tanks, consultants, multi-lateral agencies, donors, education businesses, and philanthropies. They give space to new sensibilities and values and new forms of social relations associated with neoliberalism (Ball, 2012). The PPP solution has relied on the discursive construction of state failure with regard to keeping up quality in services and limited access therefore; PPP policy is advocated as solution which can help increasing access to basic education with improved quality in the developing countries. The establishment of the PPPs as a policy tool is a new “common sense of development”. While envisioning the market as inevitable solution to social problems the networks of policy influencers have resorted to purposeful framing of the inadequacies in the state provisioning of services by identifying them as “failing state, lazy teachers, lack of incentives, lack of accountability and dysfunctional schools using selective evidences to portray the same (Robertson and Verger, 2012). They have been articulated by neo-liberal rationalities that link market mechanisms such as choice and fee payment to greater accountability and education quality (Watkins, 2011).

#### **1.4 Research Questions:**

How has the economic reforms of 1991 transformed the approaches to education of the Indian state?

How do we conceptually understand ‘choice’? What are the narratives around school choice in India?

What are the social implications of idealising market as alternative in education?



### **1.5 Research Objectives:**

The research aims at critically analyzing the growth of the ‘low-fee-private’ schools and exploring the discourses around school choice in India. It also aims at critically analyzing the education system in India post the 1990s LPG reforms in India.

### **1.6 Research Methodology**

The research work proceeds with the background and context of Reforms introduced in 1991, popularly known as the LPG reforms. The reforms introduced during this period is said to have been formulated under the neoliberal influence which was influencing reforms globally with the neoliberal principles defining the reforms at the global scale across countries. The reform was broadly informed by the ideology of neoliberalism but its formulation and design was facilitated by International organizations such as the World Bank. The ideology behind the reforms were widely legitimized and accepted by the stakeholders as a solution to the existing crisis. The West (especially USA and UK) strongly advocated for choice and competition as they theorized the two concepts essential for rejuvenating the education system that had become monopolistic and lacks motivation for improvement and the same was later ‘institutionalized’ in the form of voucher programs and other means of increased privatization through reforms.

These reforms were replicated in the Global South as well. To better understand the changes and the transformation in the education system in India, the research is carried out through discourse analysis with a focus on interpretive structuralism approach which has helped in the analysis of social context and the discourse that supports it. The broad discourse of private education and the macro changes in coherence with the dominant discourse has been understood through the Interpretive structuralist approach.

While the legitimization, theorization and institutionalization of the reform have been studied through the interpretive structuralist approach the building or framing of dominant discourse has been studied through the critical discourse analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis contributes to critical social analysis of social elements such as power, ideologies, institutions, and social identities by bringing in social analysis into

language (Fairclough, 2012). In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) primarily the argument is that, the scholarly discourses are inherently part of and influenced by social structure and produced in social interaction. Thus reflection on the role of scholars in society and polity becomes an inherent part of the discourse analytical enterprise (Van Dijk, 2001). It is ‘trans-disciplinary’ in character and thus dialogues across different disciplines are seen as the source for theoretical and methodological development of each (Jessop & Sum, 2001).

In order to understand the discourses through texts I have tried to derive meaning of the discourses pertaining to school choice from a number of existing literature that have empirical evidences of what constitutes school choice in India. The literatures with empirical evidences are mostly on studies conducted in the rural area. There are mainly three types of school in India namely, Government schools which are owned and managed by the government, Private-aided schools which are managed and governed by private entities but funded by the government and the private schools which are fully funded and owned by the schools (De *et. al*, 2002). For this research work my study is concentrated to looking at the ‘low- Fee Private’ (LFP) school which is a subset of private schools which is owned, managed and funded by private entities.

The research paper of various advocates about the preference of a particular kind of schools forms the discursive structure of the study. The discourse structures are looked at critically focusing on how they enact, confirm, legitimate and reproduce the dominant discourses.

Discourses are not about particular text or sentences, rather the relationship between texts, i.e., inter-textuality (Fairclough, 1995). Texts become meaningful through their interconnection with other texts, their meaning which are set in different discourses, their consumption, circulation and production. Therefore discourse analysis must refer to collection of texts. And hence, the concept of school choice is explained with texts informing about the rationality of choice making, the inequalities in the society that forbid the rational choice making and the structural reforms that enhance or restricts choices. In this particular study the different discourses on school choice is

explored which are interpretive and explanatory. School choice is a complex process and is not objective like it is defined in market terms. Because the concept of school choice is western which occurred in a different context in the west to situate the same in the Indian scenario the discourses around school choice at present can be explained by viewing at it in a global context. The discursive structures set limit to how people can think and act and meanings are temporarily fixed to achieve a particular purpose. These discursive structures hold within discourses written or spoken texts and speeches which is ideologically laden (UnvarSelda & Ali, 2003). The research work critically examines the emergence of the concept of school choice looking at the discursive structures and the discourses that are produced through them keeping in mind that discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

## **Data**

The research work comprises of data generated through the collection of various texts which are analyzed as background material for understanding context and gaining insight to understand the broader picture of transformation that have taken place in the Indian education system since the introduction of the 1991 LPG reforms. As mentioned above that the reforms were a part of the global reforms taking place during that era the data includes text that are related to research in the field of 'school choice' in the west tracing its rationality and genesis.

The research paper forming parts of data set though empirical studies belong to the period of 1990 and beyond. The conceptual papers informing the need for new developments in education are from period as old as 1955. Data for studying the reforms comprises of government reports and working papers of the funding agencies such as the World Bank. For understanding the dominant discourse on school choice the research of various scholars have been referred to which have been conducted empirically and which highlight the different dimensions of school choice discourse in the west especially in UK and USA as well as in the Indian society.

The discourse analysis of the transformed education system in the context of LPG reforms and the emergent idea of school choice in the Indian society is explored

questioning the constructive effect of the language of choice by the choice advocates whose idea of school choice is informed by the western system of education. The perspective of school choice as a social phenomenon is explored through a structured set of text on concepts, context and empirical evidences.

To assess the growth of the private schools data from U-DISE has been referred to. Since the low-fee-private schools are mostly unrecognized a comprehensive picture of the same becomes difficult as there exists no official record of the unrecognized schools. For a comprehensive picture and status of private schools in India evidences from Kingdon (2020) was borrowed. Her works analyses data from various sources to give a comprehensive picture about the growth and presence of private schools in India today

## Chapter 2

### Understanding School Choice

#### 2.1 The context to the idea of ‘School Choice’

Milton Friedman in 1955 wrote “The Role of Government in Education” in which he advocated for voucher system as a means to foster competition between schools. The central idea of argument was “denationalization” of education wherein the state should reduce intervention and allow for private schools to function with market principles at the core of functioning. The schools were to run for profit instilling market principles of ‘competition’ and choice into the school system. The denationalization would allow parents to choose schools for their children. The idea of denationalization is influenced by the neoliberal idea of state. The underpinning ideas of Friedman lay in the neoliberal ideology which proposes to alter the state’s role in education. According to him the state system of education has become monopolistic and there is inequality in access to quality education due to bureaucratization, that the state’s monopoly over education should end and the same should be replaced by markets. This is also part of the neoliberal ‘modernisation’ of the state (Ball, 2016), a process of ‘destatalisation’ as Bob Jessop (2002) calls it –“ the steady withdrawal of the state from direct service provision and the increasing use of contracting-out. The state becomes a contractor, funder, target-setter, benchmarker and monitor. The state becomes more technocratic and less democratic”.

It is important to understand Friedman’s idea to understand the reforms that took place especially in UK and USA where the set of educational reforms pertaining to privatization were not simply policy option but were clearly, political and driven by ideological convictions (Verger, Zancajo & Fontdevila, eds. 2018). During the 1980’s when USA’s public schools encountered wide criticism from various sections of society like the academics, federal officials and corporate about the poor education and that the public education was in deep crisis the debate around reforms intensified (Terzian and Boyd, 2004). Friedman’s thinking developed in parallel to President Regan’s idea of

freedom, with the political slogan of freedom and coincidentally the circulation of reports of deep crisis in the public schools gave rise to the idea of freedom to choose school.

In the same period in UK as well, under the leadership of Margret Thatcher there were education reforms that were taking place. The context of education reforms in UK was political and had direct implications for education. The reforms led by Margret Thatcher were also inspired by Friedman's idea. Principles of choice, competition and markets were introduced within the public schools. The government then had put forward that the "monopoly" of public education is a barrier to improving the quality of education and in order to improve the current education system market principles need to be deployed to make the current education system efficient (Lupton, 2011). The other aspect of the 1988 reform was that the "public education in crisis" has failed to meet the growing needs of the economy and the labour market and therefore vocationalization of education is important. To meet this need for vocationalization, the government had given fund to the secondary schools to develop curriculum in the technical and vocational education (Fitz and Beers, 2002).

