

Education suffering within structural inequalities: A Critical Discourse Analysis of a policy framework

Urvashi Khandal

Manipal University Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Saurabh Das

Christ (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, India

Rajshri Gaur

Manipal University Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

Education acts as an important catalyst for socioeconomic and democratic evolution in society and is a critical tool for building an equitable system. In our paper, we have historicized one of the most important educational policies, viz. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SAMSA) in India that carries large expectations to minimize the educational divide. We have studied the policy through the lens of Political Economy and have further critiqued it through the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. We find in our paper that the budget allocated to SAMSA was revised in 2022, from its preceding years with a 28 per cent slash. We critically reflect on the principles mentioned in the policy and find that although there has been an attempt to mitigate the hazards of banking education the 'Public-Private Partnership' initiative reinforces struggles for equitable education, and further, the privatization sets the government free from any accountability. Moreover, a constitutional right like the Right to Education (RTE) is not sufficient enough to meet the goals of universalisation of education. Besides, we analyse the principles such as 'Education for All', 'Equity', 'Equal Opportunity', 'Access', 'Gender Concern', 'Centrality of teacher', 'Moral Compulsion', and 'Convergent and integrated system of education management', and argue that

although some of the facets of societal structural inequalities are addressed, however, there exists hardly a proper roadmap that could be monitoring the process of creating an inclusive educational paradigm.

Keywords: *Public Policy Research, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SAMSA), Political Economy, Critical Discourse Analysis, Structural inequalities.*

Introduction

Education is the most effective catalyst for socioeconomic and democratic evolution and a critical tool for building an equitable system. A highly qualified population with the necessary understanding, mindsets, and expertise is pivotal for social and economic growth in the twenty-first century. For millions of children worldwide, education is still an unachievable right. Now, 72 million children of primary school age (five to twelve years) are not in school, and 759 million individuals are uneducated (The Borgen Project, 2016). For most of the rural population, education is heavily reliant on government-run or aided schools and non-governmental institutions. Declarations like '30% Gross Enrollment Ratio in Higher Education by 2030' or '25% RTE Quota' refer to the need for improved access to education but often neglect to address the mechanics of such access and, more critically, its sustainability in the long run (Sengupta, 2011). Since India gained its independence from the clutches of British imperialism in 1947, the education system that is built in the country in post-independence years still not have been able to become an instrument of inclusion and evolution. For example, in an article, Protiva Kundu working at the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) in New Delhi states that,

“underprivileged communities such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), for example, make for 25.2% of the country’s population but constitute only 20% of those who are educated, as per Census 2011. Fee hikes would make education even more inaccessible for them.” (Kundu, 2020)

The Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act recognizes education as a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14, and it sets basic school standards for elementary education. Right to Education acts as part of the public-private partnership demands. All non-government or private schools must set aside 25% of their seats for children belonging to weaker sections and disadvantaged groups (EWS) in all private unaided primary schools. As per the RTE quota of 25% reserved seats, admissions to private schools are primarily determined by the caste or economic status of the student. In addition, it forbids all unrecognized schools to operate and prohibits any tuition fees, donations, or interviews with students and their parents. Also, under this act, no child shall be held back or expelled until they have completed elementary schooling (Ministry of Education) (Tucker & Shagal, 2012, pp. 1-3) (Centre for Civil society, 2022).

Education also serves as a social integrator, ingraining values that promote social unity and nationhood (Planning Commission Government of India, 2013, p. 48; Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019, p.3). In large-scale assessments of learning outcomes, there has been a gaping inequality between government and private schools. As a consequence of these assessments, government schools come out as failures instead of being viewed as successful (Raina, 2020, p. 3). In general, many students belonging to lower-income families do not have access to the private education system. The majority of parents regard education as an additional expense instead of an investment. Students in disadvantaged groups have great potential and are eager to learn, but they don't have the right mentors. Children have restricted access to learning resources such as well-equipped classrooms, computers, and labs. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the most crucial issue whilst accessing education was the lack of I.T. support, digital education tools like the internet, and smartphones. In the wake of the pandemic, authorities were forced to shift traditional classrooms to online delivery, without much attention being paid to serious questions of

affordability, accessibility, and the ability to meet the needs of all, particularly marginalized groups (Choudhury & G.S., 2021, pp. 4-6).

According to data collected from 19 States and Union Territories (U.T.s), there are about 29.6 million school students who do not have access to digital devices till June 2021 (Iftikhar, 2021). These debates on affordability, accessibility and ability to meet the needs of all, are not something new in the educational paradigm, especially in developing countries like India. With the adoption of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986, India launched a slew of initiatives to attain the universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) to tackle the educational divide. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, several programming and schematic interventions were implemented, most importantly the one to be noted is Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2000-2001 (Mondal & Nandy, 2020). In 2009, the Right to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act was passed, strengthening the concept further, and establishing a lawful obligation to provide free and compulsory elementary education to all children aged 6 to 14. The Centrally Sponsored Scheme of SSA assisted States and Union Territories in implementing the RTE Act, 2009. With effect from September 2010, the scheme's norms were aligned with the act's provisions.

Although the RTE Act was implemented to broaden the state's role in providing schooling to Indian children, it picked to outsource growth in the non-public sector rather than attaining it through a public and standardised elementary educational structure. The emphasis of the RTE Act was on quantitative expansion instead of qualitative improvement in a government education system. The administration was enrolling each child, setting norms, attempting to create a reserved seat for students from economically weaker sections of society (EWS), and further incorporating these techniques preferably in a non-government school, within an education system based on the market economy.

A child belonging to a “weaker section” refers to “a child belonging to such parent or guardian whose annual income is lower than the minimum limit specified by the appropriate Government, by notification” (Tucker & Shagal, 2012, pp. 4-5) (Centre For Civil Society, 2014) (RTE Act, 2009, Section 2, Clause (e)).

This market-based school system functions on existing income inequalities in society. Besides “inequalities of income are compounded with other inequalities of gender, ethnicity, disability and geography to form a suffocating web of exclusion” (Walker, et al., 2019). Even in other high-income countries, about three-quarters of students from low-income families complete high school, compared to 90 per cent of those from well-off families (UNESCO, 2022; Oxfam, 2019, pp. 4-5). Inequalities in education can also be worsened by policies that promote commodification and expansion of private schools via public-private partnerships (PPPs), which exacerbate division and exclusion within the system of education. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) cover a wide range of actions. In India, PPP laws are not catering to the needs of developing the design of learning; instead, it only focuses on building infrastructure through the help of private bodies and only create a school management model. On the one hand, it is an essential need; however, on the other, it compromises the requirements that are needed for a student to build their socio-cognitive skills (FICCI, 2014).

