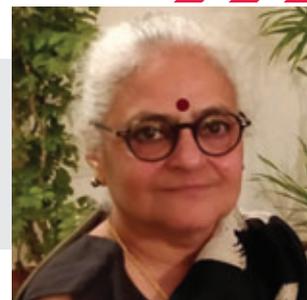


## Persisting Gap between Policies and Practice

Vimala Ramachandran



If we are to study government policies and important education commission reports since 1950 – what strikes us is the list of policy recommendations that been repeated over and over again. Here are a few that has been reiterated in almost every policy statement:

- Provide child care facilities/crèche within school premises (Kothari Commission 1968, NPE 1986);
- Introduce flexible school timings and region-specific school calendar — especially in tribal areas. Create a pool of teachers from the tribal communities and encourage more people to become teachers... (Kothari Commission 1968, NPE 1986, Bhuria<sup>1</sup> and Debar Commissions<sup>2</sup> on Tribal areas); in particular tribal commissions specifically recommended that the government “pay special attention to pedagogical and linguistic aspects of tribal education, focused programme to develop and train teachers in the tribal areas, provide mid-day meals, clothing and books and most importantly calibrate the school calendar to suit the social rhythm of tribal communities... (Tribal Commission 1961)”
- Make teacher education more flexible and local specific and strike a balance between theory and practice (University Education Commission 1948, Secondary Education Commission 1953, Chattopadhyay Committee 1985 and Ramamurty Committee 1990)
- Decentralise educational planning and administration, bring it closer to the people so that it reflects the special needs and aspirations of the community; strengthen decentralised and convergent strategies and evolve context-specific strategies to respond to educational needs — especially of girls and other special focus groups (Kothari Commission of 1968, stressed in NPE 1986, both DPEP and SSA Programmes and the RtE Bill of 2009);
- Common School System – “A neighbourhood school will provide good education to children because sharing life with common people is an essential ingredient of good education. Secondly, the establishment of such schools will

### Bhuria Commission 2002-04 Recommendations

The education sector should be regarded as a key sector for the overall progress of tribal people. Though the literacy percentage has increased from 8.53% in 1961 to 29.60% in 1991, this does not necessarily mean that the STs have become educated in the real sense of the term. They have also not been able to catch up with the rest of the society; in fact, the gap in literacy percentage as between the STs and non-STs continues to widen.

The tribal policy will aim at:

- (i) Making pedagogy suitable to tribal life and milieu
- (ii) Attuning curricula and syllabi to tribal life and culture
- (iii) Imparting teaching in the tribal child’s mother tongue, at least up to primary level
- (iv) Focusing national programmes like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan on the tribal population, since it constitutes the most illiterate section of the society
- (v) Providing scholarships, hostel maintenance costs, free school uniforms etc. up to the matriculation stage

<sup>1</sup>Bhuria Committee 1991 and Bhuria Commission 2002-04

<sup>2</sup>The Tribal Commission of 1960-61, Chaired by Mr. U N Dhebar

- (vi) In the first instance, setting up educational institutions in the Scheduled Areas and tribal areas, as per the prescribed norms. Further, considering, lowering of the norms in view of the scattered tribal populations
- (vii) Repair and renovation of school and hostel buildings lying in a state of disrepair. Provision of toilet facilities in all schools and hostels, particularly those meant for girl students.
- (viii) Establishment of at least one residential school for boys and one residential school for girls in each development block.
- (ix) Establishment of one Navodaya Vidyalaya in each tribal block
- (x) Establishment of one model residential school of the pattern evolved by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in ITDP/ITDA.
- (xi) Provision of supplementary nutrition and mid-day meals to children in tribal areas up to middle stage.
- (xii) Emphasis on vocational and professional education, setting up polytechnics for studies in subjects like farming, forestry, horticulture, dairying, veterinary sciences etc. Orientation of these studies towards self-employment.
- (xiii) Devising measures for meeting the problem of absenteeism of teachers, particularly in far-flung areas, like constituting village education committees, contractual employment, appointment of ST teachers.

compel rich, privileged and powerful classes to take interest in the system of public education and thereby bring about its early improvement” (para 10.18, Kothari Commission Report 1968)

Noting the inability of the political system to take policy recommendations seriously, the 1985 document titled *Challenge of Education: A Policy Perspective* said “The 1968 Policy was not translated into a detailed strategy of implementation, accompanied by the assignment of specific responsibilities and financial and organisational support. As a result, problems of access, quality, quantity, utility and financial outlay, accumulated over the years, have now assumed such massive proportions that they must be tackled with the utmost urgency...” This disconnect between policy and practice has progressively led to the education crisis that we face today.