In both these cases it was the inclination to the neoliberal ideology that inspired these reforms in the education in contrast to the pragmatic transition in other countries (Babb, 2002). The process of Privatization in other countries have taken place in forms of, Privatization by way of state reforms, privatization due to Scaling up , privatization through modes of PPP and de facto Privatization in low income countries (Verger, Zancajo and Fontdevila, 2018). The process and the form of privatization differ but the overarching idea behind the process remains the ideology of 'neoliberalism'. The neoliberal doctrine believes that the market economy and the market reforms are the best way to promote wealth and efficiency. The market would gain control only if the intervention of the state is minimal and so it favours a "strong individual private property rights, the rule of law, and institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2005).

The work of Friedman (1955) gave rise to the aspect of 'choice' in choosing schools and this aspect of school choice was central to many reforms that were being introduced

within the ideological landscape of neoliberalism. But, it was with the publication of “Politics, Markets and America’s School” by Chubb and Moe (1990) was from where the school choice debate actually progressed. Their book was strongly supported in the political domain and also had the support of then president George H.W. Bush. They provided Friedman’s market model with an empirical base and made an efficiency and equity argument in favour of school choice. The book argued that the bureaucratic and monopolistic system had undermined the efficiency of the public sector and such inefficiency is adding to the ordeal of the low-income families and that it is harmful for them (Ryan & Heise, 2002 and Viteritti, 2005). Although Friedman had originally advocated for vouchers so that there is freedom to choose with unrestricted demand and supply of schools. There were many reforms that were influenced by his ideas about vouchers providing opportunities to disadvantaged students and the improvement of schools through competition (Lubienski, Weitzel, and Lubienski 2009 ). It was with the work of Chubb and Moe (1990) that the idea of school choice was mainly about freedom and education excellence and it also got aligned with equity- based arguments. The idea that low-income and minority families should enjoy the opportunity to choose their schools (which were a de-facto option for wealthier families) gained popularity.

## **2.2 The “Marketization” of Education**

With the school choice theory gaining popularity and becoming a part of policy debate the perspective towards education changed. The approach of Friedman and the other scholarly works that followed Friedman’s work were designed towards reimagining education like any other commodity that can be traded for profit. Education was now to be bought by ‘consumers’ for their satisfaction and the service providers were responsible for the satisfaction of their clients. Milton Friedman was of the view that education is like groceries or any other economic good and thus should be transacted like any other commodity in the market without restrictions thus opposing any form of nationalization of education. For Friedman the outcomes in education define the efficiency of education and thus if the efficiency is to be improved the demand side constituting the parental choice and the supply side constituted by the various schools, competing with each other

should be stimulated. Growing criticism towards monopoly of state education was central to argument in favour of private education.

Chubb & Moe (1990) in their study on USA education market advocated how private system of education is beneficial. In their study they stated that the private schools provide various incentives for students and parents so that they choose those schools for their child's education, the fact that parents are free to choose, the schools become responsive to create demand for their school. The freedom to choose schools also results in switching schools and as a result schools that do not perform better or the unpopular schools lose students and parents choose schools that are more responsive and through this mechanism of natural selection, exercising their freedom to choose, the less responsive or unpopular schools are forced to shut down. Thus, in private marketplace educational choice is founded on Hirschman's exit policy (Chubb & Moe, 1988). The exit option allows parents to choose schools that are more congruent with their needs. This helps better deliver according to what consumers want and what schools should supply (Chubb & Moe, 1988). Also, helps school being more responsive to the needs by building 'voice' mechanism for their clientele satisfaction. Similarly in UK influenced by Hayekian vision of market the leadership of Margret Thatcher brought about changes through the introduction of Parents Charter with the new reforms in Education (1988) in which small business in education were promoted. The vision was setting up a consumer heaven with the revolution in setting up small businesses. (Ranson, 1990) says that the attempt was to convert the system into a consumer rather than a citizen democracy.

The proponents of privatization of education support the economic benefits that education accrues. The rationale for privatization of education are backed up by benefits that privatization would bring along. The idea of consumerism based on the ideology of market is being used to define the need for education. There is a shift towards the 'post modern markets' (Kenway, 1992) in which 'buying an education is a substitute to receiving education'. The consumers in the post modern market desire a competitive edge and look for value-added education (Kenway, 1992 p.16).



The market of education assumes that the choices of parents with regard to school are informed by the Rational Choice theory. This suggests that parents choose on the basis of maximum utility a particular commodity or service would accrue. The cost and the benefit are taken into account while making decisions and this suggest that parents are utility maximizers (Bosetti, 1998). The rational choice theory however fails to take into account the socio-cultural dynamics to choice and overlooks aspects of class, gender, race and caste (Cucchiara and Horvat, 2014). The idea of choice is disseminated by powerful international institutions which have generated powerful ideologies of how education should be delivered and have led to economic restructuring of world economy (Ullman & Blum, 2012).

### **2.3 Imperfections in the Market Understanding of Choice**

The school choice debate were premised on the criticism of public monopoly in education which was regarded as detrimental to quality of education and as prohibitive to the principles of freedom. The freedoms of the individual to chose and make voluntary exchanges in economic activity and the freedom for an enterprise to operate freely in a free market setting.

The other underlying principle is that freedom of choice gives a fair chance to everyone to choose the best school for their children. The idea of freedom to choose for fair chance emanates from the idea of visualizing market as neutral but, markets are neither natural nor neutral and are rather politically constructed (Ball, 1993). “The ideology of market assumes that the predispositions to choice and cultural capital invested in choice are generalized. In the market sphere all are equal and are only differentiated by their ability to calculate their self-interest” (Ranson, 1990). But, Choices are not always informed by rationality and are a complex process that has to go through the complex lives of families, complex because it is positioned within a social network and therefore it can be said that choices are thoroughly social. Differences in choice do not necessarily highlight the inefficiency in choice making of that individual (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz, 1996). Markets function with a particular set of ideology wherein every individual is seen as consumer.

These market mechanisms fail to take into account the heterogeneity and complexity of parents' needs and preferences (Robenstein, 2000).

Choice in education is systematically related to class difference and reproduction of class inequalities (Ball *et al.*, 1996). The choice-makers choose the 'ideal types' in relation to their class. "Privileged classes who are exclusively professionals and belong to middle class are also skilled with regard to making choices. They have 'inside' knowledge of the school system and how they work e.g., doctors, professors, school secretary, education welfare officer etc" (Ball *et al.*, 1996). In sharp contrast to the professionals are the 'disconnected choosers' who are mainly from the working class. Somewhere between the two are the 'semi-skilled' choosers. The semi-skilled choosers are from variety of backgrounds that is to say they cannot be neatly categorized as privileged or disconnected and share similarity with respect to choice-making practices with both the privileged and also the disconnected. (Bourdieu (1986) as quoted in Ball *et al.*, 1996) classified the privileged as 'inheritors' and the semi-skilled as 'newcomers'.

The class based categorization of choosers is based on varying choice process amongst different groups. The privileged groups were able to 'decode' the education market and distinguish between various schools with regard to policies and the schooling practices. They are held as active choosers who decide about their choices upon active exchanges of information as they were able to engage with the teachers and management of the school and critically evaluate based on their interaction and with the responses they would receive. One distinctive choice-making tendency amongst the privileged parents is 'child-matching'. They do take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the child, figure out the interest of the child and match a particular school with the child's personality to be able to choose the best school. The matching is also based on the future orientation. Goal-oriented parents are interested in examination results and tend to compare the result with other schools and this aspect of outcome then becomes very important along with many other aspects that they might be considering while making choices.

Unlike the privileged or skilled choosers the semi-skilled choosers have to face financial constraints and thus limited capacity to engage with the market (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1993a). Due to their biographies and history they are not equally 'effective' choice makers because they lack the 'insiders' knowledge like the privileged class. Criteria that serve as central view points amongst the privileged seem missing for the semi-skilled choosers. Quality of the child is not an important aspect while making choices. For the semi-skilled, the best school is the right school – 'pure but empty goodwill' is the guideline and principle applied (Bourdieu, 1986) quoted in (Ball *et al.* 1996). Therefore it can be said that the careful choice-making like that of the privileged is lacking and unlike the privileged who take decisions based on goals of their children the semi-skilled carry an attitude more like 'wait and see' the outcomes of education and the future of their children. With respect to these considerations they are more close to the disconnected class. The disconnected choosers are mostly from the working class, they are mostly those who have left school early and lack confidence about their ability to understand or understand the language of the teachers. Due to lack of much understanding the disconnected are not capable of understanding the market in the same way as the privileged and fail to exploit the market in the same and use it for their advantage. Upon understanding, due to lack of cultural, social and financial capital the 'effectiveness' in terms of making choices will not be the same.