Moreover, education is a fundamental right, and a public good, so, educational institutions, viz. schools, colleges, and universities, are needed to be run in a democratic process, wherein students, educators, and elected personnel of local communities should be the decision-makers (Hill, 2016, p. 74). Further, to mitigate the hazards of this PPP education model, along with the democratic way of running an educational institution, a socialist framework of education policy should be also envisioned (Hill & Boxley, 2007). Subsequently, there is a

gap in the inclusion of EWS children in unaided private schools in cities, where the possibility of inclusion is restricted to the level of admission to the school, and beyond the physical presence of a child at school, no other provision for integrated learning exists (Mehendala, et al., 2015, pp. 43-51; Raina, 2020, pp. 4). Furthermore, by providing an escape route for the state, the RTE act ended up dying due to the neoliberal trap, tangentially undermining the ability of states to ensure public schooling for all and easing the prospect of a standard school system (Sadgopal, 2016, p. 34). During this phase, the direction of policy change is shaped by neoliberalism's ideology that is dominant in shaping policy and economic practices (Raina, 2020, pp. 154-157).

Therefore, the excessive privatization of education and policies facilitates a lack of accountability for the government when an individual requests equitable access to education. With neoliberalism, an attempt is made to reduce budget deficits, usually by slashing government spending on social programs (Pettinger, 2018). Constitutional provisions envisioned that state-financed education for children in all sections of society did not become a reality, and the early decades of independence saw a continuous delay in meeting targets for universal elementary education (Mukhopadhyay, & Sarangapani, 2018, p. 9; Raina, 2020, p. 159).

To tackle the delay in the development of a holistic model of education in India the government further incorporated a Public-Private Partnership (PPPs) for education - where public funds are given to private schools to deliver education. They were and still at present are being pursued by the World Bank and other donors to address the issue of quality education (Bous, 2019, pp. 3-5). Additionally, the effects of PPPs on discrimination and social and economic exclusion have been consistently raised in research studies. One such study surveyed seventeen countries and concluded that the PPP school model

reinforces social disparities by serving predominantly high-income students (Baum, 2018). Samagra Shiksha Scheme is integrated with the PPP model. As part of the Government's Swachh Vidyalaya initiative¹, the PPP model and online performance monitoring have also been incorporated, which entails public sector undertakings and private corporations constructing toilets and maintaining them for at least five years (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018, p. 27).

However, it has not been discussed in the framework of the policy, the steps to evaluate and the bodies that would monitor the effective implementation of such action-oriented tasks. Even though SAMSA acknowledges the structural inequality, it still doesn't provide the bold solutions required to address it. Further, no road map is ahead in front of the government to resolve the larger issue of inequality in education and accountability from the personnel. Another random step was taken to make elementary education more universal by integrating centrally sponsored three schemes into one.

Shifting of three schemes to one integrated system – SAMSA

National Policy on Education (NPE), which came into force in 1986 aimed at Universal Elementary Education (UEE). After that, the Centrally Sponsored Schemes like The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the Government of India's flagship programme designed to achieve Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in 2000, as mandated by the 86th amendment to the Indian Constitution. With SSA, all children aged 6-14 years will receive useful and relevant education, as demonstrated by increased enrollment, retention, and learning, as well as improved levels of learning achievement in the primary and upper primary grades (Mondal & Nandy, 2020). The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), which began in 2009, created a secondary education

system supporting India's learning and expansion (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education and Literacy, 2019, pp. 2-5).

Another scheme, Restructuring and Reorganisation of Teacher Education (CSSTE), was launched in 1987. According to the NPE, improving teachers' prestige and professional expertise is the centrepiece of educational restructuring. As a cycle, teacher education consists of pre-service and in-service teacher training as irreplaceable modules (Department of Education: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 1998, pp. 31-35). The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Government of India, executed these three key school education advancement strategies individually, namely, SSA, RMSA, and TE, in collaboration with states and union territories. However, little attention was given to the implementation process; that was simply swept under the rug without even analysing why policies remained rhetoric. Such educational changes are not successively related to technological advancement, but rather to shifts in the material and ideological relationships between the government and public organisations (Ellis, 2020, pp. 24-35).

The Centrally Sponsored Schemes of SSA(Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), RMSA, (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan) and TE (Teacher Education) have made significant contributions to the government's efforts to build an equitable and quality school education system, but their scope and coverage remained fragmented. Instead of raising schooling outcomes, schemes often focused more on making sure requisite inputs were delivered and delivering intermediate results. Schemes seem to be unclear about what learning outcomes should be ensured in the school sector. As a result of these limitations, the MHRD, with the support of 'National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT)', an autonomous entity that provides assistance and guidance to the

state and central governments in improving the quality of school education came up with a grade-specific set of learning outcomes for elementary school students (National Council of Educational Research & Training, 2022; NCERT, 2014). Further, one of the main challenges is the provision of high-quality education.

The Central Government's priority should now encourage states to improve educational quality. To address this and achieve the primary goal of providing high-quality education, the government has combined three centrally sponsored programmes: SSA, RMSA, and TE, into one broader programme with the overarching goal of improving academic achievement for all students and equal opportunities for schooling and inclusive learning outcomes (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018, pp. 4-5). Following the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through Goal 4, it urged Member Nations to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2019, p. 12). Hence, to achieve a high-quality education system that could build a strong nation with high economic strength, between 2018-19, the Government of India and the Ministry of Human Resource Development launched Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SAMSA), an integrated school education program (Department of School Education & Literacy Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021). Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan also known as SAMSA² could be further understood more when we reflect on the philosophical and practical underpinnings of it as explained by the Ministry of Education.