On the other hand the last three decades (especially since 1990) several practices were adopted by the government without any policy level approval. Take the case of contract teachers and para teachers. No policy document recommended the appointment of teachers without the requisite academic qualification nor did any policy suggest hiring teachers on low honorarium. The notion of a para-teacher or a *shiksha karmi* / *vidhya* volunteer / *guruji* (call it by any name) was not part of the educational landscape. However, in 1987, the then Education Secretary Anil Bordia designed a project

for Rajasthan. The project – known as *Shiksha Karmi* Project – sought to alleviate teacher shortages in rural / remote areas by appointing local youth as teachers.

Given the educational status in such areas, young men who had passed class 10 were appointed. This project was meant to be a one-off to address the specific situation in schools in remote areas that did not have teachers, or the teachers appointed in such schools refused to attend. Very soon, the idea of appointing local youth (albeit with low educational qualifications) on meagre salaries (often almost one-tenth of the salary of a regular teacher) caught the imagination of the bureaucracy, a number of international donor agencies and, of course, a vocal section of the education community in India. Very soon Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (to name a few) adopted this model on a wide scale. By the early 1990s such teachers came to be known as ‘para-teachers’. Many state governments saw this as means to overcome teacher shortages without being tied down to recurring financial liabilities. The implementation of the 5th Pay Commission’s recommendations in the late 1990s placed a huge monetary burden on the government by way of substantially increased salaries. What started as a strategy to specifically address problems in remote areas quickly snowballed into an accepted practice in *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* and *Rashtriya*

*Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan*. The percentage of ‘para’ or ‘contract’ teachers, which was around 7.1 per cent in 2003-04, reached its peak of 12.2 per cent in 2011-12, before sliding back to about 7.3 per cent in 2014. In absolute numbers, these percentages translate into 0.5 million para / contract teachers in 2012-13, compared with 6.8 million regular teachers. Jharkhand employs the highest percentage of para / contract teachers at 49 percent in 2012-13, Mizoram (26 percent) and UP (19 percent). (Ramachandran et al, 2018<sup>3</sup>)

Another significant strategy adopted by the Government of India was the creation of parallel administrative structures. In 1987, the Government of India (GoI) and the Government of Rajasthan (GoR) agreed to set up the *Shiksha Karmi* Board as a registered society to implement the *Shiksha Karmi* Project. Like most other NGOs in India, this was registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, but with one significant difference. The formal head of the society was the Education Secretary of the state. It was hoped that this structure would provide the flexibility and openness of an NGO alongside the outreach, legitimacy and authority of the government. This signalled a radical departure in development administration – where the mainstream educational administration was bypassed and a parallel structure created to run a “externally aided project”. Soon this ‘innovation’ became mainstream when donor-assisted projects in the education sector adopted this model. Apart from the GOI women’s education project *Mahila Samakhya*, the World Bank assisted District Primary Education Project (DPEP) adopted this model in 1994 and later *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) was also implemented through a similar mechanism. Again, here was a mechanism that has no policy level sanction and it was adopted in special projects and gradually expanded. This also went against the federal principle on which resource sharing was agreed to in 1950. One must hasten to add that in 2014 the GOI Finance Ministry was cajoled by state governments to discontinue the practice of direct fund transfers to registered societies bypassing the state government treasury. This had been a bone of contention between GoI and a number of state governments for many years with the issue

also being brought up in meetings of the National Development Council of India. This was further reiterated in the BK Chaturvedi (2014<sup>4</sup>) report on centrally sponsored schemes.

Why is it that there is invariably a huge gap between policies and practices in India? Is this specific to the social sectors?

Globally, policies are seen as an agreed framework for action – it spells out the intention of the government. As a result, a lot of energy goes into formulating, influencing and changing policies. Equally, it is also believed that once a policy is enacted by the parliament, adequate resources (administrative and financial) would be allocated. Interestingly in India this is not the case. Policies are enacted and there is nothing that compels the government to implement it in totality. India has witnessed the formulation of wonderful policies in education, health, child development, gender equality, housing, food security etc. However, policies do not come with resource allocation and a time-line for implementation. As a result, the concerned ministries pick and choose parts of the policy for implementation. Since the 1990s, especially after the 1986 education policy and 1992 Programme of Action the MHRD has formulated projects for the implementation of specific recommendations.

For example, Chapter 4 of the 1986 policy on Education for Women’s Equality resulted in the *Mahila Samakhya* Project. However, the main recommendation of using education as a tool to neutralise the accumulated ‘distortions of the past’ in gender relations was not woven into the education strategy. Similarly, specific programmes for teacher training or the District Primary Education Programme focused on setting up institutions like DIET and later BRC and CRC without weaving in gender issues into the content and process of teacher education. The focus on subsequent national programmes of *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* was on inputs like opening new schools to increase enrolment, construction of buildings and a teacher training regime.