In fact, the cultural and social capital is of little relevance in their case. So the most important criterion in terms of choosing school for their children for the working class would be the physical proximity of the school. The other important choice criterion is a school which is part of their social community. "Spatial horizons and the practicalities of travel imposed definite limits upon the 'realities' of choosing" (Ball *et al.*, 1995). The process of choice-making is "humanistic rather technological" (Adler *et al.*, 1987). The cultural and material orientation of every parent across classes is different and so is their approach towards the education market. The orientation is such that some can exploit it to the fullest as noted above whereas some even fail to recognize the 'market', the market exists for some. Choice involves cost and those who are constrained financially for them there is no "effective choice" (Ball, 1993)

## **2.4 The State, Market and Choice**

The debate on school choices strongly argued for institutionalized reform in order to improve the education standards. Since the arguments in favour of enhancing choice and competition in the education system gained prominence the reforms in education henceforth, used 'choice' and 'competition' as central idea of any reform in the education sector. It started with the UK and USA education reforms where ideas of choice and competition shaped the reforms during that period. Such reforms helped the education market to flourish in the West with the government subsidizing education via vouchers which were used to access private schools by parents and hence, private schools became an alternative to the public schools. The school choice debate also underlined the need for freedom to choose in order to ascertain equal right for every individual to freely choose the best and thus equated this with an egalitarian, democratic community. In the public and political conversation school choice has become a synonym for democratic freedom (Robenstine, 2001).

The private alternative to the public provisioning of education was to break the monopoly in education by the state. Public education is funded by the tax-money and there is complete lack of any 'profit' motive and thus the public sector schools are disinterested in competing and improving education which has resulted in deterioration of the quality of education provided by the government. Chubb and Moe (1990) argue in their paper that- "the democratic control of monopoly schools involves an imposition of the policies of dominant interest groups and office-holders on the community as a whole, thus, creating a system of 'winners' and 'losers'; and "the 'losers' have the obligation to accept and help finance these policies and structures, however much they may be opposed to them".

The state conception of parental choice employs a 'language of choice' in which rights, responsibilities and duties are all welded together to enable parents to actively choose and so it should not be understood that they are only based on the theory of consumption. The theory of consumption is a discourse that the market employs to transform individuals into consumers. At the political front they are overtly employed with the language of

rights and responsibilities. Reducing choice to simplistic terms may lead to misrepresentations, similarly the multiplicity of discursive elements that shape choices are different strategies and that are what we need to look at (Foucault, 1990). The language of choice which talks about rights, duties and responsibility to make parents active choosers is rooted to 'populist notion of responsible parent'. This notion propagates the idea of good parenting by setting up a belief system that one is entirely responsible for one's child failure or success (Ball *et al.*, 1993). Clune (1990) argues that choices are a powerful means that the government uses to shift responsibilities for the poor provisioning of the education system. The government eases out the regulations for the market in the field of education in order to shift their responsibility to the market (quoted in Ball, 1993).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The market functions on the principles of profit. It presumes the individuals as self-interested and advantage maximizing consumers. The ideas of market which focuses on maximizing its profit would then also seek consumers (students) who do not demand expensive learning needs. It would admit more able students to show better performance in terms of educational outcomes and thus turn down students whose outcome are not up to the mark according to them or those who seek more resources for learning as this would make it difficult for them to maximize profit by demanding extra resources (Moore & Davenport, 1990).

As Connell (2003) observes, "The neo-liberal agenda is, in effect, seeking to reconstruct mass education on the organizational model of ruling-class education." The market utopia considers the exclusion of some due to limitations in taking choices as a technical glitch. This inability to make choices increases the inequality in terms of consumption of education (Boyd 1982). A market does not benefit every individual in the same manner. The individualization of choice is different in each case. Based on the difference it can be said that there does exist two distinct discourses which shed light upon the process of making choices. The market is strongly organized based on class differences and that choices can be better understood with the segregation of discourses that explain the

choice patterns of different classes. There is a working class discourse which is spontaneous and practical and then there is informed, carefully examined, investigated and ideal discourse dominated by the middle class which they can use for their advantage. It is the 'some' and others who are the beneficiaries and victims of the market. The market systematically exclude few leading to their plight while some are at advantage as the markets are designed according to the values, interests and concerns of certain groups and class of people (Ball 2003).

The conceptualization of choice is different for different class and in the language of Bourdieu and Boltanski (1979) the middle class use markets to reproduce their social class and secure their relative advantage and social advancement which shall also lead to mobility (quoted in Ball, 2003).

“School choice is presented as providing innovation, responsiveness, accountability, efficiency and above all, improvement through competition” (Lauglo 1995 and Lubienski 2006) and choice is often regarded as being positive in and of itself, an essential element of a democratic society (Levin, 1991). It is seen as being of great importance not only to individuals but also collectively as it is believed that it will be ‘increasing poor clients’ choice and participation in service delivery which will help them monitor and discipline providers’ (World Bank, 2004)

The idea of school choice which emerged in the West with the work of Milton Friedman who began to advocate for voucher plans and denationalization of education and for free market in education is today a global voice for change. The reform in UK and USA in the education provisioning premised on the idea of ‘school choice’ is a new reform strategy across globe today. The idea of increased privatization in education is disseminated to other parts of the non-western world through the International Organizations such as World Bank and other advocates for private schools. Advocacy for school choice have intensified in recent years, despite observations that ‘no country has achieved significant improvement in primary education without government involvement’ (World Bank 2004, 10–11).

The next chapter will situate the idea of school choice in the context of its development in India. The idea of school choice is brought to life with increased private participation. The reforms that were introduced in the west are broadly informed by the ideology of neoliberalism, though the forms of reforms in other parts of the world may differ in terms of process the larger ideological influence continues to inform those reforms through the presence of the international organizations and other non-state actor who advocate for such reforms along the same ideological line. Thus the chapters that follow will enquire into the structural and procedural reforms taking place in the field of education in India.

## Chapter 3

### The context and expansion of the Low-Fee-Private Schools in India

#### 3.1 Growth of private schools in India

It was with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the constitution that education which was previously a state subject now became a part of the concurrent list. Education becoming a part of the concurrent list was the result of larger centralization tendencies that were going on during that period in 1976. The 1986 National Policy on Education was formulated under this backdrop of centralization. This policy has re-oriented the Indian education system with increased expenditure from the central government for construction of school and some financial responsibility for education provision (Tilak, 1997). The centralization also vested parliament with the authority to make laws and policies pertaining to the education of the entire nation (World Bank, 1997 ). The 1986 policy has emphasized on the quality issues of the education system and was determined to work towards improving quality of education along with ensuring access and availability. The central government has increased its expenditure on education and thus shared the states burden of investing into education, this policy called for spending six percent of GDP for education by the seventh plan and even higher by eight plan (Kolhatkar, 1997). The ultimate goal however, was universalization of education. A number of state level education programs were formulated and implemented which received funding from various international aid agencies. The policy stated that “resources, to the extent possible, will be raised by mobilizing donations, asking the beneficiaries communities to maintain school buildings and supplies of consumables” (Government of India, 1986).

The mobilization of funds with enhanced liberalization made it legit for the state governments to directly borrow from the international aid agencies for various programs that were being implemented at state level for educational developments. This process of liberalization encouraged the integration with the international economy through funding from financial institutions and development organizations for various development projects (Kirk, 2005). The process of liberalization and integration that began with the implementation of the 1986 policy intensified with the policy reforms in 1991 that called



for opening up of the economy of the country for global integration with the world market through liberalization, Privatization and Globalization. These reforms are popularly known as the LPG Reforms. The policy reform also accounted for reforms in management of education implementation in the form of decentralized form of management and governance of the centrally launched programs for development of education. DPEP marked the beginning towards a centrally launched education program to meet the goals of universalization of education. The central government henceforth took active roles in education policy and one reform towards implementation of the DPEP was the moves towards decentralization. With the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments the third tier of government at the Panchayat level was vested with the responsibility of management and deciding how school infrastructure funds should be spent (Jha *et al.*, 2008). This process of decentralization was a move to ensure efficiency with the local participation at village level (Davies & Falleti, 2015) but the idea of decentralization only managed reaching local participation and not efficiency due to lack of extending ‘capabilities’ along with devolved power of decision making at the Panchayat level by the Indian state.