“The Samagra Shiksha scheme is an integrated scheme for school education covering the entire gamut from pre-school to class XII. The scheme treats school education as a continuum and is in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal for Education

(SDG-4). The scheme not only provides support for the implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 but has also been aligned with the recommendations of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.” (ibid)

The proposal framework of SAMSA was released on April 5, 2018, to improve school education quality and learning achievement. The scheme proposes the following significant interventions across all levels of school education: i. Universal Access, including infrastructure development and retention, ii. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, iii. Gender and Equity, iv. Inclusive Education, v. Quality and Innovation, vi. Financial support for Teacher Salary, vii. Digital initiatives, viii. RTE entitlements including uniforms, textbooks, etc., ix. Support for Early Childhood Education, x. Vocational Education, xi. Sports and Physical Education, xii. Teachers Education and Training, xiii. Monitoring, xiv. Programme Management, and xv. National Component.

In the next section, we are critically understanding the phenomenon of studying an educational policy and attempting to hold it accountable for the overall development of education. We have taken inspiration from Michael Foucault's understanding of discourse and further incorporated the lens of Political Economy in reviewing the formulation of the scheme, and underlying framework.

Understanding of Educational Policy using Foucault's Public Policy Research Framework

Education policies are the subject of study in terms of their socio-educational reality in their various dimensions; it should be noted that multiple evidential approaches create an object that is constantly under construction (Tello, 2020, pp. 25-45; Galindo Cáceres, 1999). The edges of socio-educational reality assessment authorise the conceptual ground of Education Policy to be built from

many longitudinal axes, which will combine it into the object, such as the state, judicial decisions, micro-politics, political discourse, political discussions, educational leadership, and the right to education, among others (Burch, 2009). These are typically evaluated using the language of justice. The term ‘school reform’ is sometimes used to describe education policies that aim to transform the educational system into a more equitable system, one that ensures that no student is left behind.

The ideas of Michel Foucault have had a profound influence on public policy research and theory. For example, he challenged the idea that we are all free to make our own choices and decisions. Instead, he argued, our lives are governed by systems and structures we have little control over. By incorporating Foucault’s framework to analyse an Indian education policy we found that it is a complex process, policy implementation has its own procedure in India because decisions of policy making and its execution must go through three levels: central government, state government and local government (Panchayati Raj) at district level (Dyer, 1994, p. 241). Further, due to the control of the three-layered hierarchy, all the decisions in policy-making are directed by the authorities, especially the funding of the centrally sponsored schemes in India. The three-tiered hierarchy system also divides the budget at each level according to the individual ideology of the government at the federal, state, and district levels. As a result, when we compare the infrastructure of central government institutions like Kendriya Vidyalaya³ and Navodaya Vidyalaya⁴ to public schools in cities and rural areas, we find it difficult to compare its amenities at all three levels.

Foucault also proposed that the government and other authorities manipulate people's perceptions of specific issues to make their policies seem better than they are. If we analyse the policy of SAMSA with this query we find it correct

because SAMSA is exclusively targeted toward girls, and states have budgeted resources specific to girls' education under the objective of 'Gender and Equity'. Under this aim, initiatives like KGBV's (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya)⁵ development and improvement, as well as programs about empowering girls, especially adolescent girls, through martial arts training, and career guidance are covered. The states have also allocated a budget to provide accommodation and other amenities to encourage girls to enrol in school.

Violence against girls in the classroom is increasing (Kundu, 2019). This phenomenon is manifested by social and cultural practices, gender biases, unequal treatment of women, and declining value of women. Teenage girls and children from disadvantaged or low-income families continue to account for most children out of school. The SAMSA scheme guideline does not stipulate that these out-of-school children will be mainstreamed at the secondary level. The biggest concern is the noticeable funding disparity between what has been requested and approved for initiatives specifically designed to educate girls (ibid). Thus in this regard, it could be observed that Foucault's argument around that how many a time these policies although look and sound lucrative in nature, lack proper sustainable execution measures at the grassroots level and similar reflections could be observed in the Indian context as well.

Taking inspiration from Foucault's ideas, discourse analysts study public policy by examining the language that policymakers use to describe social problems and proposed solutions to those problems. Discourse analysis examines how language shapes our understanding of social problems and influences the proposed policies to address them. It analyses how policies are shaped by communication and ideology and more material factors such as budgets and facts. Discourse analysis is sometimes used in conjunction with other methods,

such as policy analysis, that focuses on policy content and evaluates its effectiveness (Nicoll, et al., 2017, pp. 112-133).

Several traditional aspects of research on public policy are presented, accompanied by an evaluation of how Foucault stimulated a new manner of looking at public policy to understand how his ideologies contribute to applying discourse analysis in public policy. As the first characteristic of public policy research, it often refers to government decisions. It is commonly used in a broad sense to indicate government policy, laws of government, and policymaking. What is going to be done about our society? What will be the state's role in addressing these problems? Who will decide what to do about these problems? These are the questions that public policy research seeks to answer.

Understanding public policy necessarily involves investigating government activities and those who rule. State ideologies and government bureaucracy are studied by researchers when they analyse any government scheme or policy (Hill, 1997; Hewitt, 2009). In the modern era, the interventions of governments have often been the primary drivers of public policy. The government's actions in addressing a social or economic problem and the role of the state are to provide for the people in a variety of areas, including health, education, welfare, and the economy.

The second aspect of research on public policy is related to the questions about the government's legitimacy to decide things on its citizen's behalf. But, as Foucault argued, in a more accurate description, elected politicians are simply those 'in power' while governments take actions on behalf of all of the population. It is a result of the dominant political tradition in the Social Sciences. State governments' actions and policies have typically been examined using the concept of the 'power' of elected politicians and the 'capacity' of

governments to effect change. When we analyse any government scheme, policy decisions and the discourse on policy formation are research subjects. The goal of political parties is to satisfy their potential voters through specific content on manifestos suggesting certain reforms affiliated with their political ideology. Due to this, manifestos and party policies determine the direction of public policy more than the suitability and urgent need of the current moment (Nain, 2018, p. 622).

Third, government policy is commonly viewed as a dynamic and ongoing process that involves numerous factors (Jenkinson, 1997; Hewitt, 2009,p.4). Studies confirm that the processes are complex, but policy decisions can be contrary or have unexpected effects. Besides, analysts are looking into or investigating aspects of the procedure of policy, viz., policy formulation, application, and examination. Public policy research teams have used Organizational Anthropology and Organisational Theory to comprehend these frameworks better (Hill & Hupe, 2002, pp. 1-3,57-78). Researchers investigate the role of administration and state. Alternatively, they could conduct research on policy and its formulation, application, impact, and organisational management within government institutions.