One of the devastating impacts of the project approach was that the main frame of education

<sup>3</sup>Ramachandran, Vimala; Bêteille, Tara; Linden, Toby; Dey, Sangeeta; Goyal, Sangeeta; Goel Chatterjee, Prerna. 2018. *Getting the Right Teachers into the Right Schools: Managing India’s Teacher Workforce*. World Bank Studies; Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28618>

<sup>4</sup>MHRD, GOI. 2014. *Restructuring of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, Draft Executive Summary*

administration was weakened and parallel structures were created to implement the schemes or projects launched by Government of India. Across all the states the new 'autonomous society' emerged as competing structures that had more resources (financial and human) and greater flexibility. Funds received from GOI were channelled directly to these societies and resources were targeted to specific activities. Let us take the example of teacher management. Regular teachers continued to be appointed by the main education administration and they were managed as a cadre of the state government. Contract teachers were paid from project funds. This led to a range of problems: (i) teachers paid from projects received different salaries and were governed by different rules, (ii) academic support and training of regular teachers was done through the projects, while they continued to report to the main frame of education administration (and not the project directorate) – leading to confusion both in the minds of the teachers as to who is the controlling authority and in the project leadership, who did not have any jurisdiction when it came to teacher management (transfers and posting, salaries etc.), (iii) Travel allowances for training or official meetings and workshops paid through the projects - and (iv) conflict arising in schools over teachers being paid differently for performing the same duty.

Irregular payment of contract teacher salaries emerged as a big issue in several states. For example, in Jharkhand and Punjab salaries of teachers hired as a part of some project (usually either SSA or RMSA) or are locally hired by Zilla Parishads dependent on the availability of project funds (Ramachandran et al. 2018)

As a result, we have seen the gradual weakening of educational administration across the country. The main administrative mechanism is constrained by lack of financial resources, lack of appropriately trained staff and most importantly, with almost no powers to effect changes when required. Cadres of school inspectors and other field level staff faded out. Even the traditional school level data gathering mechanisms gave way to DISE. The main education bureaucracy is continuously in a fire fighting mode – trying to maintain what it can. On the other hand, the autonomous societies created for education projects not only get more resources (at least till 2014-15) but also had greater autonomy. This

mechanism is being reviewed now, but the damage has been done. It will take a lot of time and political / administrative will to get the system back on track.

Insights gained from over 10 qualitative research studies done by me over the last 15 years reveal that administrators and political leaders do not take policies seriously. It is seen as a broad statement of intent, a political statement for the international community – without any 'compulsion' to implement them. For several decades now GOI policies have set goals of universal access to quality education – but these goal posts continuously shifted. We have, on paper, achieved universal primary school enrolment, but are still a long way off to achieve universal participation up to class 8 (elementary). However, the dream of quality education for all children remains elusive. The bottom line is that when the government does not view policies as a legislative mandate – one that they need to implement completely and in the stipulated time – there is bound to be selective implementation.

Another important insight that I gained over the last two to three decades is that our administrators and political leaders are not committed to equity goals in education policies. As a result, there has been a steady growth of private schools and the children of anyone with the economic means to pay shift their children from government to private schools. Equally, the government has also been adept at creating multiple layers within the government schooling system – privileging those with greater voice in the system. Today the financial and human resource allocations for Kendriya Vidhyalaya, Navodaya Vidhyalaya and other newer forms of residential schools get more resources. Some states like Delhi have gone a step further – the government schools are categorised as catering to bright students (priti bha vidhyala) and these schools get far more resources than the ordinary government school. Even within the school different sections are created to cater to children with "promise". As a result, over the decades the ordinary government school has been relegated to the bottom of the ladder – receiving less resources and very little management time.

Why have we reached this state in India? Why is it that policies that are committed to equality, social justice and non-discrimination are overlooked?

Rashmi Sharma (Sharma and Ramachandran 2009<sup>5</sup>) argues: 'The fact is that any policy or plan that is oblivious to the existing reality is no more than a wish list (...) A redefinition of "policy" is clearly required in the Indian context. First of all, policy needs to address some core issues that confront government today...'. We have seen that policy announcements enjoy little leverage when the institutions responsible for policy implementation are themselves not in control, are dominated by narrow turf or profit motives, or run by bureaucrats

with little understanding of educational processes. The absence of an integrated vision for educational development can be seen concretely in the absence of linkages, both horizontal and vertical, between policy and practice, between different institutions and different layers.

Ultimately the issue boils down to lack of commitment to the constitutionally enshrined goals of equity and non-discrimination. There seems to be no other explanation.

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<sup>5</sup>Sharma, Rashmi and Vimala Ramachandran. 2009. *The Elementary Education System in India: Exploring Institutional Structures, Processes and Dynamics*. Routledge. New Delhi

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