The efforts towards universalization of education post the centralization period, with active intervention by the centre did improve the education scenario in the country. The government was successful in meeting the demands for adequate schools and thus achieved goals of access and availability but failed to improve quality. In the context of liberalization and acceptance of aid from the international financial institution, after the Jomtien conference in 1990 the “epistemic communities” in the international education have begun to influence the policy making within the country (Davies, 2016). The issue of quality and the inefficiency of the state in providing quality education were gaining ground during this period. The debates around education were turned towards the debate of education as a matter of right or the “rights based approach”. “A rights-based approach is necessitated by a backdrop of serious state failure” (Mehta, 2010). Mohini Jain vs. State of Karnataka and Unnikrishnan vs. State of Andhra were two cases that led to the Supreme Court reading the right to education alongside the right to life. In Mohini Jain (1992), the Supreme Court held that “the right to education flows directly from the right to life” and reaffirmed the same in the subsequent year in the case of Unnikrishnan vs.

State of Andhra Pradesh in 1993. The Supreme Court read and interpreted the terms of service as well, as to where it is provided and stated that both private and government facilities fall under the ambit of ruling as service providers. The court further argued that when state government grant recognition to the private it creates an agency for itself and through private institutions fulfils its obligation of providing education under constitution. Thus the state fulfils its obligation of providing education under constitution through either state-owned or state-recognized institutions. The Supreme Court rulings in both these cases resulted in expansive reading of the verdict and the civil society actively mobilized around the right based approach to education. The right based approach empowered the “prospective recipients to make legal claims on promised benefits and has emerged as a mechanism to make the state more accountable,” (Kapur & Nangia, 2013, 10).

The ruling of the two cases allowed for expansive reading of the Supreme Court ruling and the growing prominence of right based approach debates within the civil society led to the passage of the 2009 Right to Education Act. The Government showed faith in the private sector believing that the private sector will better educate country’s poor. The Right to Education Act codifies and normalizes private schools in the Indian education system. Section 12 (1) (c) of RTE, Act mentions that the privates schools must admit and reserve 25% of their seats for children “belonging to weaker section and disadvantaged group in the neighborhood and provide free and compulsory elementary education till its completion” (Government of India, 2009). The policy made it normal for the government to transfer public funds to private by paying the private schools for those 25% children admitted in the private schools as per section 12 (1) (c) of the RTE Act, 2009. The policy serves as providing a private school voucher as the government pays for children who attend private schools under this clause. Thus, the failing public education sector and the challenges to the inability of the state were brought before the court. The Supreme Court rulings interpreted the state’s failure by viewing the private providers as key actors in terms of providing education (Khosla, 2010). These rulings normalized the private sector and ensured key inputs for low-cost private schools (Davies, 2016).

### **3.2 De-facto Privatization in India**

There was rapid expansion of government schools from 1991-2005, since 1990 the government has tripled its expenditure on elementary education (Goyal, 2009 p.327). The government had added an average 200 new government school per district or about 30 schools per district per year. This has helped India achieve near universal enrollment (ASER, 2015a). This rapid expansion was accompanied with decrease in quality of government schools resulting in mass exit of children from the government schools (ASER, 2015b). The government of India in order to meet the goal of universalization and the EFA goals has rapidly expanded the inputs to education but the same was not in harmony with the outputs which created gaps and gave way to the private schools which aimed at filling those gaps in the inefficient public schools.

This can be identified as a type of privatization where “the responsibilities for education have been transferred de facto to the private sector, through rapid growth of private schools, rather than de jure, that is through reform or legislation” (Tooley, 2006). De facto privatization is also referred to as ‘privatization by default’ which is defined as “increased involvement of private actors in providing basic education through a bottom-up process without state intervention” (Verger, *et al.* 2018). Under de facto privatization and privatization by default the process of privatization takes place without the government actively promoting privatization through reforms and market-oriented policies. Expansion of privatization is a result of increased demand for private schools. In case of India, huge abandonment of public schools by many for an alternative private school resulted in expansion of the low-fee private schools across the country.

The growth of the private low-fee-private schools (LFP’s) in India serves the need of the poor. The choice for LFP’s were popularized mainly due to reasons such as- private schools provided English-medium education and were more accountable towards the learning needs than the government schools (Mehrotra & Panchmukhi, 2006). “The notion that private schools serves the need of wealthy parents is misplaced and that a lower cost private sector has emerged to meet the educational needs of the poor” (Watkins, 2000). Private schools that initially appeared in the urban areas gradually reached even to the rural settings and are flourishing with growing demands for private schools by parents. De *et al.* (2002) based on their studies in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and

Rajasthan note that “private schools have been expanding rapidly in the recent years and these include the expansion of primary schools which charge low fees in rural as well as urban areas” . similarly in Haryana the case of private school expansion is such that the private schools are “operating practically in every locality in urban as well as rural areas’ often located adjacent to a government school” (Aggarwal, 2000).

While the expansion of the low-fee-private school is said to have emerged more by default than by design (Rose, 2003). It is also promoted and further expansion is deemed favorable by many interest groups such as international aid agencies, policy entrepreneurs and think tanks. The World Bank, also the biggest lender in education in its Private Sector Development Strategy (2003) stated its plan to promote private sector by extending support for its increased participation in providing basic services such as health and education. In the 1990s PPP was becoming popular in the developing countries. The aid agencies began to look for new and innovative ways to strengthen the governance structures in the developing countries and private management strategies were seen as solution to the inefficient governance and delivery system of public services such as education. The World Bank is one of the most fervent advocates of policy reforms and is especially interested in exporting the PPP solution to the developing world (Miraftab, 2004). Increased participation of the private sector is conceived as a rapid solution for overcoming challenges associated with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and achieving EFA goals (Verger & Vander Kaaji, 2012). PPPs are expected to boost the quality and effectiveness of schools. PPP as a solution is believed to bring “more choice and pluralism, innovation, new knowledge and infrastructure from the private sector, as well as competition and incentives into the education system” (Patrinos *et al.*, 2009). Privatization in education is promoted by the World Bank and other aid agencies through the projects they fund which are also the pilot projects of the government.

More recently the privatization advocates in India have focused on the growth of the low-fee-private schools also called as the ‘budget schools’ (Tooley, 2007) as the ‘poor’s best chance’ (Tooley, 2000). The arguments for PPP models as solution are in consonance with arguments that favor expansion of the low-fee-private schools in India. The

advocates of the LFPs see its growth essential for providing quality education that will address equity issues and are crucial to achieving the MDGs and EFA goals.

### **3.3 Privatization ‘in’ and ‘of’ public education**

Ball & Youdell (2007) stated that privatization can be understood as being of two types namely, ‘endogenous’ and ‘exogenous’. Privatization ‘in’ public education is also called ‘endogenous’ privatization. “Endogenous privatization involves the importing of ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like business and more business-like”. The privatization ‘of’ public education also called the ‘exogenous’ privatization involves “the opening up of public education services to private sector participation on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education”.

The policy reforms in the form of PPP were supported by the aid agencies led by the World Bank who have actively supported the advance of PPP models both discursively and materially (Verger & Vander Kaaji, 2012). The aid agencies apart from the World Bank present in India are, DFID, ADB and European Commission, they are strongly networked with the policy-makers in India (Ward, 2011). The international development organizations perceive PPP as an opportunity to rectify inefficiencies in the public delivery of education and to mobilize new resources to increase educational access and quality. The PPP are viewed important with regard to ensuring and addressing issues regarding equity and quality.

### **3.4 Discussion**

Historically the private system where education was always present in the country where the education was imparted through charity institution (Dharampal, 2000). It was post independence that the government took upon itself to provide mass education making it the duty of the state then and right of every citizen later. The context to the normalization of private schools can be traced during the 1986 policy. The LPG reforms brought an end to the ‘licence raj’ and promoted the participation of private players through liberalization

and gave an impetus to the privatization of education. It was with the LPG reforms in 1991 that there was exponential growth in the number of private schools. The growth and expansion were demand driven, the inadequacies in the public provisioning and deteriorating quality of education in public schools brought in demand for schools that could provide quality education. This gap was filled by the private sector and to meet the demands of the low-income groups the response was the coming up of number of 'Low-fee-private' schools or the 'budget schools'. India opened up its economy for global integration to the world market and with regard to education, funded its various projects towards education development with support from international donors. The Structural Adjustment Agreement (SAA) gave way to the World Bank to extending aid with conditionalities.

The role of the World Bank is important in terms of promoting privatization in the Indian education system. The World Bank is currently the biggest lender in education in India. The other donors include, DFID and European Commission. These aid agencies have funded the government's education programme such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA). It was a programme launched to meet the EFA goals and with an aim to meet the universalization of elementary education goal of the Indian government (Ward, 2011). The SSA loans have promoted different types of PPPs including the reservation of 25% seats for the disadvantaged sections in the private schools and the role of the non-state School management Committees (World Bank, 2008 and 2010). The World Bank has consistently promoted private sector and has been very influential in adoption of the PPP reforms in India (Mehrotra *et al.*, 2006). The World Bank insists on partnership with un-aided private schools in future (World Bank, 2008).