The summary of public policy characteristics indicates that the above three approaches are relevant to analysing any public policy. All three steps are mentioning the need of analysing the role of the state in policy-making, the problems that are in focus to resolve, and proposed solutions to address the existing issues. Government is an obvious factor that runs the entire process and takes decisions on behalf of citizens because the government is not a single person, it consists of the entire power structure of political parties and administration. The act of governing a country entails a variety of tasks and responsibilities. For example, the government is responsible for providing the

public with safety, security, health care and education to all. The government accumulates taxes and uses the funds for administration, defence, and development projects, in addition to developing and implementing a variety of welfare programs (National Council of Educational Research & Training, 2015, pp. 80-82). Besides, education policy is also one of the welfare programmes run by the government to provide holistic education. Allocation of budget and funds are a major component to study in any policy, hence by understanding Foucault's framework for analysing the public policy we have first focused on the allocation of budget and funds to the education policy of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan through the lens of political economy.

Further, we have incorporated the same method to analyse the education policy called SAMSA. In addition, we analyse the language of the policy document by critically reviewing the mentioned principles. Last but not least, we also critically examine the existing problems in Indian society and the government's ambitious solutions that often turns out to be ineffective. Government and policymakers are focused on the major catching problems in the SAMSA document and have mentioned initiatives to address the issues, but there are seldom ground-level results. To understand the mechanism of policy formulation, implementation, execution, and subsequent initiatives to make the policy sustainable we also focus on understanding the relationship between institutions and society.

Political Economy of SAMSA

The term 'Political Economy' has several connotations. According to Adam Smith, Political Economy deals with managing a country's resources to generate wealth. At the same time, Karl Marx explains it as the autonomy of processing inspired histories. For most of the 20th century, the term 'Political Economy' used to have contrasting interpretations. It was viewed as a field of study (the

interrelations between global economics and political affairs) and as a methodological approach. The methodology was divided into two sections: the economic approach (also known as public choice or positive political theory) emphasising individual objectivity and the sociological approach highlighting organisational level analysis. The Political Economy is applied to analysing political behaviour and institutions (Weingast & Wittman, 2013, p. 1).

Our paper analyzes the economic costs associated with SAMSA and how institutional and political behaviour (attitudes of government officials and policymakers) are aligned to make the policy work, or in other words, make this policy enacted and executed well. Political economy analysis based on education policy is not a single or unified approach but rather a family of techniques. We cannot ignore the institutions and organizations that monitor the implementation of educational policies. After all, these organisations are the subject matter of investigations. Thus, it becomes indispensable to analyse the education policy at the political economy and education intersection.

The intersection of Political Economy and Education

Education policies are decisions and actions intended to improve education for people and often have far-reaching impacts; these are shaped by various actors, including state legislators, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Political economy is 'the study of control and survival in social life in a broader and more ambitious sense.' Societies are defined by how they organise themselves, manage their affairs, and deal with - or do not deal with - the inevitable changes that occur over time. Survival is the process of producing what is necessary to sustain oneself and to keep society going. In this interpretation, control is a political process because it shapes community relationships, while survival is economical because it involves production and reproduction (Mosco, 2009, pp. 21-36). In contrast, the political economy of

education views education as a function of power relationships between different social, political, and economic groups. These power relations play a prominent role in how much knowledge or education a person receives, what education is acquired, and how education affects financial growth and the distribution of income.

A study of the educational system cannot ignore an analysis of the role and functions of government. Therefore, when we study any political economy theory of education and economic change, it emphasizes government investment. In addition, political economists (Carnoy, 1974; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Carnoy, 1980; Carnoy and Levin, 1985), political sociologists (Offe, 1980; Lenhardt, 1979; Weiler, 1980), and even philosophers (Althusser, 1971) have made the state a focal point of their analyses of education-economic relations (Carnoy, 1985, p. 157).

Hence, understanding the process of public or government funding of any policy is crucial to understanding the political economy of education and public policy. Government funds are vital components to successfully establishing any policy, but the most crucial sector remains behind in India due to resources. The Economic Survey 2019-20 shows that education spending by the federal government and states seems to have been approx 3% of GDP from 2014-15 to 2018-19. The National Policy on Education of 1968 proposed, and the NEP, 2020 reinforces, that public spending on education be increased to 6% of GDP. However, the Indian government may achieve 3.1 per cent in 2021-22. India's education budget has yet to approach this figure (Chakrabarty, 2022). For example, an article suggests that the allocation of budget in the education sector during the period between 2021-2022 was ₹ 93,224 crore. It also suggests that this allocation of the budget was ₹6000 less than the 2020-21 time period. From the below-mentioned graph, we could get a larger understanding of the kind of

expenditure the Government of India has done in the last 5 years toward education in India (Sethi, 2022).