The debate around 'school choice' is new in India and is contextually different from the west. The choice in the Indian scenario is more about choosing between the governments vs. the private school (Woodhead, 2012). The 'low-fee-private' schools have been widely studied with reference to the idea of school choice. The idea of school choice has been burgeoning since the work of Prof. James Tooley and few other national and international think tanks have begun to pro-actively advocate for increased private participation in the

school sector. The various research works by Prof. James Tooley in the city of Hyderabad has been a much publicized work. Through various researches and evidence he argues that the low-fee-private schools are 'poor's best chance', that they are the only hope for quality education for the poor, they are affordable and crucial in addressing issues related to equity and quality in education (Tooley, 2000 and Tooley & Dixon, 2003). There is a growing presence of advocates for private schooling who now closely work with the government and with actors involved in policy making. The private entrepreneurs got interested with the education sector post liberalization and on raising demands to fill gaps appearing due to inadequate government supply. The discourse today is shifting towards 'choice' in the education selection by parents. The advocates of 'school choice' such as Prof. James Tooley and think tanks such as centre for civil society demand further expansion of private schools and more specifically 'budget private schools' or 'low-fee-private schools'. The LFPs are seen as potential sector which can give profits and hence a healthy market can develop for which investment from various national and international investors are mobilized. The growing commercialization of education through the unscrutinised growth and expansion of the LFPs will be dealt in detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Dimensions of School Choice in India

#### 4.1 Introduction

Globally there is clear divide in terms of support for and against the government or the public school. The global proliferation of discourses around public school is swayed by the changing global political scenario as well with the redefining of the goals of education with increased market intervention into the field of education. When compared with the West liberalization was late to arrive to India and therefore the spread of market and discourses on private school as an alternative to public school has been comparatively slow. The challenges in achieving the goal of universal elementary education and the struggles to meet the EFA goal provide a fertile ground for the proponents of private schools or privatization of education to argue in favour of it.

The school system in India is highly stratified and there exist various types and categories of school that cater to the educational needs of different groups in the society. Primarily there are three types of schools- government/public schools, government-aided private schools and private un-aided schools. The private schools include 'NGOs, faith based organizations, commercially oriented private schools which are owned and run by private individuals or 'edupreneurs'. These schools run by the edupreneurs are a new phenomenon in the education system currently in India and is fast mushrooming. These schools are solely funded through fees from parents. These school run at the lowest possible fee so that they can reach out to the maximum number of parents, their target clientele are those with traditionally low participation in education. Due to their minimal cost these are known as low-fee private school (Srivastava, 2007). The government schools are owned, funded, run and managed by the government, with little autonomy at the school level. The other type is 'private-aided'; these are schools which receive government grants-in-aid, which entails losing the greater portion of their former autonomy (De *et al.*, 2002). Apart from this categorization of ownership and funding the other feature that distinguishes private schools from each other is recognition. Not all



schools in India are recognized by the government despite the fact that recognition is legally required.

The scenario in terms of availability of schools have changed enormously since the 1990's, post the LPG reforms which marked an end to the 'license raj' in India and marked the beginning of globalization and opening up of the economy (Counihan, 2019 and Nambissan, 2010). The recent trends show that the lower-middle class section or the poor parents are willing to pay for English education for their children. The private sector in this regard sees it as an opportunity to invest in elementary education in India by expanding market of the private schools and investing to improve the quality of education state-funded schools (Ball & Nambissan, 2010). Privatization is seen as effective solution the failing public education system. The policies supporting privatization along with other advocates of privatization of education state 'choice' 'accountability', 'school improvement' 'devolution', 'contestability' or 'effectiveness' as the perceived goal of the reform. The discourses on school choice gained popularity in the west with the increasing demand for marketisation of education to promote competition in the education sector in order to make schools more responsive, accountable and efficient.

The advocacy for school choices in India is being promoted by few policy entrepreneurs, since 2000, the NGOs and the private sector have been quoted or mentioned in few of the policy documents and have thus been acknowledged in terms of what they advocate for. The opposition to the idea of the withdrawal of the state from its responsibility of education to the masses is what has withheld the government in extending open support to the private players (Ball & Nambissan, 2010).

#### **4.2 Disseminating Ideas of Private Education through TANS**

These advocates of private schools work at a global scale to portray private schools as a solution to the problem of achieving universal, high quality education. Ball and Nambissan (2010) have identified these transnational advocacy networks (TANS) that operate here in India and advocates for private education as solution to any problem relating to education. The transnational policy networks are 'communicative structures' organized around the 'shared values' of their members (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). The

centre on Law and Globalization defines them as “fluid and open relationship among knowledgeable, committed actors which can be both individuals and organizations”. These networks differ from other networks as they are committed to promote principled cause, ideas and values. They work to bring about changes in international policy and make an impact by bringing changes in day-to-day lives of ordinary people. “The TANS are a part of reshaping the political processes at supranational, national and subnational levels. This reshaping varies in relation to institutional arrangements, policy settings and degree of democratization” (Daton & Rohrschneider, 2003 quoted in Ball & Nambissan, 2010). The TANS are changing national governments behavior through the exchange of norms, ideas and discourses (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

TANS have been reshaping the politics of education in India by influencing policy through institutions and also the governance of education in India. The transnational Advocacy Networks work with a larger goal of disseminating neoliberal ideas and specific neoliberal policies. In order to disseminate the neoliberal ideas the TANS have resorted to applying methods of first critiquing and then making attempts to change public perception of policy issues. The government education policy and government schools have been criticized where the reports on inadequate public provisioning for schools such as PROBE Report, have been exploited and through a new set of ‘research’ which was later produced as evidence to show that an alternative model of private provisioning is a solution to deal with the inadequacies of the government schools. This proposed alternative of private schools create new educational opportunities for some section of the society along with new opportunities for big and small businesses in the education sector in the country (Ball & Nambissan, 2010). This is in line with Brenner and Theodore’s conception (2002) of two distinct but dialectical moments in the dissemination of neoliberalism. It does not stop at changing public perception but they also propose alternative such as ‘creation of new infrastructure for market-oriented, economic growth, commodification and the rule of capital’ (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

### **4.3 Advocacy Network in India**

In this section some of the advocacy networks that function here in India with the aim of promoting private education will be discussed. At the global level there are few

foundations and business groups that operate to promote and fund private education in the word. In the Indian context the advocacy of private schools at national level began with James Tooley, a British Academic. Prof. Tooley had founded Educare Trust which is registered under the Indian Trust Act, 1882. It is a 'non-profit agency' and it was through this Trust that he has carried out his work funded by Templeton foundation from 2003-2005. Prof. Tooley's work mainly focused on the existence of a number of 'Budget school' in Hyderabad. Budget school is the term he coined to describe private schools charging minimal amount of fees, and functioning for profit and where the only source of income is the tuition fees so charged by the students. Through his study he has highlighted the contribution of these budget schools in helping the country meet the MDG goals and that these low-fee private schools provide education which is of a far better quality than most of the government schools. It was with the highly acclaimed work of Prof. J. Tooley that the opportunities for schooling enterprise with a profit began to be seen in India. Tooley's work was regarded by many foundations, think tanks and media group as commendable. His work was highly published and found space in renowned journals globally. The pro-choice, pro-market advocacy works through the circulation and recirculation of ideas that when put together are articulated in a particular fashion. The idea is then disseminated to distant audiences through its establishment with policy thinking (Ball & Nambissan, 2010).

The work of James Tooley has been criticized by many who find his work is based on a very narrow base of research (Ball & Nambissan, 2010 and Sarangapani & Winch, 2018). Despite that Tooley has been able to reach a wide and varied audience. He has done this through academic journals including 'the Oxford Review of Education, Journal of Education Policy and the International Journal of Educational Research', a huge range of online sites, media interviews, as well as lectures and talks aimed at parliamentarians (in the USA and UK) and policy makers and other groups in India. Tooley's Work has also garnered enough media attention especially by media groups who are pro-market. He was also awarded for one of his essay 'Educating Amaretech' by the financial times and the International Finance Corporation which was also considered as 'gold essay'. He has received huge grant from Templeton Foundation for conducting his work on comparative study of private schools in five countries which included India as well. The essay

'Educating Amaretech' was based on the findings of this work. His work have been referred to and have been cited at various places concerning private education, Foundations that support the philosophy of free market have disseminated and given importance to his work and today it is key point of focus for its effort in India and other countries. The various foundations in support of the free market are a part of and are interlinked through the Atlas Economic Research Foundation which is a nonprofit organization that connects with the 'free-market' organizations globally, across countries to share ideas and resources to advance the cause of 'liberty'(as cited in the website [www.atlasnetwork.org](http://www.atlasnetwork.org)).

The other organizations for school choice campaign in India are- Centre for Civil Society. CCS is a member of Economic Freedom Network Asia (EFNA) which is linked to the Fraser Institute and the Liberal Institute of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Berlin (both part of Atlas Foundation 'Freedom' network). These two are main site for school choice and privatization advocacy in India. Prof. James Tooley is a Senior Research Fellow with CCS. The centre for civil society actively runs campaigns for school choice. In their school choice campaign brochure they claim that their initiative is to ensure that all children receive quality education of their choice. Their aim as stated is to reform education policy so that it is more responsive to the needs of each student and give parents the choice to decide what is best for their child in terms of schooling choice, that is whether they find government schools, schools run by NGOs, a high fee charging school or a budget private school to be more appropriate for their children (CCS school campaign Brochure).

CCS sees itself as a think tank with ideas such as- "but we don't run primary schools, or health clinics, or garbage collection programs. We do it differently: we try to change people's ideas, opinions, and mode of thinking by research, seminars, and publications. We champion limited government, rule of law, free trade, and individual rights. We are an ideas organisation, a think tank that develops ideas to better the world" (quotes from CCS website, quoted in Ball and Nambissan, 2010 ). School choice campaign is not only a initiative of CCS but also a mission wherein they are devoted to building campaigns for school choice in India to create discourses on choice in education, advocate for private

schooling among poor and giving parents the freedom to choose. It runs project for amendment to the RTE Act, 2009 and has also formed National Independent Schools Alliance which is a national platform with an objective of protecting Budget private schools, improving quality and building their brand image. Few of the success of CCS as identified by them include gaining acceptance by states such as Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttarakhand for their ideas on earning outcomes and liberalizing of the education sector which they did by modifying their RTE state rules.

They also advocate for deregulation and delicensing of private schools and that state should legalize for-profit private school and micro-finance and venture capital for budget schools in India. They perceive that their advocacy for use of vouchers to enhance school choice has been successful with the implementation of the RTE Act, provision of reserving 25 percent seats for weaker sections in private schools. They mention that progressive states in India have started adopting the school choice idea and Pahal in Uttarakhand is an example of that which is a state sponsored voucher program for urban deprived children.

CCS launched its voucher program in 2007 and provided vouchers to children from poor settlements across seven states in India. The voucher scheme was also launched by state government of Uttarakhand and Orissa and in Andhra Pradesh by the Azim Premji Foundation and World Bank under the umbrella of Andhra Pradesh Randomized Evaluation Studies. The impact of these vouchers has been that the children who availed the vouchers and had moved to school of their choice have performed better than their peers (Shah Ritika & Shah Parth, 2017). CCS has been deploying researches as evidence to support their case and thus one can find research paper of many researchers who advocate for private schools on their website and their own publications. Prof. Tooley had undertaken a similar study in line with his Hyderabad study with CCS in Delhi to study access to private schooling among poor in East Delhi and did come up with similar findings that private schools are a significant provider of education to the poor.

The highly publicized work of Prof. Tooley has turned the attention of many private investors towards India. The massive school choice campaign led by him and others in India has provided a fertile ground for the private sector to bloom. Upon reading his essay

‘low-cost schools in poor nations seek investors’ fund’, published in Financial Times, (17 September 2006), the ‘philanthropic arm’ of Orient Global (now Chandler Corporation) a Singapore based investment firm has established an education fund of \$100 million, the president of this fund was Prof. Tooley himself and this Global Education Fund is targeted to be invested in the Indian education market for private schooling for children from low-income families.

The expansive and growing private education sector in India is a result of complex and well networked global actors and organizations coming together. Global and local corporations are investing for profit into the education business in India leading to the creation of an expansive private education market. As mentioned earlier the two actors who stand out in launching the ‘low-fee private schools ‘movement’ in India are Prof. Tooley and the global corporation, Pearson who actively funds and invests in private schools run for-profit. There are a lot of other actors and institutions such as the World Bank, UK’s Department of International Development (DFID), Melinda Gates Foundation and John Templeton Foundation. The homegrown foundations include Azim Premji Foundation, Naam Foundation and Naandi Foundation. The Centre for Civil Society, the Educare Trust, EPSI and the Liberty Institute (India) are key points of the local articulation and flow of the choice policy ideas in India. They are also, directly or indirectly, engaged in a bigger enterprise of neoliberal state reform and in redefining the boundaries of the policy process – policy channels are being diversified. The Indian choice and privatization advocacy network is linked by a complex of funding, exchange, cross-referencing, dissemination and mutual sponsorship – the latter involving various aspects of what Keck & Sikkink (1998) call ‘information politics’. The involvement of local business interests adds further strength to the network. Think tanks often have very specific and effective points of entry into political systems. However, Stone (2000) points out that: ‘the authority and legitimacy for think tank involvement in global affairs is not naturally given but has been cultivated and groomed through various management practices and intellectual activities.’ She goes on to note that “in some cases, however, the think tank scholarly “aura” and independence may be misleading in reality ideas become harnessed to political and economic interests”.

#### 4.4 Aspects of School Choice in India

The struggle towards achieving the universal basic education for all has been met by mass expansion of primary schools across the country. The schools grew in number but the development of huge number of schools did not guarantee quality education and in these government schools quality of provision was ignored due to which parents started to shift their children to private schools (PROBE Report, 1999 and Kingdon, 2005). The 'low-fee private schools came up and there was an unprecedented growth of such schools which served as an alternative to the government school for people and the mass expansion of the government schools resulted to be unproductive due to the low quality and poor provisioning in the government school (Srivastava, 2006). The low-fee private schools are asserted as solutions to the poor quality of education offered by the government schools. It has been asserted that these Low-fee private schools provide quality education and that these schools should be supported and encouraged (Tooley, 2001, Tooley & Dixon, 2006). With support to these low-fee private schools a campaign for school choice started and simultaneously there was opposition to the norm of illegality to operate schools for profit in India. As already mentioned advocates of school choice such as CCS runs a project for amendment to the RTE Act and demands that India should legalize schools running for profit and should opt for deregulation and delicensing.

However there are a number of researches which contest such claims of quality, accessibility and equity of these low fee private schools. There is a growing body of research in India which has focused on the private schooling sector in India which have found that there exist constrain to access to private school (Gurney, 2017). The constraints are based on gender (Azam & Kingdon, 2013; De *et al.*, 2011), economic status (Härmä, 2011) and caste (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2015; Woodhead *et al.*, 2013). The concept of school choice is not straightforward and it involves multiple considerations while one is making a decision with regard to choices. The trends in India with respect to school choices are about making a choice between the government versus the private schools. The very notion of choice assumes to a certain extent- the making of informed

decisions between so available and viable alternatives but when the trend is of choice between the government versus the private and the government provision is inadequate or when alternatives are not available the extent to which one makes choice is questionable (James & Woodhead, 2013). 'Choice is an attractive concept in principle' but not everybody is in a position to make choices, that is to say that a certain level of wealth is required to make choices and choose between different schools and that parents have to cut their beliefs to meet cost as was seen while studying U.P. (Harma J., 2009). Advocates of choice have labelled these private schools as "low-fee" schools but the fees involved are considerably a lot or huge too many households and people with constraints of living in poverty are not able to exercise their choices due to these limitations (James & Woodhead, 2013)

The access to private school is determined by the ability to pay and also for choice to operate there must be corresponding ability to pay (Hirschman, 1978), and therefore gender dimensions come on its way because the poor household is not capable of paying for every child in the house. In India and in U.P in particular a son is preferred when it comes to spending due to patrilineal marriage traditions (Dreze & Sen, 2002). 'There is a statistically pro-male gender bias in rural Low-fee private school enrolments, particularly in U.P (Kingdon, 2005 and Bhartia & Kingdon, 2007). Along with gender there is also gap between children from different castes in terms of educational attainment. Children from Scheduled Caste have lower educational attainment than the rest in the society. The reason for which broadly relates to 'the overlapping of the economic disadvantage and caste/tribe status and disempowerment' (Subrahmanian 2005). While the SC communities lag behind due to disempowerment the upper castes 'have used their disposable income to buy privilege through private schooling for their children (Jeffery, Jeffery and Jeffery, 2005).

Much of the research on school choice have focused exclusively on 'objective' factors such as distance and affordability the growing body of empirical research have identified that parental biographies and identity characteristics also shape the school choice decisions (Gurney, 2017). Srivastava (2008) in her study demonstrates that parents are actively engaged in choosing and their choice decisions are influenced by the micro and



macro level factors. At the macro level the attitude and beliefs towards government and private options which are viewed as binary opposition with dissatisfaction from the government schools due to teacher absenteeism, crucial teacher supply and inadequate facilities, and at micro level understanding of local context and school supply with parents collecting information from other parents and comparing fee structures, teacher attendance, facilities and importantly, test results of children already studying there are determining factors while making choices.