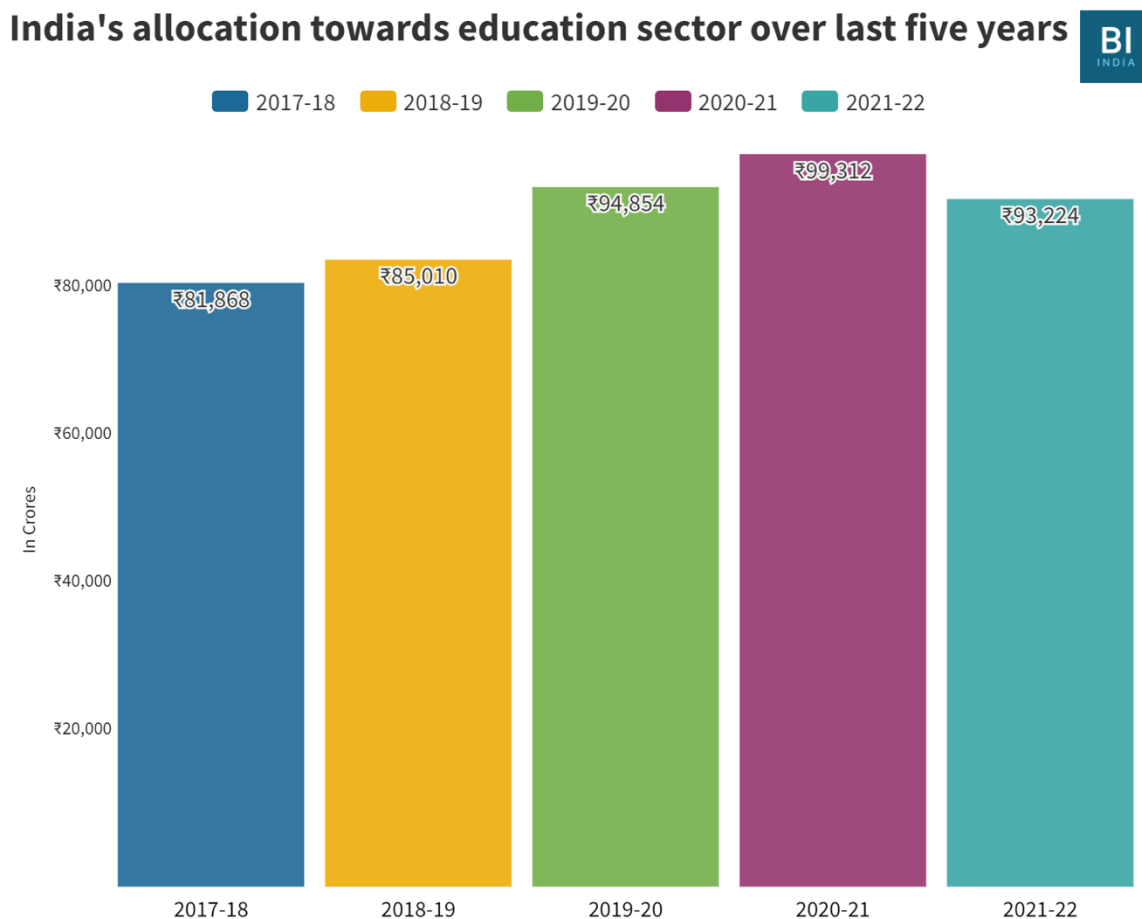


Figure 1: Expenditure on education in the last 5 years

A researcher at the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) Provita Kundu said *"All the areas are underfunded in Indian education... our entire education budget pie is very small and stagnant for years,"* (Khaitan, 2021). When we studied the SAMSA scheme, we realized that in 2020-21, after first receiving Rs. 38,751 crore, Samagra Shiksha's budget was revised to Rs 27,957 crore, a decrease of 28 per cent (PRS Legislative Research, 2021). The funds are split 60:40 between the federal and state governments for the scheme. This ratio is 90:10 for states in the North Eastern Region (NER) and Himalayan states. The Central Government fully fund Union Territories (U.T.s) that don't

own a legislature (Bardoloi & Kapur, 2021, pp. 1-2). In India, Samagra Shiksha Scheme is centrally sponsored, and it has a very major loophole when we consider its funding. As a senior researcher of the research group 'Accountability Initiative', Mridusmita Bordoloi noted, *"If you look at only the Union budget, the education story in India is incomplete,"* as most of the money for government schools comes from the state government (Khaitan, 2021).

Besides, it has been also observed that the education budget in India in the year 2021-22 ignores the Covid-19 pandemic-induced effects on education and society at large. Provita Kundu in another article critically reviews this situation. She discusses that the Covid 19 pandemic has destroyed the education of millions of children in India. Besides, there was a bit of hope in the air that after the pandemic and subsequently with the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020, as certain response measures, the government will allocate more money to the education sector. However, she says,

“Instead, the finance minister announced an outlay of Rs.93,224 crore for education, 6.13 percent lower than the Rs.99,312 crore budgeted for 2020-21. Of this modest allocation, Rs.54,874 crore is for school education and literacy and Rs.38,350 crore for higher education. The share of education in the total Union Budget has fallen from 3.3 percent in 2020-21 to 2.7 percent next year. Clearly public education is not a high priority of the BJP/NDA government at the Centre.” (Kundu, 2021).

Therefore, to understand how the education story in India is incomplete, we are analysing that discourse through the methodological framework discussed in the next section.

A methodological framework to deconstruct SAMSA

CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) has been used as the methodological foundation for studies in education, anthropology, cultural and media studies, legal studies, medical sciences, geography, communication, and other social sciences and humanities in Asia and Europe and the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (Dijk, 2007). According to economic theories, political economy examines the generation, distribution, exchange, and incorporation of values (the economic); and the generation, transmission, transfer, and exercise of power (the political), empirically, as well as how certain aspects of social relationships and daily life are arranged and carried out sequentially and diachronically. Value is hence subject to the linguistic market in contexts of mass mediation. In terms of political-economic analysis, CDA offers us a theoretically suitable framework of analysis to explain the connections between power exercise, value propagation, and value construction (Graham & Luke, 2011, pp. 103-106).

The government transmits various mediated messages to provide information about educational policy through certain frameworks. We critically analyse the multiple discourses as being mediated through different discursive practices that are often portrayed in the construction of inclusive, equitable, and quality educational institutions. Further, we highlight and elaborate on how discursive practices facilitating the construction of discourses on educational policies are being read through the lens of political economy. In that pursuit, we analyse the social, political and economic facts. It helps us better understand the broader interrelationships and inter-dependence of how educational issues are framed in policy documents, wherein briefings about budgeting on education could also be read. Consequently, it would improve our understanding of the relationship between the state's economy and the negotiated political relations in education policymaking.

Discursive practices identified in SAMSA

Foucault decided to focus on discursive practices to avoid Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Dremel & Matić, 2014, p. 155). "Discursive practices are constitutive in both conventional and creative ways by contributing to or facilitating transformations in a society" (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 63-65; Nedashkivska, 2020). Further, the idea of discursive practice in a discourse facilitates the formation of new texts, new representations of the world, and new discourses. Besides, identifying a discursive practice in a given social or political discourse would further help us in understanding how the social construction of reality takes place and how these subjective significances of reality could become objective realities (Fairclough, 1992; Peci, et al., 2009).

In understanding the contextuality of policy discourses in society, discourse research is a critical tool in critiquing the ideology that manifests at the intersection of policymaking and societal reality. Further, discourse research could be helped in analysing the structure that is framing practices at the micro-level (Brandmayr, 2020, pp. 338-339). In the SAMSA textual policy document, a few principles were referred to, generally the Discourse of the State about transforming society's attitude toward providing equitable, inclusive, and quality education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018, pp. 7-10). We reviewed the textual language in the policy document through Critical Discourse Analysis, which alludes to an understanding of the ideology that the Central Government intends to disseminate in the different educational strata through their discursive practices. The meaning of the discourse regarding any policy is connected to a set of characterising frameworks of any policy constructed by the authority. These discourses also establish the contextual socio-political environment (Oudatzis & Tzikas, 2022, p. 389).