School choice and idea of competition in education go side by side. The advocates of school choice who viewed choice to be essential in order to choose the best for their children believed that an intense competition between schools lead to better quality and lower costs as competing suppliers vie for potential clients (Chubb and Moe, 1990 and Tooley, 2000). While propagating this idea the question of affordability is not given due consideration along with various other factors that influence choice decisions. The empirical studies investigating choice-led and pro-privatization policies have found that there is an overwhelming influence of class and privilege when it comes to making choices. People from privileged backgrounds are better able to deploy material, cultural and social resources in order to take advantage of choice policies contrary to the less privileged who are marginalized to schools that are less desirable (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). Social meanings are attached to the choices that parents make for their children and for some parents the act of choosing is a means of expressing and enacting a particular identity. Parents choose based on affiliations such as ‘people like us or ‘people not like us’ in relation to wider community solidarities (Gurney, 2017).

Therefore in the Indian context the choice making is not based only on the ‘objective factors’ but there are many other concerns that need to be looked at in order to understand choices in the Indian domain. While it can be said that the school choice practice started with the liberalization of the economy and with the surge in demand for ‘English medium’ education along with huge dissatisfaction from the poor quality education at the government schools. The discourses built up by the pro-privatization advocates cannot be overlooked. The idea that private schools are affordable and can serve as an alternative to

the government schools to fulfill the quest for quality education especially for poor stands questionable with too little evidence to support the same.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In the Indian context what we see today is the involvement of networks, entrepreneurs and investors who are engaged not only with the exponentially growing education market in India but also with reshaping of the policy at the national level. These policies are being influenced by a number of actors working at the ground level who are also actively engaged with changing public opinion and building discourses around issues of education (e.g. CCS, Liberty institute, India). The dissemination of such policies is carried out by policy entrepreneurs and think tanks. Prof. Tooley can be addressed as an individual policy Entrepreneur who has done tremendous amount work with respect to research and advocacy of private schools as solution to failing public schools. The policy entrepreneurs also engage with policy transfers and deploy mechanisms of policy convergences while working with many partners and consultants. Through assistance in policy formation they help in making local policy infrastructures which are embedded with the prevailing policies of the western discourses which can either be direct or ‘spillovers’ into local policy systems (Ball & Nambissan, 2010). The expansion of the low fee private schools were regarded as essential in order to meet the international commitments of ‘Education for All’ (EFA) goals as well as the SDG goals.

The choice campaigns are followed by the increasing privatization of the education sector. The embedded western discourses of choice bring along the practices and reforms of the west. The choice campaigns in the west resulted in reforms in the education sector with the introduction of the markets into the school system by way of vouchers and the same is being replicated here in India. Within the field of education in India what is being attempted through the networks and policy entrepreneurs is the creation of a business infrastructure for private education projects being run with the aim to bring about amendment in the legal framework for education in order to legalize for-profit education and their expansion through vouchers. This is a shift from the ‘proto’ to ‘roll back’ neoliberalism (Tickell and Peck, 2002). The long struggle to achieve the aim of universal education and EFA goals make the Indian state vulnerable as the policies so formulated to

achieve these goals have failed. The failure in terms of achieving the goals makes the state susceptible to the politics of TAN which is well funded and has the support of powerful and influential voices along with a huge network.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

#### 5.1 The LPG Reforms and the Education Sector in India Today

The reforms introduced in 1991 provided an impetus to increased privatization in the school education sector resulting into the ‘mushrooming’ of private schools in the country (Nambissan, 2003). The growing privatization has changed the landscape of school education in India post 1990s (Kumar and Choudhury, 2020). The total enrollment between 2010-2016 fell by 14.5% in the government schools while the enrollment in the private school during the same time rose by 38.5% (Kingdon, 2020). This abandonment of the government school for private school has been explained in many studies which enlist certain factors such as quality, accountability, ‘English medium’ education, classroom size, infrastructure as the main drivers towards choosing private schools. Of all the two arguments that come out very strongly in favour of choosing private schools are (i) quality and (ii) affordability.

##### 5.1 (a) Quality Issues

Quality has been studied through the ‘outcomes and achievement level’ of the student. The outcome and the achievement of the students, their test scores are used to define quality. The idea of quality in education finds its first mention the 1986 policy where it was viewed in relation to learning outcomes (Sarangapani, 2010). Recently with the publication of Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) the issue of quality got operationalised and has eventually become the focal point of most policy formulated for education. The ASER report reported the abysmal low level of learning, in its study; it found out that the learning levels of children were below their grade. Apart from the learning outcomes the other parameters used to assess quality are ‘efficiency’ and ‘accountability’. Both the concepts of accountability and efficiency are best described with the preference of economic understanding of them. The World Bank provides an understanding of both the efficiency wherein it states that- the acquisition of foundational skills in literacy, numeracy and reasoning in the most cost-effective manner proves the ‘school effectiveness’ and the efficiency of the school (Sarangapani, 2010). The concept

on accountability focuses on the accountability of the teacher where a number of studies point to the fact that teacher absenteeism ranging from 18 to 40 percent and with an all India average of 25% (Kremer *et al.*, 2005 and Muralidharan *et al.*, 2016) have been responsible for poor quality of learning in public schools and the absence of this factor makes the private schools better (Mukhopadyay & Sarangapani, 2018). The quality of school have often been studied in comparison to the private schools where the learning outcomes, teacher absenteeism and other material inputs such as infrastructure, facilities of toilet, clean drinking water and playground are markers of better quality (Goyal, 2009; Kingdon and Teal, 2007; Muralidharan and Kremer, 2006; Tooley and Dixon, 2006, Tooley, 2009).

The issues pertaining to quality are held responsible for the failing or the breakdown of the public schools and the comparative studies have shown that the quality of the private school is superior to the public school (Rangaraju, Tooley, and Dixon, 2012; Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Tooley, Dixon, and Gomathi, 2007). The private schools are also believed to be better in quality as they offer English medium education (Gurney, 2017; Nambissan, 2012; Narwana, 2019). The private schools prove to be more efficient and accountable as they provide quality education with better and improved learning outcomes at less cost than what the government spends per child (Kingdon, 2007; Kremer & Muralidharan, 2006). The accountability aspect too is better in private schools as they are more responsive to the parental needs. The teachers in the private schools are accountable to their employers who can any time replace them and are also accountable to the parents as the parents have the option to withdraw their children. The availability of school options with private schools provide parents with enhanced choices in terms of selecting schools. The market mechanism of ‘choice’ and ‘competition’ make schools more responsive and thus accountability is improved.

### **5.1 (b) Affordability**

Private schools both aided and unaided have increased from 19.49% in 2007-2008 to 25.24% in 2016-2017 and the enrollment share in these private schools has increased to 45% (U-DISE, 2008; U-DISE, 2018). The increase in the private schools mainly

comprises of the “for-profit” segment which is growing fast and the philanthropic and charitable schools which were historically present as private providers of education seem to be disappearing (Nambissan, 2012). Since the 1990’s there has been an exponential growth of the ‘low-fee-private’ schools even in the rural areas (Nambissan, 2012; Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Tooley & Dixon, 2007).

The increased participation of the poor in the private schools is mainly due to the fact that they are affordable. The fees in these private unaided schools in the rural area is estimated to be around 275 rupees per month and that in the urban areas the median amounts to 500 rupees per month (Kingdon, 2020). The perceived better quality education offered by these schools at affordable cost the ‘low-fee-private’ schools prove to be the ‘poor’s best chance’ (Tooley, 2004). These low-fee-private schools have become popular among the lower and lower-middle class parents (Choudhury, 2020; Harma, 2011; Nambissan, 2012; Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Singh & Colin, 2014; Srivastava, 2008; Tooley & Dixon, 2007).

The idea of outcome as measure of quality, aspect of efficiency and accountability have become the basis of new discursive regime and are central issues discussed for policy matters (Mukhopadhyay & Sarangapani, 2018). As a part of the solution to the inefficiencies in the public schools the ‘low-fee-private’ schools are seen as a desirable alternative (Tooley & Dixon, 2006 and Tooley, Dixon & Gomathi, 2007). The private unaided LFPs in India are found to be highly heterogeneous (De et al., 2002). The presence of these private schools enhances choice and choice is deemed important to discipline the providers in the private sector. The presence of the LFPs is important for “increasing the poor clients choice and participation in service delivery” (World Bank, 2003, p.1). The presence of private school not only enhances choice but private schools also bring in competition and are therefore beneficial as competition would increase responsiveness, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency and quality (Lauglo, 1995; Kitaev, 2007).

## **5.2 PPP Solution for ‘Ailing’ Government Schools**

The faith in the private schools are not only acknowledged but also endorsed with the public-private partnership policy initiatives. “The Government of India proposed strategies for public–private partnerships (PPPs) in education in its Tenth and Eleventh Five Year Plans to help the ‘ailing’ government school system to transform itself” (Srivastava, 2010; Srivatasva *et al.*, 2013). The aspect of competition and managerial efficiency of the private sector are becoming the driving logic of such policy move (Mukhopadhyay & Sarangapani, 2018).