For example, in the first principle of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, in the narratives, it is stated that through the Central Government's discourses, states are attempting to articulate 'Education for All' as 'Samagra Shiksha,' i.e., a 'Holistic view of Education.'. The Central Government's discursive actions can create a new paradigm for education in states and interpret the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005), which works on standardising content and syllabus curriculum from pre-primary to senior secondary schooling, including teacher education, planning, and management. Besides, the idea of standardizing content and syllabus curriculum came from larger observations of National Curriculum Framework 2000, wherein in the latter it was suggested that as the pupils were experiencing a burden in their schoolwork it was required to lighten the curriculum burden (National Curriculum Framework for School Education, 2000). This would lead to students enjoying the learning process than feeling exhausted. Along with the above-mentioned suggestions to create a paradigm of education for all, NCF 2005 also suggested that there is a need to create a child-centred approach in the curriculum to promote universal enrollment and retention up to the age of 14 (Sharma & Singh, 2018; NCERT, 2005).

According to the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for education, SDG-4.1 states, "*By 2030, make sure that almost all boys and girls free, equal, and high-quality primary and secondary education leads to meaningful and useful educational results.*" (UNESCO, 2022).

According to the second principle or narrative - 'Equity,' when we study the wholesome objective of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, we find this equity or equal education a vital goal to achieve. Similarly, the Central Government also discussed the principle of equity through this policy as 'Equal Opportunity.' They dissected the term 'Equity' through discursive practice in particular

reference to the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan scheme (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018). Discursive practices include categorising the sections of society who will be eligible to avail of this scheme, i.e., disadvantaged groups in society, children belonging to Scheduled Caste (S.C.), Scheduled Tribes (S.T.), the Muslim minority, landless, agricultural workers and children with special needs are some of the highlights.

The analysis of such discourses helps us to understand the social identities that need to be transformed in terms of equal education access and differentiate the Samagra Shiksha Scheme from other contemporary schemes of the government. However, equity, as defined here, does not imply that everyone should achieve the same results, nor does it imply that all students should be taught the same material or have access to the same resources. Instead, equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, socioeconomic status, migrant background, age, special needs, or place of residence do not impede one's ability to achieve one's educational potential (fairness) and that all individuals achieve at least a minimum level of skills (inclusion). This was seen as ensuring fair chances for all people while adhering to constitutional principles of social justice, diversification, and participation.

The significant changes in educational policy began with the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986, which hailed the policy knowledge in favour of privatisation (or non-state stakeholding), limiting the government's role and commitment to public education. It continues to talk, as existing policies had, about having equal opportunities for education through the intensification of the common school system, however without providing details on how the state expected to put this vision into action. More notably, it kept ignoring an examination of why the egalitarian or inclusive concept of a prevalent education system had remained simply policy articulation on the document (Raina, 2020).

This is because historically it could be observed the attempt was to create a framework of holistic education in India through different initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), The Rashtriya Madhyamik, Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Teacher Education (TE), and further merging the three into one as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SAMSA), however, most of these changes only happened through keeping the ideological shift in mind with a change of the government, but not through addressing the structural inequalities, and finding solutions to uproot them.

The third narrative describes access to education similar to other educational policies; however, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan confounds the word 'access'; therefore, the discourse can only be characterised by how social reality is incorporated into the text. It notes that access to education and school is achieved by making them accessible to all children within a specified distance while also emphasising the educational requirements of excluded or disadvantaged groups, S.C., S.T., Muslim minorities, girls in general, and children with special needs. The strategy of giving a school in every settlement contributes to the system's failure. So often, what we call schools often comprise only two to five-room buildings across every village where multi-grade tutoring is the standard practice (Meshram, 2021). When a teacher teaches students in two or more grades in the same classroom, this process is referred to as multi-grade teaching. Therefore, unlike large, well-equipped private or central public schools, in rural India, where 70 per cent of the population lives, we find small, ill-equipped schools with as few as 60 (primary) or 100 (upper-primary) students and only two or five teachers (ibid).

In 2014-2015, the average spending in public schools (INR 16,151) was 58 per cent of that of the Kendriya Vidyalaya chain (INR 27,723), these schools are run by the government that caters to public servants who are employed in

transferable jobs. Parental class and profession impact how children are dealt with and affect the quality of education students receive. It shows how the government discriminates against students (Walker, et al., 2019). When compared to well-managed private and public schools such as Kendriya Vidhyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalaya, the village public schools' design backfires on the benchmark of the constitutionally pledged principle of equality.

Further, the narrative about 'Gender Concern' is the construction of the social discourse, idealistically representing the main ideology of gender bias in education to examine discursive practice as the transformation of society. 'Gender concern' in Samagra Shiksha is one of the earlier concerns of the government in terms of education. Furthermore, SDG 4.5 claims that by 2030, the objective should be to minimise gender inequalities in schooling and provide fair access to the opportunity of technical and vocational education for the needy, which include people with disabilities, native populations, and kids in precarious circumstances (United Nations, 2021).

However, the discourses like: *"to use education as a decisive intervention to bring about a basic change in the status of women"*, lead to the idea that the policy document is taking into consideration an attempt to make a social transformation in the status of women in society (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018, p. 8). Accessing education for girls requires more than just going to school. In some places, girls are not allowed to go to school, or if allowed, it is only up to a certain age. In the world, there are near to 129 million girls who are not enrolled in school, out of which 32 million children are in primary school, 30 million children are belonging to lower-secondary schools, and last but not least 67 million children are belonging to upper-secondary schools (UNICEF, 2022). Gender discrimination, social practices, and gender norms and practices expose girls to the possibility of teenage pregnancy, child

marriage, domestic work, poor health and education, abuse, exploitation, and violence (UNICEF India).

Gender is one of the most critical concerns in the Indian education system. Besides, gender discrimination also impacts the overall growth of girls throughout their lifespan, as it negatively impacts not only the education trajectory of the girl student, but also her health, and raises larger safety concerns. For example, India ranks 135 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2022. In addition, in the sub-index of “health and survival”, India is the worst performer with a ranking of 146 (The Hindu, 2022). Besides, it is also found that discrimination against women begins as early as the killing of female feticides and thus contributes to India’s skewed sex ratio (Vaze, 2021).

The other aspect of child marriage is another concern of gender discrimination, as it could be found that one-third of child brides in South Asia are from India. In addition, it is found from the data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) that crime against women has increased over the years, especially in 2021 which has risen by 15.3% (Roy, 2022). Further to add to the woes, when it comes to crime against kids, the latest report suggests that the numbers in this category are also concerning. It has been observed that in 2021 only 1,49,404 cases of crime against children were registered, and 36.05%, i.e. 53,874 were under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POSCO). Besides, NCRB data also suggests that under POSCO there has been a gradual increase in crime rates against children, a 12.1% increase in 2021, and a 10.10% increase in 2020, where more than 53,276 girls and 1083 boys are victims of crime respectively (Roy, 2022).

The framework of the Samagra Shiksha scheme highlighted gender differences as a significant issue to resolve because gender disparities in childhood literacy rates in India are evident. India is ranked 112th out of 153 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020, with a score of 0.668 out of 1 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2021). There is a significant gap between Indian education policies and laws, and it is the outdated educational practices that are integrated into the structures and institutions. According to the 2011 Census in India, 82 per cent of boys are literate, while only 65 per cent of girls could indeed read and write (Nagar, 2021).

Even in 2022, after the implementation of so many educational schemes by the government to eliminate the gender disparity in the education system in India, the male literacy rate is higher, at 84.7 per cent, than the female literacy rate, which is 70.3 per cent (The Global Statistics, 2022). Besides, it could be found through the official discourses of the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) that poverty and local cultural practices contribute to gender inequality in Indian education (Nagar, 2021). Hence, education policies in India cannot be separated from the planning and implementation to eradicate the structural social and economic issues causing gender disparity.

The government is still neither taking any constructive, purposeful and progressive steps which could start dealing with inequalities in education seriously nor tracking them by collecting information directly from families because mechanisms of gender discrimination lie in the structure of society and awareness about the relevance of girl's education among the members of society is very crucial. The teaching of women should serve as an agent for fundamental changes in women's status, which should incorporate non-discrimination, equality, and justice as human rights. It should not be a

commodity sold to the wealthy but a right protected by the government. Girls need to feel secure in the school environment and supported in their career selections, including in fields where they are underrepresented.

There exists a social structure of teachers in society, discussed in the principle of 'centrality of teacher'; the Samagra Shiksha Scheme includes narratives that provide a major representation of a teacher's role in society. The policy document argues that one of the roles of a teacher is to motivate the students, and further has suggested: "to innovate and create a culture in the classroom, and beyond the classroom, that might produce an inclusive environment for children, especially for girls from oppressed and marginalised backgrounds." (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2018, p. 8).

The role of a teacher now includes managing active learning in the school environment, establishing the entire school system as a 'learning community', and building relationships with the local and global communities (OECD, 2005). The position of teachers has been at the centre because, in the Samagra Shiksha scheme, teachers are one of the social actors to make this policy work efficiently. The discursive practice shares one prominent feature with all the dimensions of social structure that shape and limit it, whether directly or indirectly; its standards and customs, and the relationships, affiliations, and organisations that empower them. In the framework of the Samagra Shiksha scheme centrality of teachers is discussed with much importance, and teachers are considered to be quite knowledgeable.

However, it could be observed from Paulo Freire's perspective, a Latin American Marxist scholar, that the current model of education in a capitalist framework is the banking concept of education, where teachers are considered to be carrying absolute knowledge. Further, in this banking concept of

education, teachers are considered to be the oppressors, and students are oppressed. A certain ideology and knowledge are being enforced upon the students, than attempting to create a critical consciousness wherein through that process the students would feel empowered and would attempt to liberate themselves from structural inequalities (Freire, 1970, p. 53). So, although there is a large emphasis on teachers who are going to be creating an inclusive model of education, in reality, the harsh observation that exists is teachers often oppress the students and dictate a worldview based on the former.

Besides, it could be also argued that within the framework of a Critical Marxist approach, it is imperative to be critical of the role of the teachers, and the educational institutions as they often cater to imposing a regressive ideology at the intersection of functioning in a conservative and fascist state. Subsequently, Althusser argued about the imposition of ideology and inciting violence whilst explaining the idea of ISA, and RSA, many a time teachers, and educational institutions control the minds of the students with regressive acts like surveillance, and punishment (Althusser, 1971; Hill, 2016; Althusser & Brewster, 2001).

The oppressed attitude of a teacher is quite visible in the Indian context as well. In the recently published National Education Policy by the government, this issue has not been addressed. In one of the social commentaries Dr Kiran Bala, an Indian educationist argues that educational institutions are not empathetic toward those students who experience financial crises and are unable to pay hefty fees during the pandemic (Bala, 2020). Besides, Bala is critical of the role of the teachers in inculcating a caring attitude among the students, as there is seldom care taken in understanding whether students have access to Information Communication Technology-driven tools (ibid). So, this kind of educational

paradigm has to be dismantled, and the framework should be read through a more Feminist approach.

Pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) are recognized as essential for ensuring quality education. All schools (government, aided, and private) must maintain a PTR of no more than 30-35 pupils per teacher at the primary and upper-primary levels, respectively, according to the RTE Act of 2009. In addition, it establishes guidelines for teacher assignments. For instance, two teachers are required in a primary school with 0-60 students and three teachers in a school with 61-90 students. Schools with less than 60 students have two teachers, indicating that a quarter of Indian schools have fewer than 30 students and two teachers, thus underutilizing teacher resources. The second factor of the problem is political interference in teachers' allocation. It is usually the teacher's preferences and political pressures that determine the transfer of teachers, rather than school needs and requirements (Bhat, 2021). On one side the teachers become the oppressors and on the other due to underutilizing of teachers' resources, the teachers dictate their own transfer orders to other schools based on their preferences, than requirements to fulfil the teacher-student ratio.

Another principle of 'Moral Compulsion' in the framework of SAMSA signifies the imposition of the RTE (Right to Education) Act on the constitution of social structure, i.e., parents, teachers, educational administrators, and other stakeholders who are involved directly or indirectly in shaping the policy process. Besides, the government underlines the above identities, and institutions that are required to make conventional changes in their approaches, wherein moral compulsion in education could be achieved. However, there exists no mapping of factors that could be instrumental in providing moral support in the attainment of inclusive education to underprivileged communities as a compulsory practice for avoiding any punitive legal process.