PPPs were first theorized and implemented in the USA during 1980s, in the 1990’s PPP also became popular in the developing world owing to the international ‘development’ policy discourse (Verger & VanderKaaji, 2012). “The World Bank, is one of the most fervent advocates of this shift in paradigm, became especially interested in exporting the PPP solution to the developing world” (Miraftab, 2004). The international aid agencies under the leadership of the World Bank PPPs for education have been incorporated into the global agenda. PPPs are defined as “contractual relations between government and private providers to acquire education service of a defined quantity and quality at an agreed price for a specified period” (Patrinos *et al.*, 2009).

In 2002 the working group on Public-Private Partnership was created and a Sub-group to look into the feasibility of PPP in social sector development including the elementary education was established in 2003. The adoption of the PPP model into policy followed by the report of the Sub-group was in line with the neoliberal belief which stated that the PPP solution is not only more effective and efficient but is also an empowering mechanism that would help resolve the distrust in the bureaucracy and the oppressiveness of the state. The PPP mode of policy pronouncement will make possible the involvement of the community, neighborhood and voluntary organization which will lead to the empowerment of citizens’ (Planning Commission, 2004).

The 1991 Economic Policy reforms were largely influenced by the World Bank’s standard structural adjustment package (Srivastava, 2010). The PPP proposal for policy preference by the World Bank is paradoxical in the sense that while it strongly believes

the presence of market as a solution to problems lingering in the public sector it also seeks government intervention in generating the conditions and providing incentives to the market so that education market can successfully work (Verger, 2012). The developments during this period with new policy adoption were also ideological. The reforms introduced in 1991 were influenced by the neoliberal ideology of development. The presence of many other international aid agencies also extended aid due to the faith in the private sector. The privatization of education which was termed de-facto and demand-driven was given enough impetus through policy reforms. The liberalization and privatization process has led to the vast expansion of the private sector in the education sector today.

### **5.3 'Edu-business' in the form of LFPs**

As noted above the growth has mostly been in the 'low-fee-private' school segment. The growth and expansion of the 'low-fee-private' school is also fuelled by the corporate investors into the 'edu-business'. The post 2015 era can also be termed as "second wave" (Srivastava, 2016) witnesses the evolution of the LFPs as an attractive sector for investment and the consequent emergence of the corporate-backed low-fee-private school chains. The most fervent advocate of this profitable LFPs who work with the mental models of 'the business of making money' and the offshoot of 'doing good' and are involved in the diffusion of the corporate-backed low-fee-private school chains have been some of the non-state actors who mobilized funding from venture philanthropies, social entrepreneurship firms, corporate social responsibility units etc. (Srivastava, 2016). The studies revealed that even "running a school even for low-income families was potentially a profitable undertaking, with estimated profits of about 25% in the year of school recognition" (Tooley & Dixon, 2003). The profitability of the sector as informed by researches did not go unnoticed and many private investors showed interest in investing in the sector. The private investment and commercialization of the low-fee-private schools saw a surge and thus the period post 2015 can be marked as the second wave (Srivastava, 2016).



The PPP policy preference has enabled access to private schools through the school voucher programs in India. RTE Act, section 12(1)(c) reserves 25% seats for children from 'disadvantaged section' in the private schools. Though, through this provision in the Act the government strengthens the discourse of private school alternative. The RTE also regulates the private schools heavily in terms of meeting certain standards to operate which is that the private schools are to follow same rules as public schools in terms of curriculum, teacher qualification and training, student pupil ratio and prescribed norms for school facilities (Kamat *et al.*, 2016). The low-fee-private schools that exist today are mostly unrecognized and hence, unregulated. The recognition is an government stamp for approval however there are hardly any private school that are 'recognized' meet standards or fulfill all conditions of recognition (Kingdon, 2007 p. 183). The unrecognized schools continue to exist unregulated and are not a part of the records maintained in any form which is why no official data base accurately reports on their numbers (Kingdon, 2007 and Kingdon, 2020). Study by Kremer and Muralidharan (2006) found that in the rural areas 51% of schools, surveyed in an extensive survey of 20 villages were found to be unrecognized.

#### **5.4 Low-fee-private schools and choice in India**

The private schools are believed to provide more choices to the parents and the low-fee-private schools in this relation cater to enhancing the choices for the poor and the disadvantaged sections. The low-fee-private schools serve the educational needs of the poor and happen to be the 'poor's best chance' in terms of acquiring quality education from a private school. The advocates of the private schools and specially the LFPs have recommended establishing the public and private voucher schemes, availability of micro credit or loans, deregulation of private schools or the liberalization of the regulatory environment for schools making profits (Tooley & Dixon, 2003).

The advocates for LFP schools are networked and work at the global scale with the motivation to actively create a global market for the corporate-backed low-fee-private schools (Srivastava, 2016). For the same it is believed that market metaphors of

'branding, competition and profit' will help the market to create educational brand names and this will make it possible for mobilizing fund through philanthropy, investment and aid and the investor can invest with full faith. The school chains with the brand name will maintain standard in the educational quality and thus branding will ensure replication of standardization across the schools (Tooley, 2009). With the increased funding and branding of the schools, "idealized market of low-fee-private schools will be created with competition as the chief spur". As stated, branding will ensure standardization and will increase competition, the "unbranded or unchained school will have to compete with the branded school where they could suffer or go out of business" (Tooley, 2009).

The idea of choice is central to the idea of privatization debate (Harma, 2011). The argument that accompanies the idea of unfettered privatization is that it gives people the freedom to choose. Choices in the competitive educational market will lead to higher quality through competition (Tooley & Dixon, 2006). Borrowing from Hirschman (1978) the concept of 'voice' and 'exit' will help the unsatisfied parent to voice their concern about the deterioration of the quality and at the same time the parent can withdraw or 'exit' their child from an underperforming school. However under such a situation the poor parent choose to exit rather than exercise voice (Harma, 2009).

### **5.5 Contestations to the LFP as Solution**

While a full-fledged market is being developed with the involvement of the non-state actors in the form of venture philanthropy and corporate investment with the intention of 'doing good' and providing quality education which is affordable the claim seems to be failing. Many empirical researches refute the claims and provide evidences of both poor quality and private education not being affordable rather involving cost people can't afford. Nambissan (2003) argues that "the mushrooming of privately managed unregulated preprimary and primary schools can have only deleterious consequences for the spread of education in general and among the poor in particular" as their quality is doubtful. Not only quality but even affordability is often suspect as 37% of the population in the country live below poverty line and can hardly afford the cheapest LFPs available

(Tilak, 2009; Nambissan, 2012). In order to avail one of these LFPs the expenditure of the household amounts to 30% of their income at the primary level (Tilak, 2009).

Account of poor household reveals that they need to ‘cut their bellies’ in order to afford these private schools (Harma, 2009). The LFPs are accessible only to those whose household incomes are above a certain level and a significant proportion of the poor households cannot afford these private schools (Goyal & Pandey, 2009; Harma, 2011). The concerns with regard to the LFPs are not only with contesting claims of quality and affordability but that these LFPs tend to accentuate inequalities (Tilak, 2009; Mehrotra, 2005). Given that the private schools are accessed only when paid for there exists a gender dimension with regard to schooling choice within the household. Following the patrilineal traditions the son is preferred or there is a pro-male bias in terms of spending for education (Dreze & Sen, 2002; Bhartia & Kingdon, 2007).

While the choice campaign in the West has led to major educational reforms the case is not the same in India. Choice in the Indian context is understood as a binary between the government and the private schools at the macro level and at the micro level informal information regarding, fees, facilities and distance is what influences choices (Srivastava, 2007; Woodhead & Frost, 2012). The advocacy networks involving the policy ‘Individual Policy Entrepreneur’ and the Centre for Civil Society along with the corporate investors continue to strengthen the discourse for more privatization for quality and affordable education but the advocacy has not been able to build much discourse on choices. The reservation of 25% seats in the private schools through legislation is the voucher program of the Indian Government which is derived from the discursive regime of the pro-privatization which believes that the markets or private providers are more efficient. There are a number of private-sponsored vouchers that are given to children in Delhi, Uttarakhand and Andhra Pradesh. There are also government-sponsored vouchers in these states (Muralidhran & Sundaram, 2015).

The advocates of school choices argue for more privatization and deregulation of the private schools so that the education market can fully develop and function with freedom.

The rationale for further privatization is linked to freedom to choose. However with exacerbating inequality, poor quality of education being offered by the low-fee-private schools and illegal profit-led edu-businesses the growth of the 'low-fee-private' school or the 'budget school' need further investigation and research with regard to their expansion and functioning in India.

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