The final narrative in policy discourse is the 'Convergent and integrated system of education management' and most importantly in terms of meaning creation because "Discourse is a practice is not just to represent the world but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough, 1992, pp.75-76). A collective discourse regarding Samagra Shiksha as an integrated learning system is necessary to implement RTE. This discourse represents the entire world (Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan) and provides the whole world meaning (the RTE laws required by Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan) to the state government. This discourse also provides the state government with a direction. However, in an article by Tanoj Meshram, he mentions that Article 21A of the Indian Constitution guarantees elementary school education as a fundamental right. Subsequently, he shares that if we check out this article following Article 14 (Equality before the law) and Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination based on religious doctrine, racial group, caste, gender, or birthplace (explicit focus), there is hardly any discussion in RTE that could eliminate the structural inequalities from the educational system and could provide equity and equality in education at the grass-root levels (Meshram, 2021).

Furthermore, it is also observed that disadvantaged groups on the ground are still unacknowledged of their rights and that parents, teachers, educational administrators, and other stakeholders are not willing to participate in the mission and the worst scenarios emerge when the government itself does not take responsibility for ensuring moral compulsion as a societal practice.

It could be further argued that SAMSA and the RTE Act are incompatible educational reforms that violate the principles of equality and show discriminatory behaviour towards rural children, who are predominantly S.C., S.T., OBC, and minorities. Oxfam International report emphasizes that separate

and unequal schooling is consistent with privileges mounting for the privileged ones and exclusion is consistently based on class, capital, race, sex, or other indicators. Besides, we have also observed discrimination taking place in the classroom, and the lunchroom. Further, Dalit students and students from lower castes are forced to sit separately. Their diet is also compromised. However, there exists a silver lining to this difficult situation. It could be observed teachers from Scheduled Caste backgrounds are getting more representation. They constitute, “16% of the country’s population, increased from 9% in 2005 to 13% in 2013 offering hope for introduction of Dalit role models in classrooms.” (Walker, et al., 2019; Taneja, 2020).

Discursive practice in Critical Discourse Analysis is an important method for understanding how social and cultural practices constitute a discourse. In the context of our study, through the principles mentioned in the policy document of SAMSA, we have analysed the discursive practices that have been incorporated in the attempt of creating a holistic discourse on education. However, to many extents, it has failed. The overall ideological construction of the scheme resembles its emergence and transformation into a societal reality because discourse functions in building social relationships between people and power and the structure of a knowledge and belief system (Fairclough, 1992, pp.74 -76). Further, to understand the new objective of SAMSA as a collaborative scheme, vis-à-vis the existing multiple individual policies, we are taking into consideration the idea espoused by Fairclough, where he suggests that "as a consequence of the articulatory struggle, envisaging the new elements, are constituted through the redrawing of boundaries between old elements" (Fairclough, 1992, pp.70). Similar to the concept of understanding discourse, we have articulated the new objectives of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan in comparison to previous government educational policies because it is a collaborative effort of three previous educational schemes. Despite the

collaborations, the structural inequalities existing in education are not finding solutions.

Discussion and Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been brought out that inclusive, quality, access and holistic education in India has the potential to be a dream come true if achieved with the help of any educational policy. By UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report, India is expected to attain universal primary education by 2050, universal lower secondary education by 2060 and universal upper secondary education by 2085 (PTI, 2016). Similarly, it is being observed that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has specific objectives in the attainment of creating a holistic educational framework in India. When it comes to the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in preschool to secondary level, the aim is to increase by 100% by 2030, whereas “GER in Higher Education including vocational education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035.” (Press Information Bureau, 2022). The success of any educational reform is a systematic journey rather than a feature of instructions and attainment of results.

The concept of the holistic approach in any educational policy expresses the government's ability to reform itself to improve its ability to tackle its weaknesses and reinvent the whole system. In India, various structural problems exist like discrimination in delivering education to underprivileged children, injustice on the gender basis for multiple reasons and the rural-urban divide and regional disparities etc. Only when education quality is improved can equal rights and social justice be achieved. Hence to reduce the gap, this policy must include adequate inputs such as a good curriculum, competent teachers, realistic assessments of a student's progress, and job guidance and counselling services for adolescents, which are still missing at the grassroots level of SAMSA. Further, to establish an inclusive and common school system like the one in

India, discursive practices like including students from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds thus facilitating a social mix and match of abilities, and attainment levels could be incorporated as a part of the education manifesto (Hill, 2016, p. 77; Hill, 2010).

Moreover, it is critical to ensure that processes in the educational policy include monitoring and research aspects, such as curriculum design, teacher education restructuring, and examination reform, and to assure the involvement of all stakeholder groups. Despite all the measures that could be taken to provide a fair and equitable educational system at the grass-root level, a social transformation in education can only happen when there is a radical change in the mindset of the people. Still, a section of society exploits the easy resources available to them based on their privileges and social capital. Further, there exist unheard voices and individuals who get exploited due to the inaccessibility of resources like schools, books, quality teachers and most importantly a supportive family. Social justice could not be achieved unless a youth has the freedom to decide her future by acquiring an education. Last but not least there has to be a paradigmatic change in the way we understand epistemically the structure of the education system and practice the moral values of education. Education should not be considered as a commodity but rather as a fundamental constitutional right, and that should not only be practised in theory but rather in praxis. Subsequently, more than the pedagogy, the responsibility to impart critical education becomes pertinent. Taking the argument of Freire further wherein he states that ‘the role of education is to raise critical consciousness’, Hill (2020) argues that critical education would address the structural inequalities and bring a transformation in society (Freire, 1970; Hill, 2020).

Notes

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Author Details

Urvashi Khandal, Research Scholar

Manipal University Jaipur

Dehmi Kalan,

Off Jaipur-Ajmer Expressway,

Jaipur, Rajasthan 303007

email: khandalurvashi1997@gmail.com

Saurabh Das, Corresponding Author

Assistant Professor

Department of Media Studies

Christ (Deemed to be University)

Dharmaram College Post, Hosur Road,

Bengaluru - 560029

email: saurabh.das1985@gmail.com

saurabh.das@christuniversity.in

[+91 9724260002](tel:+919724260002)